Theatrical Tragedy and Moral Phenomena: A Cross-Examination of Morality in Rotrou, Racine, and Nietzsche

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This paper seeks to distinguish between two different moral dispositions found in two texts that have a similar context. *Le Véritable St. Genest* by Jean Rotrou and *Phèdre* by Jean Racine both were written in France during the 17th century and look back to Antiquity for their setting. However, the moral assertions provided in these texts suggest opposite senses of morality. In order to distinguish between these two texts, a careful examination of morality drawing upon a genealogical critique as suggested by Friedrich Nietzsche proves useful. As Nietzsche suggests that the common notion of the "good" has undergone a total reversal from its original meaning in Antiquity, this idea can be used as an analytic tool to examine morality in these texts that look back to Antiquity from the modern era.

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An Introduction to the Theatrical Tradition: Context for Comparison

In the Occident, theatre is often viewed as a mark of a country's sophistication and cultural relevance. Every culture that is considered worthy by purely Western standards has some form of theatrical literature and performance, certainly dating back as far as Ancient Greece. During the early years of the French Renaissance, theatre blossomed arguably as much as any of the other art forms and intellectual pursuits that followed from the era. Indeed, some of the most influential playwrights of Western literature, such as Molière and Corneille were active in this era of theatre. The "Grand Siècle" as it is called in French, can be marked by a deep cultural fascination with the theatrical tradition.

In 17th century France, the development of theatrical literature and performance was evidently quite important not only to the larger whole of literature but also to the cultural heritage of France. If one is in a larger city in France such as Paris or Lyon, it is not uncommon to stumble upon an architectural relic from this era of theatre. Even more common is to find streets, plazas, or parks named after the great playwrights of the era. Perhaps the greatest show of strength of theatre's importance in France during the 17th century comes to us by means of historical fact. The great tragedian Jean Racine, just before his retirement from theatre (wherein he accepted the position as the King's historiographer) was invited to perform the first version of his *magnum opus* *Phèdre* at the Hotel de Bourgogne, a prestigious royal house where the king's selected artistic vanguard had the exclusive privilege of performing[1].

[1] Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s.v. "Jean Racine," accessed May 08, 2014 http://www/britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/488151/Jean-Racine

As intellectual and literary development in the 17th century can be claimed in France by theatre, intellectual and literary development in the 19th century in Germany can be claimed by a strong philosophical tradition. Around the turn of the 19th century, Immanuel Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" impacted the field of philosophy in such a way that the largely metaphysical continental tradition that preceded its publication would never quite recover. This new approach to philosophical reasoning laid the framework for a larger critique from Germany of previous philosophic methods known as "German Idealism", which held that objects that are perceived can only be perceived insofar as there is a subject that perceives them, rather than possessing a certain quality of the "object in itself". A rich literary tradition followed from Germany's philosophical discourse, with these intellectual advancements from this era in Germany earned the country the nickname of the "Land of Poets and Thinkers". This nickname perhaps found its best match around the end of the century, however. Despite the importance of German Idealism, by the turn of the century, scientific discovery began to become more important than old metaphysical questions. A new sort of philosophical tradition was necessary. With this, Nietzsche's philosophy serves as one of the key foundations of the philosophical tradition of the late 18th and early 19th century. However, it is important to note that Nietzsche never fully considered himself a philosopher, and was classically trained as a philologist[2]. As such, the role of language takes a particularly important place in much of his work, thus giving a new sense of validity to Germany's nickname of the "Land of Poets and Thinkers".

[2] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* s.v. "Frederich Nietzsche," accessed May 08, 2014 http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche/

A Contextual Comparison Between Theatre and Nietzsche

As a cultural development, theatre lies in a rather dichotomous position. From one angle it can be viewed as an entirely literary development, as it can be read in its written form as one would read a novel. Because of this literary aspect of theatre, it can thus be critiqued and analyzed as one would analyze a written text. However, viewing theatre as purely a literary work can be reductive to its original intention. As it is meant to be performed before an audience, theatrical brilliance is often best exemplified through its performance, with emotional cues given by actors adding to the contextual richness and ontological complexity of piece. This performative element of theatre adds another tier of possibility of analysis. Yet the possibility for this analysis only exists insofar as the performers have understood the literary implications of the piece. Indeed, the first step to performing a piece ought to be to read the piece as a written text. Thus I will argue that the literary aspects of theatre are necessarily the primary, or original aspects of a piece, and that the performative elements follow from the understanding of a theatrical piece's literary implications. In the simplest terms, theatre is both literature and performance based art, yet never fully either. Theatre's relation to performance and literature functions in a sort of undefined flux between the two categories.

The philosophy of Frederich Nietzsche can be said to have a similar abstract attribute. As I previously mentioned, Nietzsche is retrospectively considered a philosopher. During his time he was perceived more as a cultural critic or philologist, a field in which he was classically trained. As philology is the study of language and words, their etymologies, implications, and historical developments, language as a keen role in Nietzsche's work. Indeed, in reading many pieces by Nietzsche the reader

becomes privy to the sort of literary wordplay by which he presents nearly all of his arguments. Furthermore, historical context, literary analysis, and proto-psychoanalysis[3] can all be said to constitute the diverse and eclectic philosophical tradition that Nietzsche follows. Simply put, Nietzsche's thought straddles a multitude of fields, never fully adopting a dogmatic ideology such as 'philosophy' or 'cultural criticism', but rather lying in a distinct place where this plurality of intellectual traditions crosses borders.

It is from here that the basis of my inquiry is posed. In order to establish the grounds upon which a conjecture regarding Nietzsche's philosophy as it pertains to theatre is possible, the first step is to identify a quality that is shared among the two. This quality is the ability to fluctuate between two different genres, be it performance and literature or be it philosophy and cultural criticism. At first glance this inquiry may seem rather abstract, yet with a more critical perspective on this link between these two subjects, the connections begin to solidify.

[3] A.H. Chapman notes in his essay *The Influence of Nietzsche on Freud's Ideas* that there are “striking analogies between the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud”, despite the fact that Freud maintains that he “never read Nietzsche”.

What is Tragedy?

When addressing the question of theatrical tragedy, it is necessary before anything else to explain exactly what theatrical tragedy is. One of the first theoreticians of tragedy was Aristotle, and in his Poetics he outlines the difference between the two most prominent forms of entertainment found in Ancient Greece – tragedy and epic poetry. Aristotle's definition of tragedy is " the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in appropriate and pleasurable language... in a dramatic rather than a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions"[4]. Perhaps the most important notion that ought to be considered from his definition of tragedy is that the goal of tragedy is to cause a catharsis of emotions. Indeed, there always is a tragic moment in which the main character in a tragedy suffers from some sort of tragic action that causes him or her to fail in the end. Furthermore, it is important to note that this sort tragic moment is intended to evoke an emotional release from the audience and be something that they can enjoy.

With a classical definition of tragedy outlined, the implications of tragedy ought to be further elaborated. As Aristotle states that tragedy is designed with "incidents arousing pity and fear", the most basic assertion that can be made about this claim is that tragedy necessarily simulates a phenomenon wherein a character experiences a negative emotion. From here, it is the task of the audience to make a connection between the emotions experienced by the character in the piece. What this implies is that if there is a connection to be made between a fictional character's emotional

[4] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher (MIT Classics, 2009) accessed May 08, 2014, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html

response in a sort of pseudo-reality and a human observing these progression of events and emotional responses – and reacting in the same way – then there must be some sense of right and wrong that lie intrinsic to the human conscience, enabling the possibility for a connection to be made between a fictitious character and a real person. This sense of right and wrong can be called morality. Furthermore, as tragedy aims to evoke a real emotional response from an audience, it can be said that there are specific real events (death, loss, etc) that are tied to emotions that tragedy attempts to simulate. In this simulation, however, it is the case that the morality attached to the events in the play reveals itself as a mere interpretation of these events. My reasoning behind this is that if there are real events that evoke certain emotions, and if these events are simulated and create a similar response from those observing the simulation, then the events themselves are not intrinsically moral, because in the simulation of these events, no one is actually harmed – that is, the actors who are simulating a tragic event (such as a death) are not actually engaging in the event. Because of this, it can be said that we have a certain guideline of morals that allow us to interpret the actions, simulated or real, as good or bad, regardless of if they actually amount to any material effect. As Nietzsche suggests this notion outright in *Beyond Good and Evil* ("There are no moral phenomena – only moral interpretations of phenomena"), it seems logical to assert a Nietzschian critique of morals to further understand how it is that morality functions in a tragic theatrical context. The moral interpretation, so to speak, of a tragic event would usually be one from that has its heart in the "bad". Yet as I will show, if morality is subject to change, this theatrical interpretation of morality is subject to change as well.

Summary of the Theatrical Pieces

The story of L*e Véritable St. Genest* by Jean Rotrou follows the last days of the early Christian martyr St. Genest, who was brought to his death by the Romans. Written in 1646 and performed in 1648[5], *St. Genest* serves as a portrayal of Christian piety and Judeo-Christian morality that embraces the pious religious spirit of the early modern era. Because of this, it provides the early modern audience with an empowering, relatable subject – the value of Christianity, despite its taking place in a time when the Christian faith had barely set a name for itself . Perhaps the most interesting theatrical and literary device that the piece employs in the use of a "play within a play" – a moment of meta-theatre to assert a Christian perspective into the work. It is during this moment that the main character, Genest, is converted to Christianity, and inevitably seals his fate as a martyr in the end of the play.

Such a fervent Christian mentality is not always the case, especially when one considers Jean Racine's magnum opus *Phèdre*. Written in 1676 and performed one year later in 1677[6], Racine abandons the notion of Christian sentiment and 17th century European moral tradition and chooses Antiquity for its pagan religious tradition and pre-modern sense of morality as the setting and context for the piece. The plot follows the relation of Phèdre, the aggressive and fear-inspiring queen of Trézène, her stepson Hippolyte, and his father Thésée . Thésée is falsely assumed to be dead after not returning to his kingdom from an oversea conquest, so Phèdre therefore assumes it to be permissible to find another suitor, which she mistakenly hopes to find in her stepson Hippolyte. As Hippolyte is not fond of his fearsome step mother, he plans to leave the

[5] Jean Rotrou, "Le Véritable St. Genest", *Théatre du XVIIè Siècle*, edit. Jacques Scherer, (Paris, 1975)
[6] Jean Racine, "Phèdre " *Théatre du XVIIè Siècle*, edit. Jacques Scherer, (Paris, 1975)

kingdom and flee her overbearing presence. As Thésée returns, Hippolyte leaves. They encounter each other, yet this reunion ends up with Thésée cursing Hippolyte for leaving the kingdom and calls upon Neptune to condemn him to a watery grave. In the end of the piece Thésée discovers that his wife has attempted to sleep with his son and then condemned him to his grave. The piece ends on a tragic note, with Phèdre ultimately committing suicide. Traditional Christian values such as fidelity to one's spouse, chastity, and pity are continually rejected throughout the piece, thus allowing *Phèdre* to be considered in a context that lies outside of the early modern religious sentiment that is the case with *Le Véritable St. Genest*.

An Introduction to Nietzsche's Philosophy

In this section, I will outline the framework of the genealogical critique and its methodological assumptions. I will draw upon passages that will be integral to understanding the relation of the genealogical critique to morality in *Phèdre* and *Le Véritable St. Genest*[7]†. Nietzsche's critique of morality is one that stems from a genealogical perspective. That is not to say that his critique of morals is one that inherently has to do with familial lineage, but rather Nietzsche aims to critique morality from its historical origins. This alone has a considerable implication; in assuming that a genealogical critique can be made of morality, Nietzsche implies that, as humans change over the course of time, morality ought to change with the passage of history. Indeed, he starts his first treatise in the *Genealogy* by stating:

> "Hats off then to whatever good spirits may be at work in these historians of morality! Unfortunately, however, it is certain that they lack the historical spirit itself, that they have been left in the lurch precisely by all the good spirits of history! As is simply the age old-practice among philosophers, they all think essentially ahistorically […] The ineptitude of their moral genealogy is exposed right at the beginning, where it is a matter of determining the origins of the concept and judgment of 'good'"

Here there are several things that ought to be noted. First, Nietzsche's tone should be taken into consideration, for it begins with a sort of sardonic poke at the "historians of morality." This is important because his sarcastic attitude is used to undermine the relevancy of previous historical accounts of morality, which implies that they are insufficient in some way. Nietzsche goes on to provide us with the answer to the insufficiency of these historical accounts of morality made by philosophers of the era by stating that they are "essentially [ahistorical]." If these previous accounts of the

7 † The original German title of Nietzsche's treatise is Zur Genealogie der Moral. Throughout the text I will refer to this text as the Genealogy of Morals and the Genealogical Critique of Morals.

history of morality are inaccurate due to their inability to properly place themselves in history; Nietzsche attributes this lack of historicism to the inability of these historians to properly historicize the notion of the "good," which after all, ought to be the foundation of any sort of morality.

From here, much of the following section takes into question exactly this notion; how can the concept of the "good" be put into a proper historical context? Nietzsche notes that

"the judgment of good does not stem from those to whom "goodness" is rendered! Rather it was "the good" themselves, that is the noble, powerful, higher-ranking […] who felt and ranked themselves and their doings as good...[8]"

With this assertion, it can be noted that the idea of the "good" relating in some way to "utility" is notably absent, according to Nietzsche. Rather, it is the "lasting and dominant collective and basic feeling of a higher ruling in nature in relation to a lower nature"[9]. He adds that this notion of a hierarchical structure between a higher and lower is the origin of the opposition between good and bad. This is important because it shows that the "good" does not come from the idea of the useful, but rather from the idea of a "higher ruling" asserting itself above a "lower ruling."

From here, Nietzsche expounds on a philological discussion of idea of the word "aristocratic", relating it in several languages to the origins of the word "good". He notes that the noble can be related to the French word "noblesse", meaning aristocratic class, but also that noble is synonymous with good. It is this relation, in combination with the idea that the origin of good and bad comes from a higher order imposing itself

[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* trans. Maudemarie Clark, Alan J. Swensen, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 10

[9] Ibid, 11

over a lower order, where Nietzsche's fundamental genealogical critique comes forth. In the 7th section of the first treatise, he presents his thesis that

> "It was the Jews in opposition to the aristocratic value equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of god) dared its inversion […] and held it fast with teeth of the of the most unfathomable hate (the hate of powerlessness), namely: " the miserable alone are the food; the poor, powerless, lowely alone are the food; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly are also the only pious, the only blessed in God, for them alone is there blessedness ..." [10]†

Nietzsche gives this reversal of moral value a name, calling it the slave morality in revolt. This notion of the slave morality is continually evoked in opposition to that of the noble morality. This reversal of moral value is key to understanding how Racine and Rotrou can be related to a genealogical critique of morals. The moral disposition of the characters, actions and discourse found in Phèdre can be notably associated with the pre-modern system of morality, the noble morality, rather than the "slave morality in revolt" .The moral disposition of the characters, actions, and discourse found in *Le Véritable St. Genest* can be associated with the sense of morality that Nietzsche suggests has been reversed by the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Nietzsche elaborates upon this notion of the reversal of morality in the 13th section of the first treatise. Nietzsche here takes the example of the lamb and bird of prey. He states that they lambs say among themselves " these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is as little as possible a bird of prey but rather its opposite – a lamb – isn't he

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[10] Ibid, 19

†A frequent criticism of Nietzsche is that many suppose him to be anti-Semitic. Indeed, it is the case that the Nazi Party claimed itself to the the philosophical heirs to Nietzsche, yet this was due to the fact that his sister married a Nazi party member, and posthumously edited his texts to fit their ideology. When reading Nietzsche, it is important to understand that Nietzsche is critical of modernity as a whole, and though it often seems that he may be calling out specific groups of people, no one is free from his spectre of criticism. Catholics, anarchists, socialists, Anti-Semites, and nationalists are among the groups criticized by Nietzsche, with the goal of this criticism being to take a step back from modernity in order to critique its components.

good?". [11] However, Nietzsche then speculates as to the possible discussion that the birds of prey might have, stating from the bird's viewpoint that "we do not feel any anger towards them, these good lambs, as a matter of fact, we love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb." With this, Nietzsche aims to distinguish strength from the expression of strength. He elaborates

> "to demand of strength that it not express itself as strength, that it not be a desire to overwhelm, a desire to cast down […] For just as common people separate the lightning from its flash and take the latter as a doing, as an effect of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from the expressions of strength as if there were behind the strong an indifferent substratum that is free to express strength – or not to". [12]

From this point, I will use Nietzsche's term "slave morality" to refer to this sort of moral disposition. Additionally, I will use his term "aristocratic morality" to refer to the sense of morality that has its roots in antiquity. With the dichotomy of master morality and slave morality established, it is important here to explain the notion of ressentiment and how it relates to the *Genealogical Critique of Morals*. First, it is important to understand that Nietzsche chooses to use the French word "ressentiment" to express the idea of bitterness, or contempt for a perceived wrong doing. This choice is quite interesting on a philological level, with Nietzsche himself admitting to using the French word because there exists no German equivalent[13]. Furthermore, the word "ressentiment" itself can be broken down into "re-sentiment", with "sentiment" meaning "feeling" or "emotion" and "re" having the connotation of repeated occurrence, or to do again. With this breakdown of the word, "ressentiment" can be seen in effect to have the implication of "repeated emotion", giving it a reflectional

[11] Ibid, 25
[12] Ibid, 25
[13] Ibid

connotation that implies a certain pensive quality to feelings. Indeed, Nietzsche relates this reflectional means of action to the slave revolt in morality by stating in section 10 of the first treatise in stating that " the ressentiment of beings denied the true reaction, that of the deed, who recover their losses only through an imaginary revenge."[14] The key to understanding how Nietzsche sees ressentiment as a personality trait of those who espouse the weaker, slave morality is through the word "imaginary". Nietzsche proposes that ressentiment is composed of a perceived revenge, which implies that there is a necessary component of the subject, or self, that comes into play. Furthermore, because this revenge is only imaginary, ressentiment can be differentiated from anger on the basis of powerlessness. Thus ressentiment can be described as bitterness for a perceived wrongdoing wherein the resentful character doesn't have the power to react in a vengeful way. He continues in stating that

> "Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant yes-saying to oneself, from the outset slave morality says "no" to an "outside," to a"different," to a "not-self"[...] This reversal of the value-establishing glance – this necessary direction towards the outside instead of back onto oneself – belongs to the very nature of ressentiment: in order to come into being, slave morality allays needs an opposite and external world; to needs, psychologically speaking, external stimuli in order to be able to react at all."[15]

With this excerpt, an important element to the idea of ressentiment is outlined: the necessity of an outside action which to react. With this, Nietzsche continues to explain the negative outlook presented by the human beings of ressentiment by stating that "human beings of ressentiment in the end necessarily become more prudent ..." [16]. This idea stems from the fact that ressentiment entails a reflectional, rejection of not-self, as opposed to a passionate, noble affirmation of self. Thus, with the idea of

[14] Ibid, 19
[15] Ibid
[16] Ibid, 20

ressentiment outlined, its implications can be summed up by a dichotomy between reflectional action and passionate action.

Another important concept that will be further developed in this paper is Nietzsche's notion of the "ascetic priest", or one who would rather "will nothingness than not will at all." This idea is integral to understanding what modern morality suggests as "good." As Nietzsche proposes that the human beings of the slave morality espouses a certain strength through weak values i.e. values that are associated with a lack of power (namely pity and compassion), it seems logical that this would entail a personality of reflection (or of re-sentiment instead of sentiment) . Here, Nietzsche evokes the notion of the "ascetic priest" to describe "human beings of the slave morality" Traditionally, asceticism is a lifestyle adopted by various religious traditions that emphasizes abstention from worldly pleasures[17]. In Nietzsche's *Genealogical Critique*, this notion of asceticism is called the "ascetic ideal". Nietzsche goes into further detail in explaining what the ascetic priest lives by, and expresses the essential characteristics of the ascetic priest in the 11th section of the 3rd treatise by stating that "The ascetic priest has not only his faith in that ideal but also in his will, his power […] His right to existence stands and falls with that ideal" [18].He continues by exploring the ascetic priest by examining how life is valued under this ideal and explains that "The idea we are fighting about here is the valuation of our life on the part of the ascetic priest: he relates our life to an entirely different kind of existence, which opposes and

[17] Paul A. B. Clarke and Andrew Linzey, *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology, and Society* (London: Routledge, 1996)
[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Maudemarie Clark, Alan J. Swensen, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 84

excludes, unless, perhaps, it were to turn against itself, to negate itself: in existence."[19] From this excerpt, it can be understood that Nietzsche proposes that the ascetic is a character of ressentiment, who negates external life as if there was some original wrongdoing to be resentful about, and chooses to espouse a "holy" attitude – in effect, "slave morality" – in order to move forward. Naturally, Nietzsche sees this as a not-self affirming stance on the world. He continues in explaining the resentful character of the ascetic as one of inherent self-contradiction, that willingly wills against itself, by stating that

> "An ascetic life is a self-contradiction: here a ressentiment without equal rules, that on an unsaturated instinct and power-will that would like to become lord not over something living but rather life itself […] This is all paradoxical in the highest degree: we stand here before a conflict that wants itself to be conflicted, that enjoys itself in this suffering and becomes even more self- assured and triumphant to the extent that its own presupposition […] decreases" [20]

Last, it is important to note that Nietzsche proposes that the ascetic is not bound by racial or social construction, evoking that "[The ascetic priest] does not belong to any single race; he flourished everywhere, he grows forth from every social rank" [21]. What is important to gather from this last quote is that, as the ascetic priest knows no societal constraints, it can be said to be an attribute shared across the entire spectrum of modern society, thus presenting itself as a universal feature of modernity.

Another part of the *Genealogical Critique* that I believe to be pertinent to my analysis of Racine and Rotrou is Nietzsche proposal on the origin and implication of guilt. In the 8th section of the 2nd treatise, Nietzsche suggests that "The feeling of guilt, of personal obligation […] has at its origin […] the oldest and most primitive

[19] Ibid, pg 83
[20] Ibid, pg 84
[21] Ibid

relationship among persons there is, in the relationship of buyer and seller, creditor and debtor". [22] Nietzsche states from here that this relation between buyer and seller stems from "the first time [a person] measured himself by another person". [23] Furthermore, he continues to present the origin of guilt as a fact of man's inherent capacity to measure and think in equivalents. He notes that "Making prices, gauging values, thinking out equivalents, exchanging – this preoccupied man's very first thinking to such an extent that it is in a certain sense thinking itself".[24] With this last note, Nietzsche highlights his idea that man's capacity to think can only be determined insofar as there is something to measure it up against. As this relates to morality, the emotion of guilt can be said to be a feeling that arises when the guilty person violates a moral standard that they themselves uphold. This feeling arises insofar as there exists a moral standard that these actions can be measured up against.

The last part of the *Genealogical Critique of Morals* that I shall evoke is Nietzsche's conception of the idea of bad conscience. Nietzsche presents the notion of the "bad conscience" as an illness of conscience that stems from man's repression of instinctual action. In the 16th section of the 2nd treatise, he states that "All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn themselves inwards – this is what I call the internalizing of man".[25] As man seeks instinctively to act freely, yet cannot do so sundry the constraint of modern society, Nietzsche suggests that this repression of man's natural drive leads to a "bad conscience".

[22] Ibid, pg 45
[23] Ibid
[24] Ibid
[25] Ibid, pg 57

This “bad conscience” can be seen as “the suffering of man from man, from himself” according to Nietzsche. With this inward repression of outward action, man effectively cages his instinct, resulting in the “greatest and most uncanny of sicknesses”[26].

[26] Ibid

Morality in the 17th Century

In using the contemporary European settings, including the overtly Christian outlook and its application in terms thematic elements, French theatre at the time can be said to serve as an exemplary of societal standards in the 17th century. Here it is helpful to recall the citation from André Julliot , who notes in the opening line of his essay, *Au Sujet de Quelques Theories de la Passion et du Sentiment au XVIIe Siecle* that

"« On se plait souvent à lier un siècle à un thème ou à un groupe des idées
[…] Ces simplifications n'ont guère de valeur, parce qu'à chaque fois le
contenu, par sa riche diversité fait éclater l'enveloppe.
Mais comme entrée en matière, c'est commode. » [27]

We often like to tie a century to a theme or a group of ideas...
These simplifications have little value, because each time
the content, due to its rich diversity, shatters the link we contain it within.
However, as an introduction to a subject, it is rather useful.

There are two ways to consider Juillot's quote. First, it should be applied to the idea of 17th century theatre itself from a historical standpoint. According to Julliot we often link together certain centuries with groups of ideas, so in terms of 17th century theatre, it could be said that a theatrical piece serving as an exemplary of 17th century society could be subject to a more careful examination. Indeed, this is the case with Jean Racine and Jean Rotrou. Though I mentioned that many pieces written in the 17h century were derived from a certain 17th century outlook, and as such used their contemporary setting to show this outlook, it should also be noted that settings such as Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome were relatively common within the larger field of French theatre in the 17th century.

[27] André Julliot, Au sujet de Quelques Théories de la Passion et du Sentiment au XVIIè Siècle, 1

The other way that I propose that Julliot's citation ought to be considered is in the notion of a piece's consciousness. As a theatrical piece can be said to exemplify certain societal standards, language, or ways of social interaction, it can be said to portray a certain consciousness that is often relative to the time period in which it was written. Yet if Julliot's quotation here is applied, it would follow that this is not always the case, and that certain theatrical pieces can indeed transgress the conceived notion of a consciousness that is associated with a time period.

Here I believe it is necessary to outline a few assumptions that I shall be making in order to properly address the relation of Gods and human morality. First, I believe that is necessary to assume that morality as a human notion comes from a place that fundamentally has a divine nature. This is a widely debated topic, prompting the question of the possibility of a moral system that exists outside of the possibility of a God or group of Gods existing, yet as Nietzsche traces the roots of modern moral consciousness to the emergence of Christianity, and as he considers this moral consciousness to be a reversal of ethical value, it can be extrapolated then to say that what came before a modern moral consciousness with a singular deity at its helm was an ancient moral consciousness with a plurality of deities guiding it.

Furthermore, it should be assumed that a God is an infinite being, and with this, that every possible moral action exists within the infinite moral consciousness of a God. Additionally, it should be assumed that the actions that the Gods choose to commit are, in their conception, moral actions, for if there was a God that could commit an immoral action, and in doing so willfully acknowledge that there is a moral choice and reject it, then this God would be morally void and thus morality as it relates to humans would be

a non-existent concept.

If morality is to stem from the Gods, that is to say that Gods are moral beings, then the subject in question ought to be where we can place the notion of betrayal in terms of an ancient system of morality. On one hand, it could be speculated that betrayal is morally permissible according to an ancient moral framework, for if the actions of the Gods are intended to be a framework for a human system of morality, and the Gods commit a betrayal, then betrayal as it relates to a human sense of morality should be permissible.[28]†

[28]† However, this does not necessarily follow from the rest of the story of Phèdre , because in betraying her husband by attempting to sleep with her step-son, she provokes hostility from those who learn of the incident, including her husband upon his return to the kingdom.

Thesis Claim

The perceived continuity of the moral tradition found in 17th century French tragedy is only continuous when theatrical tragedy becomes dogmatic. Indeed, French theatre from this era is rigidly structured; it adheres to the Aristotelian notion of the three unites (time, action, location), yet this framework does not necessarily imply a continuity of content. Recalling the aforementioned citation provided by André Julliot that it is dangerous to link certain centuries with certain ideas or groups of thought, it must be considered that the French theatrical tradition is heterogeneous in its moral content. Despite Julliot's concern, French theatre from this era generally tends to lend itself towards a moral tendency that is representative of the 17th century.

In order to properly assess the moral assertions presented in L*e Véritable St. Genest* relative to those *Phèdre*, the grounds upon which an initial comparison can be made ought to be understood. First and most simply, both tragedies are pieces of literature from the 17th century that choose a different time period as their setting. Thus there is a certain temporal component to each of these pieces that looks back to a previous era from the era in which they were written. Furthermore, these works both have a certain moral character attached to the discourse of the piece. However, it is from this point where the similarities end. If morality is critiqued from a genealogical approach, as developed by Frederich Nietzsche in his text *The Genealogy of Morals*, then it can be seen to act as a schismatic force that breaks the continuous similarities between the two pieces.

Nietzsche provides the tool necessary to examine the moral assertions in *Phèdre* as decidedly un-modern. That is to say, when morality in these two pieces of theatre is

critically approached from a manner that examines its historical origins and how certain moral values have undergone a reversal of value, then the perceived similarity of the temporal component as it relates to the similarity of moral assertion is no longer continuous, and becomes in fact a stark difference. *Phèdre* has moral qualities that place in far more in a historical moral consciousness, in that the actions, dialogue, and origins of the characters in it espouse a morality that violates the Judeo-Christian moral norms of the 17th century.

When the principles developed by Nietzsche are used to analyze *Le Véritable St. Genest,* however, the result is quite different. When the temporal component that looks back to Antiquity from the modern era is viewed relative to the moral assertions that the piece present (with the genealogical critique being the basis of the comparison between the two), this play has a moral consciousness that, despite its setting, is far from that of Antiquity. Rather, the morality of the discourse, action, and origins of the piece can be viewed as modern. This morality is thus projected, rather than adapted, onto the setting of the piece from the 17th century perspective of Jean Rotrou.

With this notion that Nietzsche presents, the two French theatrical pieces ought to be evaluated relative to this idea, and in doing so, Phèdre proves itself to draw more from the Ancient Greek idea of unmediated tragedy that serves as life affirming, whereas *Le Véritable St. Genest* proves itself to fall victim to the nihilism, or the "willing of nothingness", as Nietzsche calls it. Indeed, as the Denis Hollier notes in his essay *Jansenist Tragedy,* Racine "[anticipated] the efforts of modern playwrights to recover the awesome gravity and austere intensity of ancient Greek tragedians…" [29]

[29] Denis Hollier, "Jansenist Tragedy", *A New History of French Literature,* (Harvard: Harvard University Press), 326

Methodologically speaking, there is a certain order in which each of the pieces should be analyzed. I will first observe the moral traditions of each of the authors of the pieces, in order to understand, morally speaking, where the conception of each piece lays. I will then examine the origins and literary foundations of the main characters in subject in each of the pieces to better outline the origins of the morality found within the piece. Once this has been done, I will examine particular actions that are performed in the piece, relating them to the ontological claims presented by Nietzsche. Lastly, the dialogue, or discourse, of each of the pieces will be analyzed. It is necessary that this piece come last, because within the structural unities of tragedy that both pieces adhere to, the dialogue most often comes in reaction to the actions that are committed.

Analysis of St. Genest

If Phèdre is to transgress the normative sense of morality when under inspection with the genealogical critique of morals, then quite the opposite is the case with *Le Véritable St. Genest*. Indeed, this piece has much in common with Phèdre on a surface level; both pieces are set in Antiquity but written in the 17th century, and both stories adapt pre-existing characters to a new narrative (in the case of Phèdre , these characters are mythological, whereas in the case of *Le Véritable St. Genest,* these characters are historical). Yet the moral dispositions of each of these pieces are far from similar, beginning from the origins of the authors themselves. As Racine was a Jansenist Catholic who rejected the strict pessimism of his upbringing, Rotrou never had quite the same religious rigidity to his upbringing. Indeed, as the son of a family of statesmen in the era of divine right to absolute monarchy, it seems logical that his upbringing would reflect his portrayal of morality in his writing.

The origins of Rotrou reflect the nature of his tragic works to a great degree. Born in Dreax to a family of magistrates, he left at a young age for Normandy and then Paris, where he was educated. Indeed, Rotrou proved himself to be an excellent writer from a young age, shown in the fact that he was writing tragedy three years before his contemporary Pierre Corneille began to write. In 1635, he was invited to join a group of playwrights called “Les Cinq Auteurs”, a literary task force assembled by Cardinal Richelieu with the task of taking the Cardinal's ideas and writing them into dramatic literature[30].

As Rotrou was born into a family of magistrates for the French government in

[30] Henri Chardon, *La Vie de Rotrou, mieux connue,* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970)

the 17th century, it is important to remember the official policy of the French government at the time. Rotrou was born during the reign of Louis XIII, who would have his place taken by the Sun King, Louis XIV, in the middle of Rotrou's life. Though Louis XIV is often viewed as the figurehead of absolute monarchy, it is important to note that as a political ideology, its foundation is often credited to Cardinal Richelieu, whom Louis XIII relied heavily upon. Integral to the notion of absolute monarchy is devotion to the Catholic Church. Indeed, Louis XIV claimed to have the right to absolute monarchy given to him by God. However, it is necessary to distinguish this from the years preceding his reign as king, because this is when Racine got his start as a playwright. However, the notion of devotion to the Catholic faith was not lost upon Rotrou. Considering that he was commissioned by Cardinal Richelieu to transcribe his ideology into dramatic pieces, Rotrou's theatre can be seen as a sort of script from the Catholic Church. As Richelieu was a cardinal and effectively the head of the state during Louis XIII's reign, the ties between the Catholic Church and the government were inseparable (though arguably not as strong as the previously mentioned notion of divine right that Louis XIV established). With the origins and consequent moral disposition of Rotrou clarified, his theatrical endeavors become more clearly religious, and consequently, follow a strict guideline of morality that Racine's plays do not follow.

The origins of the characters that are portrayed in *Le Véritable St. Genest* share with those of Phèdre the fact that they are based upon pre-existing characters, yet this similarity can only be said to go so far. As Phèdre is based upon ancient mythology, *Le Véritable St. Genest* is based in Ancient Rome. Furthermore, this piece is set in the days leading up to the spread of Christianity, yet takes place before the crucifixion of Christ,

thus placing its religious context in a sort of "critical moment", or in line with the turning point of the reversal of morality that Nietzsche describes in his first treatise of the *Genealogy of Morals*. If it is the case that this piece takes place in a historical period wherein the "aristocratic morality" is the generally accepted moral tradition, then it should also be the case that as a theatrical entity, Rotrou's writing should reflect this, if it is to be fully adapted to its time period. It is necessary here to recall the citation of Nietzsche that provides context as to the moral disposition of Rome at this time. Nietzsche proposes an etymological approach to the origin of the Latin word for good "bonus" by stating that

"I believe I may interpret the Latin bonus as "the warrior": assuming that I am correct in tracing bonus back to an older duonus […] Bonus accordingly as a man of strife, of division (duo), as a man of war – one sees what it was about man that constituted his "goodness" in ancient Rome." [31].

With this in mind, strength, force, and power can be said to be attributes of the "aristocratic morality" that ought to be espoused in L*e Véritable St. Genest;* considering that the piece takes place in Ancient Rome, and that Nietzsche attributes these values to this time period.

What can be said of the characters in *Le Véritable St. Genest*? Before examining the historical origins of the characters in *Le Véritable St. Genest*, I believe it is necessary to note the alignment of the characters that Rotrou wants the audience to perceive. The main antagonist of the piece is the Roman emperor Diocletian, who consistently espouses a moral position that can be seen as contrary to that of the main protagonist, Genest, an early Christian martyr who is converted from the Roman pagan tradition to Christianity in the meta-theatrical 3rd act of the piece. Furthermore, the co-

[31] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* trans. Maudemarie Clark, Alan J. Swensen, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 14

emperor Maximin is known as a glorious persecutor of Christians, and as such, he can be seen in conjugation with Diocletian as the antithesis of what Genest believes in. The implication of this choice present the reader with a certain initial sense of the way in which morality is presented in the piece. In choosing that the protagonist be converted in the piece and die as a Christian martyr, Rotrou wants the audience to feel that his death is truly a tragedy, which implies that his life was valued in a certain way. From this it can be said that Genest's death is tragic because he died for what is “right” according to a Christian definition of “right”, and as such this implication can be said to uphold a sense of Christian ethics.

In order to unpack the moral disposition in *Le Véritable St. Genest,* I will mostly examine the moral dispositions as presented by the piece's antagonists[32]†. If the historical context of the setting of the piece is considered, then *Le Véritable St. Genest*'s plot can be said to simulate the reversal of moral alignment from the “aristocratic” to the “slave” as Nietzsche explains. That is to say, through the course of the piece, the moral characteristics of the piece as a whole transforms from one that indulges in passion and strength into one that sees these values as “bad”. Simply put, the conversion of Genest from a pagan to a Christian serves as an allegorical representation of the reversal of morality as presented by Nietzsche.

One of the most important moments in this piece is the moment of “theatre within theatre”. This notion ought to be unpacked, because its complexity reveals much about the moral disposition of the characters in the piece. Furthermore, this stands as the moment in which the main character, Genest, converts to Christianity, thus

[32]†The reason for this difference in methodology is that morality is portrayed in a different way in each of the pieces. Nevertheless, it remains that Nietzsche serves as the cornerstone of my critique of morals.

metaphorically representing the historical reversal of moral value. Genest is asked to perform a theatrical piece to honor the persecution of Christians by the emperor Maximin. In this piece, Genest is asked to play the role of Adrian, a former Roman statesman who persecuted Christians before having converted to Christianity himself. However, while Genest prepares his lines for the piece, he begins to identify with Adrian more and more, resulting in his conversion to Christianity in the piece of meta-theatre. In having the main actor convert to Christianity in a piece that is intended to celebrate the glory of a Christian persecutor, this moment can be seen as a subversive triumph of Christianity over paganism. Furthermore, this triumph of Christianity over paganism function in the same way that the triumph of the "slave morality" over the aristocratic morality. The choice to make the emperor of the Roman state, a symbol of aristocracy, power, and honor, have his play subverted by a Christian conversion happen in the middle, it can be said that the "weak" triumphs over the "powerful", "ressentiment" triumphs over "sentiment". Furthermore, the fact that Genest dies a martyr, yet the rest of the Romans go unscathed presents this moral struggle as Nietzsche explains it; pity, compassion, and weakness become a signifier of strength, and power, passion, and pride become signifiers of weakness. To die a Christian martyr means that one dies for Christianity, which ultimately posits its strength in the abstinence of worldly pleasures; the real gift of Christianity according to Christians is the guarantee of an afterlife, yet this afterlife can only be achieved by adhering to a set of moral guidelines. So, as Genest dies for an ideal, he is literally pitting his life against itself – willing his own repression for a higher ideal, which renders him an "ascetic priest" by Nietzschian standards.

In recalling Nietzsche's previously mentioned etymological proposition regarding what Roman society valued, the initial moral disposition of the characters ought to be measured up to this standard. As Nietzsche suggests that the Romans saw a warrior, shrouded in glory, pride, and honor as a “bonus” – “good” – it would seem to be the case that this value should be upheld in *Le Véritable St. Genest.* Indeed, this sort of rhetoric is greatly espoused in the piece, yet in dealing with a piece that places two categories against each other – Christians and pagans – it is important to understand from which characters this rhetoric is coming. Indeed, throughout the piece, the way that Christian morality is upheld largely stems from the Romans expressing a sense of morality of Antiquity, and as these Romans are considered to be the “bad” characters, this can be seen as a sort of subtle critique of Antiquity's moral system. As the Roman characters justify Genest's death in the end, this can be seen as an way in which they assert their dominance over Genest, yet to the audience of the 17th century, this assertion is outweighed by the ultimate strength – Christian martyrdom. Simply put, Rotrou portrays the morality of the Roman characters as they were; a sense of pride, power, and duty is what is “good”, yet subverts this sense of moral guidance by establishing a connection between Genest and the audience. After his death, the Romans continue to espouse their sense of morality, which entails a justification of Genest's death. With this, the audience ought to see the Romans, and the moral guidelines they follow, as a source of “evil”, for their condemnation of Genest's values. Effectively, Rotrou is reinforcing the idea of the highest strength through the ultimate weakness – death.

To elaborate upon this idea, I will take as example the last scene of the play, in which all the characters with the exception of Genest, who has died at this point, take to

the stage. Morally speaking, this section is rather conflicting, yet with careful attention payed to the characters who are espousing any sort of moral assertion, this last scene can be seen as a ratification of Christian morals. As Genest has died for the moral virtues of the Christian religion, the Roman characters here are attempting to recap the progression of the tragic events. Plancien, an aid to Maximin, proclaims:

“Par votre ordre, Seigneur, ce glorieux acteur
Des plus fameux héros fameux imitateur ;
Du théâtre romain ma splendeur et la gloire,
Mais si mauvais acteur dedans sa propre histoire
Plus entier que jamais en son impiété
Et par tous mes efforts en vain sollicité
A du courroux des Dieux contre sa perfidie
Par un acte sanglant fermé la tragédie. »[33]

By your order, lord, this glorious actor,
Famous imitator of the most famous heroes;
of the Roman theatre, my magnificence and glory
But such an awful actor in his own story
More whole than ever in his impiety
And by all my efforts in vain unfed
Has, by the wrath of the gods against his perfidy
By a bloody act closed the tragedy [34]†:

With this proclamation, Placien can be said to be justifying the death of Genest. Indeed, he admits that Genest is the “most famous hero” and the “[most famous] imitator”, and

[33] Jean Rotrou, *Le Véritable St. Genest, Théatre du XVIIè Siècle,* edit. Jacques Scherer, (Paris, 1975)
[34] † As this piece is not well-known among the Anglophone world, this piece is rarely (if ever) translated to English. In all of my research I couldn't find an English version of the text, and as a true, adaptive translation would be a great undertaking, I have decided it most useful to present my own translation. Though it doesn't preserve the original syllabic meter or the rhyme scheme found in the French version, the context and sentiment is preserved in my translation.

even goes as far to call Genest a “glorious actor”, yet quickly reverses this sentiment by stating that “But a bad actor in his own story”. What I take this here to mean is that Genest was valued in the theatrical arts, yet his life outside of theatre, in his “own story”, Genest was a “bad actor”. This means that Placien believes that Genest's choice to convert to Christianity was misguided. This criticism of Genest's conversion to Christianity comes from a pagan Roman, and as such it should be considered as an approach that makes them look more morally reputable to an audience of the 17th century. Furthermore, Diocletian continues in this justification of Genest's death, by stating that:

“Ainsi reçoive un prompt et sévère supplice
Quiconque ose des Dieux irriter la justice ! »[35]

Translation
Thus he receives a prompt and severe torture,
For whomever dares the Gods will provoke justice!

This proclamation that “whomever dares the Gods will provoke justice” can be seen as Diocletian espousing a sort of “noble morality”, because he is proposing that a swift, just punishment ought to be dealt to whomever dare transgress the power of the Gods. Yet Diocletian is intended to be considered morally reprehensible, and as this is the case, his moral code based in power, punishment, and justice is also intended to be reprehensible. ”

At this point, I have gone into detail as to how the Christian morality is intended to subvert Antiquity morality, yet I have outlined very little of the outward expressions

[35] Jean Rotrou, *“Le Véritable St. Genest, Théatre du XVIIè Siècle”*, edit. Jacques Scherer, (Paris, 1975)

of Christian morality in the piece. In order to consider these expressions of Christian morality, it is necessary to consider the technological innovations that theatre of the era used to make the set quite impressive. One such moment comes when Genest decides to take on the role of Adrian for the theatrical piece. At this point, the moment of meta-theatre has not happened, yet there is an outward expression of the awesome power of the Christian God. In the fourth scene of the second act, Genest finds himself conflicted about taking on the role of Adrian because he is afraid of the possibility of angering the Gods. After a brief monologue, however, Rotrou provides a note that states
"Le ciel s'ouvre avec des flammes, et une voix s'entend, qui dit:"[36]

The sky opens with flames, and a voice speak saying:

At the time period, having a technological innovation that would allow for flames to appear on the stage surely would have impressed the audience, perhaps even leaving them slightly dumbfounded, or even declaring this act itself a work of God. With this, the words that the voice says are also quite important, for this moment stands as the point in which Genest fully adopts the Christianity. The voice says

Poursuis, Genest, ton personnage
Tu n'imiteras point en vain
Ton salut ne dépend que d'un peu de courage
Et Dieu t'y prêtrea la main.[37]

Pursue, Genest, your character
You will not imitate him in vain
Your salvation only demands a little courage
And God will lend you his hand.

[36] Ibid
[37] Ibid

This moment should be examined from two perspectives in order to understand how it relates to a direct proclamation of Christian value. First and most obviously, this moment can be understood as a single God contacting a person in conflict, providing him with a sense of security and encouragement. This stands in direct contrast to the multiplicity of Gods that are continually evoked throughout the piece by the other characters. However, more important to understanding the moral implication of this section how the voice states that Genest won't act “in vain”. To not act in vain means to act accordingly, which implies the existence of this single God. Furthermore, the voice states that Genest's salvation needs only “a little courage”. In order for one to act courageously, there must be something that is fearful, intimidating, or daunting to act up against, in this case it is acting against mainstream ideology of paganism. If paganism and its value system is fear-inspiring for Genest, then this means that he must overcome a moral and religious tradition that holds an emphasis on power, assertion, and pride in order to “see the light”. Thus with this moment, Genest's dialogue with Christianity can be seen as an explicit moment of espousing the strength of the Christian religion, and consequently its following sense of morality.

Analysis of Phèdre

The first step to understanding how morality works in Jean Racine's Phèdre is to understand the moral disposition of the playwright himself. According to the scholar Denis Hollier, Racine was "immensely indebted to the Jansenists", who were a group of "deeply pious advocates of strict Christian morality"[38] . Educated at the Port Royal, which Hollier notes was a "center of rationalist inquiry as well as a bastion of religious rigor"[39], Racine received a strong foundational education in the classics. With this, he was indoctrinated too the Jansenist tradition as well, which holds that heaven exists only for a few selected individuals, and that this decision was entirely pre-determined by God. Jansenism also upheld a deeply pessimistic outlook on the notion of free will, stating that no such notion exists, and that a strict moral constraints were necessary, as human are all born sinners[40].

With the guidelines of Jansenism outlined and understanding that Racine was educated according to its doctrine, it seems as though Racine's upbringing as a devout Catholic would predispose him to write strictly sacred texts, that is, texts that are centered around Christian thought and morality. However, Phèdre is set in the deeply pagan realm of Antiquity, complete with characters that are creations of the divine mixing with the human. Why is it then that Racine seems to reject the devotional fervor of his upbringing in favor of a deeply secular tradition?

Hollier provides us with one possible answer, in stating that "[The Jansenist] severity was disdained by the young Racine as he rose to unrivaled preeminence as an

[38] Denis Hollier, "Jansenist Tragedy", *A New History of French Literature*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press), 320
[39] Ibid
[40] Ibid

author of secular tragedy" [41]. Perhaps it is unfair to say that Racine rejected outright his upbringing as a Jansenist, as he did attempt to reconcile his upbringing in the preface to his most secular piece, Phèdre . Rather than saying that Racine rejected Jansenism, it seems more appropriate to say that Racine gleaned what he could from the Jansenist tradition, then applied these few key elements to secular tragedy.

One key element that Racine owes to the Jansenist tradition is the pessimistic outlook on the world. Though not exclusively a Jansenist value, this pessimism sets the roots for the unmediated tragedy that Racine creates in *Phèdre* . Furthermore, though *Phèdre* remains a firmly secular piece, the notion of a lack of free will is prominent in virtually every character in *Phèdre* .

Another element that Racine adapts from the Jansenist tradition is the notion of a hidden God. Hollier outlines this notion relative to the Jansenist by recalling that this notion was integral to another famous Jansenist, Blaise Pascal. This idea of a hidden God is one that is both "present and absent" and "inaccessible to intellectual faculties yet knowable through faith"[42]. When considering *Phèdre* in this light, it become evident that the Christian God, let alone the multiple Ancient deities, appear to be absent. One one hand, the Christian god can be said to be absent from Phèdre simply because the story takes place before the idea of Christianity was developed. On the other hand, the Ancient Greek gods, though apparently present through their actions, are mostly hidden from the text, aside from fact that several characters, such as Phèdre and Aricie, are descendants of these gods. Faith alone is the means by which the Ancient gods can be known in *Phèdre* , such as in the instance where Thésée condemns Hippolyte to a

[41] Denis Hollier, "Jansenist Tragedy", *A New History of French Literature*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press), 321
[42] Ibid, 320

watery grave by praying to Neptune. This lack of divine presence suggests a sort of humanism that ignores any sort of notion of deity – surely a great departure from the pious spirit of modern morality.

Perhaps what is most important about Racine's upbringing as a dedicated Catholic who lost touch with his faith is the fact in itself that he showed disdain for the strict moral reasoning of the Jansenists. This idea lays the framework for the moral transgression that lies at the heart of Racine's work, specifically in Phèdre. Yet, as Hollier also notes, Racine made efforts to reconcile his theatre with his Jansenist friends in the original preface to Phèdre . Understandably, the church was not fond of the secular works of Racine. The church claimed that Racine's depiction of incest, pagan rituals, and generally profane thought would inspire the 17th century audience to recreate these morally dubious moments.[43]

Yet it is important to clarify that Jean Racine himself is not endorsing a moral system that is opposed to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Rather, as the fact that he defended his piece against the claims of its sacrilege shows that it is more of an attempt to re-enforce a Christian morality. Perhaps the best way to put Racine's choices into context is to say that Racine intended to cross the line of morality so that it can be reinforced. In crossing the limit of what is considered morally acceptable in *Phèdre* , Racine first and foremost acknowledges that this is indeed a limit that is being crossed. Putting a moral transgression in a format such as theatre also in turn ritualizes the process moral transgression. In theatre, ontological assumptions are controlled in such a way that makes it a fashion similar to the way a scientist controls an experiment. Everything is precisely dictated and carefully constructed, and in a way can be seen as a

[43] Ibid

sort of “alternate universe” where morality can be rejected. In carefully crafting the entire scenario where the morality can rejected, the audience is allowed to engage a moral transgression and participate in it from afar while not crossing the line of acceptable morality themselves. This concept is further developed by Aristotle's notion of catharsis, or a dramatic moment in which certain emotions are spilled onto the set of the theatre. In other words, catharsis is the name of the “dramatic” moment in which sentiments of pity, fear, or other dark feelings are let out onto the audience from the actors[44].

Perhaps the most useful way to view morality in *Phèdre* as it relates to Nietzsche's philosophy is to relate it to the progression of events. That is to say, each distinct action that takes place in *Phèdre* has its own moral implications that follow from it. Looking at how the play progresses according to a timeline makes it easy to map out each specific moral implication of the major events. Here, I propose that a “moral timeline” be taken into consideration, so that each major event and its corresponding moral implication can be viewed in a more structured manner.

As with any sort of timeline, the timeline for Phèdre ought to start at the origins of the piece. As the piece starts with Hippolyte addressing Théramène about his plans to leave the kingdom, the reader is thrown into the universe that Racine crafts. Because of this, it is useful to look at the origins of the characters in the piece, because it is implied that there is a continual pattern of events that leads up to the twenty four hours in which the play takes place. As Racine draws heavily upon Greek mythology, the characters in *Phèdre* have their own distinct origins that indicate certain aspects

[44] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher (MIT Classics, 2009) accessed May 08, 2014, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html

regarding their moral dispositions. These moral dispositions lead to a non-Christian sense of morality that is found throughout the piece.

The origins of Phèdre are one way in which Racine created the piece with the intention of violating the normative sense of Christian morality. Phèdre is the biproduct of the divine mixing with the human – the ultimate form of transgression – and as such, her personality reflects this. Furthermore, in considering that the characters in *Phèdre* are based on Greek mythological tradition, the origins of Phèdre as a character come from a legend that has at its heart a notion of deity that necessarily predates that of the Christian notion of God. So, the fact itself that Racine chose to base his characters on Ancient Greek tradition ought to be taken as the first indication that the typical Judeo-Christian moral tradition is absent throughout the piece.

Mythologically speaking, Phèdre is the daughter of Pasiphae and Minos. Pasiphae is the daughter of the Sun God Helios and the Goddess of Love Venus. However, it must be noted that Pasiphae was birthed out of Venus' betrayal of Helios. From the most simple point of view, the plurality of deities that conceived Phèdre show that her existence is posited on the absence of a singular Christian deity. Furthermore, it should be noted that Phèdre is born out of two gods betraying each other.

As Phèdre is the title character of the piece *Phèdre*, I will analyze her moral disposition throughout the piece, using the *Genealogical Critique* as the cornerstone of my analysis to show that 17th century morality is transgressed in her actions. I shall start by examining her origins as a mortal that is born out of divine betrayal, which ultimately predisposes her for a bad conscience, ressentiment, and “illness”. From here, I will examine her incestual drive, which can be seen as the fundamental moment of

transgression in the piece. With this, the moral sentiments that can be associated with a modern sense of morality are rejected, resulting in a moment of self-overcoming that reverses the initial morality attached to Phèdre. From here, her moral disposition is one of instinctual drive. In the end of the piece, Phèdre ultimately commits suicide by ingesting poison, an action which can be said to stem from Phèdre's rejection of a world in which nothingness is willed.

In this section, I will examine the initial moral disposition of Phèdre, using Nietzsche's ideas of bad conscience and ressentiment relative to the "illness" that stems from this in order to assert that Phèdre's character can be initially seen as one that embraces the consciousness of modern man.

In the beginning of *Phèdre* , the character of Phèdre is portrayed as a personality of ressentiment and bitterness. For example, in the second scene of the first act, Oenone, while talking to Hippolyte about his stepmother, provides an outline of Phèdre's personality. He says:

Hélas, Seigner ! Quel trouble au mien peut être égal
La Reine touche presque à son terme fatal.
En vain à l'observer jour et nuit je m'attache
Elle meurt dans mes bras d'un mal qu'elle me cache.
Un désordre éternel règne dans son esprit
Son chagrin inquiet l'arrache de son lit.
Elle veut voir le jour. Et sa douleur profonde
M'ordonne toutefois d'écarter tout le monde...
Elle vient.[45]

45 Jean Racine, "Phèdre", Théatre du XVIIè Siècle, edit. Jacques Scherer, (Paris 1975)

Alas! My Lord, what misfortune Could equal mine?
The Queen is near to the ending of her life.
I've Kept watch over her, in vain, day and night:
She'll die in my arms of this illness That She hides.
Eternal disorder reigns now in her spirit.
She's torn from her bed by sorrowful unquiet.
She wishes to see the light: yet with deep sadness
Orders outside the world to be Dismissed ...
She is here.[46]

With this section, there are several key indications that Phèdre experiences a conscience of ressentiment and bitterness. First, Racine notes that she has an "eternal disorder of that reigns in her spirit". The use of "eternal" implies a temporal component that cannot be separated from Phèdre from the time of her conception to the time in which the piece is started. What this means is that Phèdre has always espoused a certain disillusioned attitude towards the world, which can be explained originally through the understanding that Phèdre was born out of an act of divine betrayal. Furthermore, Racine adds that Phèdre is close to the end of her life by stating that she is "dying in [the arms of Oenone] of a sickness that she hides [from Oenone]". The use of the word "mal" to signify "sickness" is interesting in this context, because the word "mal" here has a double meaning. On one hand, "mal" certainly means a literal sickness, yet on the other hand, "mal" can be used to mean "bad", or "evil". With the provided context of the surrounding lines, this double meaning is further explained. In the second line, Oenone says that Phèdre is reaching her "fatal term", which certainly implies that she is close to death. However, the lines following this sentence evoke a sickness of mind, by using the words "sorrow" and "pain", yet linking it to the "eternal disorder that rules her spirit".

[46] Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, trans. A.S. Kline, last modified April 05, 2005 http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Phaedra.htm

How can this passage be interpreted to outline the moral disposition of Phèdre? If this section of analysis is viewed as a the first point on the moral timeline for Phèdre , then there are certain implications of a transgression that is to happen that cannot be ignored. For instance, in the sentence where “she dies in my arms of a “mal” that she hides from me”, it is important to note that Racine adds that this “mal” is hidden from Oenone in the beginning of the piece. Due to the fact that Phèdre is a tragedy, the beginning necessarily starts with a sort of calmness in order to provide the conditions necessary for a tragic chain of events to happen. In other words, this play starts with a sense of tranquility that over the course of the time in the play begins to unravel into tragedy. This implies that the hidden qualities of Phèdre's conscience shall reveal themselves outward throughout the development of the piece.

Here, I believe it necessary to evoke several ideas from the *Genealogical Critique* in order to properly place this initial portrait of consciousness in a place where it can be transgressed. One key notion that I evoked earlier is the concept of the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche presents this ideal as integral to the consciousness of modern man, claiming that it “is an artifice for the preservation of life”[47]. He continues “This ideal as been able to rule and achieve power over humans to the extent that history teaches us it has, in particular wherever the civilization and taming of man has been successfully carried out, expresses a great fact: diseasedness of the previous type of human...” [48]. Nietzsche presents the ascetic ideal as an idea that can be used to “tame” man, that is to say to structure more rigidly the standards by which man lives. Furthermore, he adds that with this taming comes an emphasis on the sickness of the previous man.

[47] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* trans. Maudemarie Clark, Alan J. Swensen, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 86
[48] Ibid

What is most important to gather from Nietzschian notion of the ascetic ideal as a means of preserving civilization is the idea that it "tames" man. With this, Phèdre , being born out of an act of one god betraying the next, can be said to have been born out of a passionate, uncontrollable act. As Phèdre reveals herself to be driven by passion later in the text, it is necessary first for Racine to outline the conditions on which her passion can be acted upon. That is, Racine here is laying the framework for what ought to be transgressed. To act upon passion is to act upon instinct, which lies outside of the structure of modern civilization. Thus when Racine outlines Phèdre as a sickly, resentful character, he is laying the framework for this notion to be reversed by a passionate, instinctual act rooted in self-preservation.

Here, I believe it necessary to pose the question if Phèdre is considered to be a human being of ressentiment, how is it then that this can be overcome? That is to say, is it the case that Phèdre changes consciousness entirely based upon a certain moment of passionate action, or is it the case that Phèdre exhibits a "noble morality" from the first place, and this ressentiment that she experiences is nothing more that a brief blight of spirit? With this question, the possibility of ressentiment as it relates to a noble consciousness ought to be addressed, which I will answer in drawing upon the 10th section of the first treatise of the *Genealogical Critique of Morals*, wherein Nietzsche evokes that "for the ressentiment of the noble human being, when it appears in him, runs its course and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, therefore it does not poison – on the other hand it does not appear at all in countless cases where it is unavoidable in tall the weak and powerless." [49]. With this quote, ressentiment can be further understood according to my latter proposition as it relates to Phèdre – it is an emotional response

[49] Ibid, 21

that can grip even those who espouse the noble moral tradition, yet as such, it can be expelled from the conscience without posing such a great harm that allows it to become the defining aspect of one's outlook on the world.

Nietzsche elaborates further his notion of the sick in stating that “The sick are the greatest danger to the healthy; it is not from the strongest that harm comes to the strong, but rather from the weakest […] the diseased are man's great danger: not the evil, not the 'beasts of prey'...” [50]. In order to understand this quote, it ought to be outlines as to what “sick” and “healthy” mean relative to Nietzsche's philosophy. One who is sick means one whose conscience is sick, and is therefore intended to mean one who upholds the ascetic ideal, or one who espouses the “slave morality”. Furthermore, one who is healthy is intended to mean one who acts according the stronger moral inclinations, thus lending itself towards the idea of the “aristocratic morality”. Considering this and the fact that Phèdre is portrayed as a sickly personality, it seems as though Phèdre, as one of the sickly, ought to be considered a danger to the “strongest”. However, considering that Phèdre has a sick conscience and that Nietzsche proposes this sickness as a threat to those with a strong conscience, there ought to be some sort of struggle between the “sick” and the “strong”. I will argue that this struggle is internalized in the case of Phèdre , and that in her moment of passionate action and incestual pursuit of Hippolyte, Phèdre finds herself in an internalized conflict between her sickly conscience and her “strong” conscience. In the sixth scene of the fourth act, this moment of internal tension is presented to the audience when Phèdre proclaims that

[50] Ibid, 87

Ils s'aimeront toujours
Au moment que je parle, ah mortelle pensée !
Ils bravent la fureur d'une Aricie insensée.
Malgré ce même exil qui va les écarter,
ils font mille serments de ne se point quitter.
Non, je ne puis souffrir un bonheur qui m'outrage,
Oenone. Prends pitié de ma jalouse rage.
Il faut perdre Aricie. [...][51]

They will always love.
Ah, deadly thought, as I speak, at this moment, here,
They brave the fury of a maddened lover!
Despite the same exile that will separate them,
They swear a thousand times nothing will part them.
No, I cannot endure a happiness that galls me,
Oenone. In this jealous rage, take pity on me.
Aricia must perish. [...][52]

At this moment in the play, Phèdre finds herself in an internalized struggle between two senses of morality, one that follows the Nietzschian model of the "slave morality" and the other that follows the model of the "aristocratic morality". This tension is best exemplified by the last two sentences, in which Phèdre claims that she cannot suffer a happiness that outrages her, and asks Oenone to take pity of her jealous rage. This last sentence in particular presents itself as a conflict of two senses of morality. On one hand, Phèdre admits herself that she is in a jealous rage, which implies that her moral drive is governed by emotional response, which stands in stark contrast to the asceticism of modern morality. Yet on the other hand, she asks that this emotional response be balanced by Oenone taking pity on her. Additionally, the last line ought to be taken into consideration. In her state of passionate mania, Phèdre expresses that she wants Aricie "to perish". Such an emotional response is symbolic of a system of morals

[51] Jean Racine, Phèdre, *Théatre du XVIIè Siècle*, edit. Jacques Scherer, (Paris 1975)
[52] Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, trans. A.S. Kline, last modified April 05, 2005
http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Phaedra.htm

that values passionate, instinctual action, because in requesting for her amorous rival to perish, Phèdre is expressing her desire to expel her contained emotions through a violent lashing out of her instinctual drive.

Perhaps the most useful scene to analyze the moral disposition of Phèdre comes in the fifth scene of the fourth act. This scene is particularly useful in understanding how Phèdre's morality can initially be seen as one that is in line with a modern sense of morality, yet is transgressed through an incestuous passion for her stepson because this scene is a monologue wherein Phèdre is alone on the stage.

Phèdre says here:

Il sort. Quelle nouvelle a frappé mon oreille ?
Quel feu mal étouffé dans mon coeur se réveille.
Quel coup de foudre, ô Ciel ! Et quel funeste avis !
Je volais toute entière au secours de son Fils :
Et m'arrachant des bras d'Oenone épouvantée
Je cédais au remords dont j'étais tourmentée.
Qui sait même où m'allait porter ce repentir ?
Peut-être à m'accuser j'aurais pu consentir,
Peut-être si la voix ne m'eut été coupée,
L'affreuse Vérité me serait échappée.
Hippolyte est sensible, et ne sent rien pour moi !
Aricie a son coeur ! Aricie a sa foi ![53]
…

He’s gone. What words are these in my ears?
What evil flame stifled in my heart appears?
What lightning bolt, you heavens! What fatal news!
I flew here only in hope his son might be rescued:
And tore myself from Oenone’s trembling arms,
Yielding to that remorse that does me harm.
Who knows where repentance might have led?
Perhaps I’d have tried to accuse myself, instead:
Perhaps, if my voice had not been stilled within,
The dire truth would have escaped me even then.

53 Jean Racine, Phèdre, Théatre du XVIIè Siècle, edit. Jacques Scherer, (Paris, 1975)

Hippolytus feels, and feels nothing for me!
Aricia has his heart! Aricia has his loyalty.[54]

In this passage, Racine portrays Phèdre as a personality driven by instinctual, passionate action – which ends up resulting in a taboo love for Hippolyte. First, it should be understood that this monologue comes after Phèdre is rejected by Hippolyte. However, this rejection is not only disappointing for Phèdre, but also rather shocking, which is indicated by the first line, where Phèdre states that “what news struck my ears?” This disappointment implies a certain sense lack of repentance for her passion for Hippolyte. Furthermore, this lack of remorse for her love is exemplified to the reader by Racine's use of “a poorly extinguished flame” in Phèdre's heart that “is waking up”.With this, the reader can see the immediacy of Phèdre's love for Hippolyte by using the phrase “coup de foudre”. Once again, this phrase has a double meaning. One one hand, “coup de foudre” means “sudden love”, or can be roughly translated to as “love at first sight”. However, it also means (and is used more accurately in this context) “lightning bolt”. Nevertheless, the implication of this remains the same. If “coup de foudre” is taken to mean “love at first sight” then there is an obvious expression of incestual passion. Translating this word as “lightning bolt” has a more abstract implication that arrives at the same conclusion: passionate, violent energy being unleashed from a contained space. If taken allegorically, this implies that Phèdre is overcome by passion for Hippolyte in a moment where her passion leashes out, much like a lightning bolt bursts out of the sky.

` Considering the fact that a sexual love for a stepson is taboo by modern standards, and as this passion that drives this love is determined by Phèdre's

[54] Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, trans. A.S. Kline, last modified April 05, 2005 http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Phaedra.htm

consciousness, this overcoming with passion can be seen abstractly as an overcoming of one moral disposition to another. At this moment of passionate transgression, the traditional morally "correct" value of monogamy is ruptured by the morally dubious passion for a family member. Let us examine yet another section from Phèdre that has a morally transgressive connotation. During the 3rd act of the piece, Phèdre, while talking to Oedone about the consequences of her transgressive actions, says

Il n'est plus temps. Il sait mes ardeurs insensées.
De l'austère pudeur les bornes sont passées.
J'ai déclaré ma honte aux yeux de mon Vainqueur,
et l'espoir malgré moi s'est glissé dans ma coeur.
Toi-même rappelant ma force défaillante,
Et mon âme déjà sur mes lèvres errante
Par tes conseils flatteur tu m'as su ranimer.
Tu m'as fait entrevoir que je pouvais l'aimer. [55]

No longer. He knows my ardent ecstasy.
I've passed the bounds of cautious modesty.
In my conqueror's sight I declared my shame,
Yet hope glides to my heart now all the same.
You yourself, defeating my powers' eclipse,
Recalling my soul, already hovering on my lips
You revived me with your flattering advice.
Made me see, that I might love him, with your eyes.[56]

First and most explicitly, it is important that in the second line Phèdre mentions that she has "passed the bounds of her cautious modesty". From here, we can understand that there is a notion of what it means to be modest, and despite her best efforts to contain herself, Phèdre cannot help but cross these limits. Yet with this, it must be noted that Phèdre can admit to these things. In terms of the *Genealogical Critique,* it seems that

[55] Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, *Théatre du XVIIè Siècle,* edit. Jacques Scherer, (Paris, 1975)
[56] Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, trans. A.S. Kline, last modified April 05, 2005
http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Phaedra.htm

Phèdre here is accepting responsibility for her actions, which in turn puts her in a position of self-affirmation. If Phèdre's personality was plagued by ressentiment, then it would follow from her actions that she pass the blame off elsewhere, engage in a no-saying to an outside force out of her control – consequently resulting in bitterness and bad conscience. Furthermore, it is explicitly stated that she declares her "shame" stemming from her actions. If Phèdre were taken here to be an ascetic priest, so to say, it would follow that she would attempt to uphold a saintly devotion to a moral code that willingly wills against herself – willing her life against life itself – yet as she admits to crossing this moral boundary. In this admittance, it is implied that there exists a moral code that ought to be upheld – which implies a certain measurable standard by which her actions could be compared. Thus with this passage, Racine implies a certain sense of guilt in Phèdre's actions. However with this, the next line suggests that there seems to be a distinct lack of remorse for this moral transgression in Phèdre's dialogue, in stating that "hope glides in her heart all the same time". From this, it appears as though Phèdre is willing life as life, and instead of letting the possible guilt that could come from crossing a moral boundary go. In a word, Phèdre is not plagued by guilt as a modern conscience would be, rather affirms her actions as such an moves on from there.

The last scene in Phèdre portrays Phèdre in a such a way that shows a continued pattern of self-affirmation that places her morality outside the realm of that of the "ascetic priest". In this last scene, Thésée, having recently returned from his voyages alive, confronts Phèdre about her attempt to seduce his son, Hippolyte. In her last words in the piece, Phèdre says:

[...]

J'ai pris, j'ai fait couler dans mes brûlantes veines
Un poison que Médée apporta dans Athènes.
Déjà jusqu'à mon coeur le venin parvenu
Dans ce coeur expirant jette un froid inconnu
Déjà je ne vois plus qu'à travers un nuage
Et le Ciel, et l'Époux que ma présence outrage.
Et la mort à mes yeux dérobant la clarté
Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, tout sa pureté [57]

:
[…]
I have
taken…I have spread through my burning veins,
A poison that Medea brought to Athens.
Already the venom flows towards my heart,
An unaccustomed chill pierces my dying heart
Already I see as if through a clouded sky,
Heaven, and a husband my presence horrifies.
And Death, from my eyes, stealing the clarity,
Gives back to the day, defiled, all his purity.[58]

With this last cathartic testimony from Phèdre , the reader learns that she has ingested a poison and is on the verge of death. In this last moment, Phèdre proclaims that she now has a "clarity of conscience" so to speak, and that she no longer "sees through the clouds". One one level, since Phèdre is proclaiming to have a clear conscience and no longer dwelling upon the sense of suffering that she once did, it could be said that she is better off psychologically, or that the notion of "bad conscience" as presented by Nietzsche has been fully rid from her moral outlook. Taking this suggestion into consideration, and aligning it next to the fact that Phèdre has committed one of the fundamental moral transgressions of society – suicide – it follows that Phèdre is no longer plagued by a moral standard that wills against her passions. Furthermore, if

[57] Jean Racine, Phèdre, *Théatre du XVIIè Siècle*, edit. Jacques Scherer, (Paris, 1975)
[58] Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, trans. A.S. Kline, last modified April 05, 2005
http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Phaedra.htm

suicide is accepted as a transgression of modern morality, then Phèdre lacks the sentiment of guilt that should accompany a decision wherein a moral standard is broken. That is to say, Phèdre is not guilty of her choice to end her life, which should be the case if this is considered a moral transgression by modern societal standards. Furthermore, Phèdre's last words are marked by a moment of purity of spirit. In her last two lines of the piece, Phèdre says :

Et la Mort à mes yeux dérobant la clarté
Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa pureté.

And Death, from my eyes, stealing the clarity
Gives back to the day, defiled, all his purity.

Perhaps the most important choice that Racine made when writing these lines was the rhyming couplet of “clarté” and “pureté” . Since Alexandrine verse emphasizes the importance of rhyme, Racine aims to emphasize a last moment of clarity that Phèdre experiences. The use of “purity” implies that Phèdre's conscience is not weighed down by any sort of potential guilt or feeling of wrong-doing for her actions in the piece, which further implies that that the end scene in Phèdre is marked by a diversion from modern moral standards.

Conclusion

Tragedy, as a theatrical art form, is intended to evoke an emotional response from the audience for whom it is being performed. In order to evoke an emotional response effectively, this means that tragedy must have some sort of progression of events that result in a tragic conclusion. To say something is tragic means that it evokes a sentiment of loss, sadness, and pain – all of which are generally considered to be negative emotions. With this taken into mind, I have proposed that in order to evoke these sentiments, the actions that lie at the heart of tragedy must have some sort of moral assertion attached to them in order to evoke an emotional response.

On a surface level, the possibility of comparison between *Le Véritable St. Genest* and *Phèdre* is quite real. The two share many aspects in common, including the fact that they were both products of "Le Grand Siècle" in France and that both of them are morally charged pieces that take place in Antiquity. Yet this temporal difference creates a sort of problem in comparing these two texts. As Nietzsche proposes that morality has undergone a reversal from Antiquity to modernity, the time period in which the pieces were written would seem to be in conflict with the moral assertions in each play. In order to properly assess this difference, I used the *Genealogical Critique of Morals* to highlight the difference in morality between the two plays. The first way that I differentiated between the two texts was by examining the historical origins of the authors. As Racine was orphaned at a young age and quickly thereafter was educated by the strict Jansenist tradition yet grew up to reject their pious doctrine as a playwright, his origins had an important influence on his sense of tragedy. From here, I examined how *Phèdre*, in its unmediated tragedy and deeply pagan universe, presents itself in a

way that, over the course of the piece, transgresses the moral system of modernity, and as such, upholds the value system of Antiquity by having Phèdre be portrayed initially as a character of a modern moral conscience who is overcome with instinctual passion for her stepson. From here, I asserted that *Le Véritable St. Genest* does quite the opposite. Once again, I examined the origins of Rotrou. As he was born into a family of magistrates during the period of absolute monarchy by divine right, this can be said to have greatly influenced his piece *Le Véritable St. Genest.* Indeed, this piece takes on a pagan realm with a multiplicity of gods, yet Rotrou spins the setting and main characters so as to make them appear morally reprehensible to an audience of the 17th century. Furthermore, through a moment of Christian piety in meta-theatre, this play shows itself to be representative of the process by which the "slave morality" overtook the "aristocratic morality". With careful examination of the two pieces, it can be said that *Phèdre* upholds the morality of the time in which it is set, whereas *Le Véritable St. Genest* can be said to uphold the time in which it was written.

Annotated Bibliography

Aristotle, and S.H. Butcher *Aristotle: Poetics*. MIT Classics Archive, Web. http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html

This text by Aristotle is important to understanding the fundementals and definition of theatrical tragedy and exactly what it entails. In this text, Aristotle lays the groundwork for how tragic theatre differs from epic poetry, which during Athenian times was a more prevalent literary media. Indeed, this piece is neither Nietzsche nor French theatre, but rather provides the grounds from which both of these traditions emerge. One interesting notion that I shall develop from this source is the notion of the three unities of tragedy. Aristotle notes that tragedy usually takes course over a single 24 hour period, with a linear flow of time, as opposed to epic poetry which could cross a time span of months. With this, the location is contained to a small region of the world, whereas epic poetry takes more of a global approach. Furthermore, all actions take place within these constraints, thus leading to what is called the "unity of time, place, and action".

Bénichou, Paul. "Morales Du Grand Siècle."Bibliothèque des Idées, Paris. (1948) Print.

This text talks about the notion that certain social conditions can be associated with moral conditions. Bénichou particularly refers to 17th century literature for his analysis, and as such this piece is useful as an example of a well-written critique of morality in Racine.

Chardon, Henri La Vie De Rotrou, Mieux Connue. Print. Slatkine Reprints, Geneva (1970). Print.

This text is a biography of Jean Rotrou. Though his life and works are less well-known than those of many other playwrights from the same era, he has come into reconsideration in more recent years as a formidable author.

Chapman, A. H. "The Influence of Nietzsche on Freud's Ideas." National Library of Medicine (1995): n. pag. Web.

This article serves as an outline of the influence of Nietzsche on Freud's ideas. For my purposes, this article sufficed as an example of the impact of Nietzsche's philosophy on what is perhaps one of the most important fields of study of the 20th and 21st century, psychoanalysis.

Clarke, Paul A. B., and Andrew Linzey. Dictionary of Ethics, Theology, and Society. London: Routledge, (1996). Print.

This source is a dictionary for terminology that is often used in the fields of ethics and theology. For my purposes, the definition of the word "asceticism" was cited from this source.

Hollier, Denis. "Racine Et La Nouvelle Critique." *De La Littérature Française* (n.d.): 373-78. Print.

This article is one of many articles regarding a 20th century re-reading of neo-classicist literature. Specifically, this article talks about the history and implications of

the different ways in which Racine's works have been interpreted over the years. Hollier shows how often times Racine's work can be put into a philosophic context, citing how specifically the post-modernist tendencies of French academia in 1960s began to publish “new critiques” of seemingly “unattackable” works by Racine. Though this piece never made it into my project, it was helpful to read in order to understand how 17th century literature can be approached in the 21st century.

Hollier, Denis. "Jansenist Tragedy." A New History of French Literature (1996): Print.

This article by Denis Hollier serves as a critical engagement with the religious tradition of Jansenism as it related to theatrical tragedy – notably that of Jean Racine. Hollier explains that Jansenism – a rigid school of Catholic dogma that emphasizes a lack of human free will, the importance of original sin, and the existence of a heaven that allows only a few number of pre-selected people – had in important impact on French literary and scientific tradition. He then explains how Jean Racine, who was abandoned by his parents at the age of two and sent to live at the Jansenist academy at Port Royal eventually broke his tied with this sect of Catholicism, due to the increasingly tense relations between the Jansenists and Racine, provoked by his continual emphasis on pagan tragedies.

Julliot, André. *Au Sujet De Quelques Théories Du Passion et de la Sentiment Au XVIIème Siècle*. Paris: n.p., n.d. Print.

This article explains several theories of passion and sentiment in 17th century. In explaining that it is unjust to attempt to reduce a century or period of years into a certain group of idea, Julliot promotes the idea of considering diverse notions of thought, especially here thought regarding passion, during a period of time. Phèdre here is called into questioning for its going against the normative notion of 17th century passion.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Geneology of Morality*. Trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan Swesen. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998. Print.

This text is often considered one of Nietzsche's most cohesive works, and is divided into three different treatises. In the first treatise Nietzsche addresses the origins of modern notions of “good” and “bad” in comparison to notions of “good” and “evil”, determining that things deemed to be “good” are those which assert a sense of dominance or affirmation in one's life. Nietzsche also addresses here the notion of *ressentiment*, a sort of deep seeded resentment born from fact that a societal distinction between good and evil is present in the lives of the average person. The second treatise delves into the notion of guilt and the “bad conscious”, and also develops further the concept of the will to power. The third treatise deals with the concept of asceticism, or willing meaningless notions as truth with a sense of religious devotion to upholding its meaning. I will draw upon this text for a large portion of my anaylsis of characters in the theatrical pieces.

Racine, Jean. *Phèdre*. N.p.: n.p., 1676. Print.

Written in 1676, this play takes the form of a Greek tragedy. Indeed, there are quite a few other plays that follow the story of Phèdre, including many written around

the same time period. Racine's version of the story seems to be the only one that has really held up and been considered throughout time. In this piece, the story of a complex triangle of lust and passion is outlined, wherein the King of Trezene's wife Phèdre, a cold and bitter woman, believes that her husband is dead since he has not returned from battle for a long time, and begins to be overcome by her lustful desires for her step-son who is trying to flee her overbearing reign. She claims she will curse his ship if he tries to leave. Right before he leaves and is consequently killed by his father, who then learns that his wife had attempted adultery with his son. Rich in its development, this text is considered a classic of French literature.

Racine, Jean. *Phèdre*. Trans. A. S. Kline, 2003. Web. Accessed May 08, 2014 http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Phaedra.htm

This translated English version of Phedre by British translator and poet A.S. Kline conveys the original rhyme scheme, sentiment, and language style as those found in the original French text.

Rotrou, Jean. *Le Véritable St. Genest*. edit. Jacques Scherer Paris, 1975. Print.

Another classic of French literature. This story follows the late life of the early Christian martyr St. Genest. It is an example of “theatre within theatre”, in that Genest is an actor in the play who is asked to perform before the emperor Diocletian's court. During the piece that occurs within the play, Genest himself is converted to Christianity, which serves as a problem in the era of the Roman empire, inevidably leading to his own martyrdom.

Wicks, Robert. "Friedrich Nietzsche." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Stanford University, n.d. Web. Accessed May 08, 2014 http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche/

This encyclopedia entry, from Stanford University, serves well as a biographical introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche. In a detailed database entry, the specific details of Nietzsche’s birth, education, life as a philosopher, and death are outlined.