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From Nietzsche and Scheler's Concept of Ressentiment to Jean Genet's Resentful Characters: *The Maids*

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Abstract

Associated with Nietzsche's nihilism, the concept of ressentiment—the resentment felt by the slave toward the master—is defined by Max Scheler, following Nietzsche's line of thought, as the self-poisoning of the mind. This emotion frequently appears in cinema and the performing arts, which are nourished by conflict. Theatre does not merely reflect the calm moments of life; it also incorporates its complexity, tensions, and distortions. This study examines Jean Genet's *The Maids* through the concept of ressentiment. Situated at the intersection of underground literature and absurd theatre, *The Maids* offers a particularly suitable context for examining the dynamics of ressentiment. Ressentiment emerges as one of the principal forces shaping the characters' actions and relationships. Their resentment is directed toward the woman for whom they work and functions as a central force that generates dramatic conflict. While the characters attempt to transform their resentment into violence, they simultaneously enact what Scheler describes as the self-poisoning of the mind. Dramatic and post-dramatic theatre, sustained by conflict, operates in close relation with negative emotions. Accordingly, this article examines ressentiment as the central affect structuring conflict in *The Maids*, drawing on Nietzsche's and Scheler's accounts of ressentiment.

Keywords: Nietzsche; Scheler; ressentiment; resentment; Jean Genet

1. Introduction

> *"…We want to live above them like harsh winds, neighbors to eagles, neighbors to snow, neighbors to the sun: thus do harsh winds live. And one day I want to blow among them like a wind, to cut off their breath with my breath: this is what my future demands. Truly, Zarathustra is a harsh wind for the lowly; and he gives this counsel to his enemies, and to all who spit and spew: beware of spitting against the wind!".* (Nietzsche 2014, p. 20)

Theatre develops in close relation to life, yet it does not draw only on life's calm or continuous aspects; it examines what disturbs the individual and unsettles society, bringing to the center the fragments of life left at the margins, incomplete emotions, and corrosive behaviors. This orientation toward disturbance is not incidental, since conflict is indispensable to theatre in tragedy, dramatic theatre, and post-dramatic forms alike, just as it structures everyday life, where what is striking, unfamiliar, or resistant to ordinary patterns is precisely what attracts attention. Because human beings pursue the unknown and strive to reach what is different, theatre too follows what is authentic rather than what is settled: it seeks, on the one hand, the truth inherent in the nature of art, and on the other, the singularities that disrupt convention.

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Jean Genet and *The Maids* occupy a distinctive position in twentieth-century theatre, particularly through their proximity to underground writing and absurdist dramaturgy. Jean Genet, regarded as one of the important playwrights of the twentieth century, and one of his notable works, *The Maids*, reflect the characteristics of the period in which it was written, while also remaining close to the contemporary world through the relationships and emotions it contains. *The Maids* is nourished by a profound sense of resentment and bears traces of Genet's anger toward life. Resentment has been a frequently discussed and extensively written-upon emotion by thinkers. In this study, the play *The Maids* is examined through Max Scheler's work Ressentiment and, more frequently, through Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment—which, although overlapping with and similar in meaning to resentment, is addressed here specifically through the thinker's own use of the term. The discussion draws particularly on Nietzsche's treatment of ressentiment in On the Genealogy of Morality. Rather than understanding ressentiment simply as an emotional reaction, the study considers it as a force that shapes systems of valuation. Within this context, Claire and Solange's hostility toward their mistress, their envy, and their desire to overturn an established hierarchy are examined through the dynamics of ressentiment. *The Maids* is often read in relation to class conflict, identity, role-playing, and absurdist dramaturgy. This study approaches these dimensions through ressentiment, arguing that Claire and Solange's hostility toward the Mistress is shaped by humiliation, envy, and a persistent desire to reverse the hierarchy that confines them. Nietzsche and Scheler make it possible to read this hostility as more than personal anger: it becomes a mode of perception through which the characters understand themselves, the Mistress, and the world of the play.

2. Jean Genet

Before turning to ressentiment as it operates within the play, it is necessary to consider the life from which *The Maids* emerges, since Genet's own experience of exclusion supplies the biographical ground on which the play's resentment is built. On the back cover of Tahar Ben Jelloun's book Jean Genet: The Sublime Liar (Jelloun 2012)—in which Jelloun recounts the twelve years he spent with the writer—Jean Genet is described as a writer who turned his back on the hypocrisy of the French, devoted himself to the struggles of the Black Panthers, the Zengakuren, and the Palestinians; an anarchist, a homosexual, a thief, in Jean-Paul Sartre's words, a "saint," a rebel, a pure white Black man. In his work, Jelloun recounts the writer's perspective on betrayal, his friendships, his betrayals, and his weaknesses. In the words of Juan Goytisolo, *"To know Genet closely is an adventure from which no one emerges unscathed."*

Jean Genet was born in Paris in 1910; his father is unknown, and at the age of seven months he was abandoned by his mother and placed in an orphanage. His mother disappeared after leaving him. In 1911, he was placed with the Régnier family; in 1916, he began attending the local primary school and was raised as a Catholic. At the age of thirteen, he was taken from his adoptive family and sent to a vocational school to learn typesetting; ten days later, he escaped, was found in Nice, escaped several times, committed crimes, and repeatedly entered and left prison until he was eventually held in the Mettray Penal Colony for Juveniles until reaching adulthood. At the age of eighteen, in order to escape from there, he voluntarily enlisted in the army. In 1930, he went to Damascus as a soldier and stayed there for eleven months. His crimes and his life in exile never ceased throughout his lifetime (Dolanoğlu 2022, p. 207).

Jean Genet is precisely one of the stigmatized individuals described by Erving Goffman in his work Stigma (Goffman 2014); he is a criminal and a homosexual. On the back cover of Goffman's book, the stigmatized individual is described as follows: *"Stigmas take many*

forms: the disabled, those who have lost a limb as a result of an accident, homosexuals, the mentally ill, former criminals, drug addicts, the unemployed, or those marginalized due to particular ethnic, religious, or class affiliations are the principal figures of the 'stigmatized."

Jean Genet committed crimes throughout much of his life. He became known partly with the support of certain writers in French literature, such as Jean-Paul Sartre. He directly reflected his life in his writings. In 1948, he was tried for theft for the last time and sentenced to life imprisonment. The book he wrote in prison, Our Lady of the Flowers, was noticed by André Gide, Jean Cocteau, and Jean-Paul Sartre; it is known that these writers petitioned the president for Genet's pardon, and that he was subsequently pardoned. While depicting the world of criminals in which he lived, Genet also put forward his own ideas about life. He attempted to define life through a poetic language, yet stated that this was not possible. Arguing that human beings cannot perceive their own identities, he claimed that imaginary reflections can be seen in the eyes of others. Genet maintains that roles are merely names attached to specific functions. He explains that actions are replaced by functions and that real behaviors thus turn into ritualized behaviors (Demirtaş 2023).

Jean Genet uses the prison in his novels as a space of exclusion and confinement. Through his strong rhetoric and effective use of language, he elevates his protagonists—who are in the position of victims—beyond their given circumstances. These victims, in a sense, attain a respected position above society. Prisons become temples for homosexuals, criminals, and murderers. He removes criminals from ordinariness and endows them with powerful qualities. The exclusion he experienced in his own life and his criminal identity are used as weapons against society. Jean-Paul Sartre attributes the writer's genius for creating a flawless world of criminals to his ability to mythologize things. While contributing striking examples to what is called absurd theatre, Genet remains in a constant state of rebellion. This rebellion, in turn, becomes a weapon through his writings (Akın 2017, pp. 11, 12).

Jean Genet states that writing is the last resort remaining after betrayal. He notes that at the age of fourteen or fifteen he realized he was a thief, and that, at best, he could only become a butcher's apprentice or a bus ticket seller; knowing that such a form of success would disgust him, he trained himself from a very young age to cultivate impulses that would lead him toward writing. He says that he began writing at the age of fifteen while he was in Mettray. Genet remarks, "Writing is what remains to you when you have been expelled from the realm of the given word." He states that the Mettray Penal Colony had a profound impact on his transformation, and that the children there rejected traditional morality and the moral codes of society. He also makes striking observations about prison: he claims that people enter prisons unprepared, and although they wish to be part of society, they become imprisoned due to being compelled into acts such as theft; however, according to the writer, true prisoners are those who hate society and love prisons. He describes such individuals through a line from Charles Baudelaire: "The true travelers are those who leave for the sake of leaving" (Dolanoğlu 2022, pp. 186, 187).

Jean Genet, while depicting prisons in his novels, constructs an identity that is content with its condition yet filled with anger toward society. Pornography is magnified and serves this anger. By constantly using obscene language, he seeks to unsettle the reader and the audience. In the world of criminals, he treats even male–male love as if it were a myth. The fate of his characters is unhappiness. Genet writes with a cinematic language, as if employing a filmic structure. His images are in motion; they do not remain still. He makes use of flashbacks, interrupted sequences, repeated scenes, and blackouts. He aims to surprise by employing cinematic techniques. This perceptual dizziness he creates is a result of his passion for cinema. In his five autobiographical works, he draws from life while combining poetic dialogue, slang, and montage. By combining myth with sociology,

he creates a literary language. While he appears to have been influenced by Marcel Proust at the beginning of his writing career, his desire to expose violence in theatre aligns with Antonin Artaud (Akın 2017, pp. 24, 25).

3. Underground Literature and Genet

> *"Who is the rebel? A person who says no. But even if he refuses, he does not renounce; he is also a person who says yes, from the very first movement. A slave who has taken orders all his life suddenly finds a new command unacceptable. What is the content of this 'no'?"*. (Camus 2009, p. 11)

The trajectory outlined above—a life built from exclusion, crime, and defiance, transposed into a poetics of ritual and myth—situates Genet within a specific literary category that requires clarification before the analysis of ressentiment can proceed: underground literature. Underground literature departs from human reality and includes oppositional figures, anti-heroes, and marginal characters. In this genre, irony is intertwined with evil, and works typically contain slang, sexuality, and violence. It remains outside the canon and is defined as an alternative literature beyond mainstream literary traditions. At its philosophical core lies an understanding of evil. The aim of those producing within this field is to maintain an oppositional stance without becoming popular (Demir 2019, p. 4112). It is a form of literature in which unspoken, ignored issues and socially deviant elements are brought into discussion. Rather than recounting the stories of heroes, winners, or those aligned with the system, it focuses on the lives of non-heroes and those excluded from glamorous lives (Çoğulu 2010, p. 6). Öktem states that this type of literature creates its own readership (Öktem 2011, p. 16). The criteria of underground literature remain a subject of ongoing debate, particularly regarding which works should be included within this category. Three criteria can be identified for a work to be considered part of this genre: the work itself, its author, and its mode of publication. The author's living "underground" is not regarded as a criterion; rather, using the work itself as a criterion appears more reasonable. The mode of publication, on the other hand, may only apply to fanzines (Demir and Kuş 2016, p. 124).

Nurdan Gürbilek, in her work The Language of the Victim, approaches humiliated characters through Fyodor Dostoevsky, Cemil Meriç, Oğuz Atay, and Yusuf Atılgan. She argues that literature possesses a powerful language and that human consciousness—which may appear to consist only of certain ideas, decisions, or sentences—is also capable of perceiving conflicting traits and competing voices. She begins with Dostoevsky, as he is the voice of the oppressed and the humiliated. Dostoevsky presents the fragmented structure and indecisive state of the underground as the space of the victims. He addresses the false values within society, whose inability to change leads to a sense of stagnation. The writer embraces the unsettling elements that civilization has pushed into the underground (Gürbilek 2008, p. 5). Jean Genet, like the authors cited by Gürbilek, focuses on the lives of victims, portrays the oppressed, and exhibits a structure that aligns with the characteristics of underground literature.

Jean Genet, due to his solitude and his condition of being without a place, without roots, almost without a flag, is like a vagabond who can fit all his belongings into a single suitcase. Jean-Paul Sartre, in Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr, interpreted Genet through the figure of the "saint," emphasizing the relationship between marginality, transgression, and self-creation (Sartre 2012). For Genet is inclined toward a form of happiness that seems fitting only for saints. He sets aside career, values, material concerns, and friendships. He chooses a path defined as deviant both sexually and sociologically. He wounds his closest friends, does not remain loyal to people, causes scandals, and is deeply entangled with pornography. He sees society as an enemy and stands in defiance against it (Akın 2017, p. 16).

Underground literature separates the artificial and the real—despite their close interconnection—and turns to the most extreme examples of life. The characters within this literature identify themselves as belonging to subcultures such as rock, hippie, or punk, and reject artificial structures. Because they exist within crime, violence, and misery, they are cast outside society. They perceive morality as hypocritical, respond to superficial goodness with evil, and oppose the ordinary with the extraordinary. Underground literature contains nothing artificial that does not correspond to reality; there are no utopian or fairy-tale-like narratives. In this genre, there are generally two types of characters: first, those who question the social structure and remain outside it; second, those who are excluded by the social structure due to economic, cultural, and social reasons. Both types exist outside society, differing only in the way they detach themselves from the social order. Groups that oppose the social structure are those who adopt subcultures such as hippie or punk and challenge traditional norms. The other group consists of those whom society ignores and renders invisible (Bolat 2013, pp. 12–13).

Bolat (2013, pp. 24, 25) summarizes the characteristics of underground literature as follows:

- Underground literature is a form of opposition that does not draw from political ideologies; it stands against dominant ideologies and the moral structure of society.
- It does not pursue a didactic aim and does not seek to convey a direct message.
- Although its subjects and characters are extraordinary, the themes remain grounded in reality; there are no fantastic or utopian elements.
- This genre includes those who exclude society or those who are excluded by it.
- These marginalized figures often come from subcultures.
- The protagonists are generally solitary, in a state of collapse, and psychologically inclined toward addiction or a desire for death.
- Themes such as sexuality, violence, crime, addiction, evil, and death are expressed in a distinctive language.
- The language is ordinary rather than refined, and slang appears without restriction.
- Underground literature draws from various sources (social structure, historical period, individual traits) and is influenced by anarchism and existentialism.
- It shares similarities with the postmodern period—perhaps due to their emergence in similar contexts—and its opposition to dominant structures is striking.
- It is directly related to sociology and is shaped by changes in social structure.
- It is the literature of metropolitan life.
- While opposing the mainstream, it is also influenced by it.
- Examples of underground literature—at least the well-known ones—often possess cult characteristics; works initially ignored may later be embraced by the mainstream.

Many of the characteristics summarized above are present in the works of Jean Genet. With his distinctive language, the structure of his characters, and his attempt to present reality in all its starkness, his works embody features of both absurd theatre and underground literature. In some of his plays, the perspective on reality brings the qualities of the underground to the forefront, while in others (such as The Balcony), the texture of absurd theatre becomes more apparent. Underground literature is relevant here because it turns toward figures marked by exclusion, humiliation, and social marginalization. These conditions prepare the ground for emotions associated with ressentiment: envy, hostility, shame, and suppressed revenge. Genet's theatre, with its attention to marginal figures and corrupted forms of desire, therefore offers a productive space for reading ressentiment through dramatic action.

4. Absurd Theatre and Genet

> *"Absurd theatre expresses the anxiety and despair that arise from the realization that human beings are surrounded by impenetrable darkness, can never know their true nature and purpose, and that no one can provide them with ready-made rules of conduct".* (Esslin 1999, p. 332)

This attention to marginal and corrupted desire is not confined to underground literature alone; it equally defines the second literary-theatrical category through which Genet's work must be read: absurd theatre. The Dictionary of Theatre Terms (1966) defines absurd theatre as follows: "A type of theatre that, in the mid-twentieth century, presents the human being's incompatibility with life and nature, and estrangement from nature, through a suggestive mode with a new essence and form. It employs forms and content that are incompatible with reason in the Aristotelian sense. For example, the early plays of Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco" (non-rational theatre). In particular, the communication problems in Beckett's works—such as ignoring, hearing but not understanding, or hearing and responding incorrectly—illustrate the meaning of the absurd. Writers of the period defined the absurd as lacking logic and harmony. A more comprehensive understanding of the absurd can be found in Albert Camus's thought. In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus argues that the absurd emerges from the confrontation between the human desire for meaning, order, and intelligibility and the silence of an indifferent universe. The absurd, therefore, is not simply a property of the world itself but a condition arising from the encounter between human consciousness and reality. From this perspective, the experience of meaninglessness is produced by the tension between human expectations and a world that offers no final answers. Initially, the term was considered a deviation from order. Explaining the meaninglessness of life, it also described the psychological states of individuals in the face of this meaninglessness. Life appeared as something absurd to human beings. In movements that emerged during the war period, artists in both literature and painting sought to express the absurd. Works of art focused on the "moment" and were devoid of logic (İsmayilova 2020, p. 4). Eugène Ionesco states that the absurd refers to a human being detached from origins, effortless, and devoid of value. The term emphasizes not only meaninglessness but also nothingness (Cornwell 2006, pp. 3, 4).

The depiction of alienated and solitary individuals in absurd theatre, the pessimistic atmosphere of the plays, their incompatibility, and the breakdown of communication are consequences of the Second World War. Under the impact of the war, human existence was devalued, and absence and despair began to prevail; under such conditions, harmony in the world became impossible. The conflict between human beings and life gave rise to this incompatibility. Absurd theatre expresses the absurdity of everyday life and the meaninglessness of speech in a world marked by a lack of communication. Reality is deceptive, and the modern individual is alone. As human beings experience alienation, the world becomes increasingly meaningless, and the individual is caught in a vicious cycle (Özalp and Büyükarman 2018, p. 252).

In The Theatre of the Absurd, Martin Esslin explains Jean Genet by referring to his works. According to Esslin (1999, pp. 182–83), through his writing, Genet confronts the audience with the hidden world of the dreams of marginalized individuals. Although Genet's plays may lack character, structure, order, and social values, they possess psychological truths. His texts are expressions of a distinctive discourse nourished by pre-logical modes of thought. In Genet's plays, it is possible to observe the magical forms of action. Language, rather than serving communication, produces incantatory words. Words do not merely signify concepts; instead, they seem to bring things into existence through a kind of enchantment. These magical utterances create a ritual. Genet's theatre is a form of social rebellion. It stands against political discourse, didacticism, and propaganda.

While engaging with the dream world of those excluded by society, it also probes human alienation, isolation, and the futile search for meaning and truth. According to Esslin, although some of Genet's plays differ from those typically cited as examples of absurd theatre, they nonetheless display many of the genre's characteristics. In particular, *The Balcony*, *The Blacks*, and *The Maids* can be considered examples of absurd drama in terms of the devaluation of language, the confrontation of the audience with meaninglessness, and the stark presentation of human solitude within the world. The atmosphere of alienation in Genet's theatre also clarifies the place of ressentiment in *The Maids*. The collapse of stable identities, the failure of communication, and the characters' inability to accept their social position intensify resentment and turn it into a principle of relation between self and other.

5. *The Maids*

> *"You are a coward. Obey me. We have reached the shore, Solange. We will go all the way. You will keep both of us alive in a single body. Alone. You will have to be strong. I will secretly accompany you in exile; no one will ever know. When you are sentenced, do not forget that you carry me within you. Carry me carefully. We will be beautiful, we will be free, we will be happy, Solange—we do not have a single minute to lose. Repeat what I say"*. (Genet 2023, pp. 72, 73)

Martin Esslin's discussion of *The Maids* offers a useful starting point for summarizing the play's central dramatic structure (Esslin 1999, p. 164). The play begins in the room of an elegant lady. The maid is named Claire. The lady is proud, while the maid is submissive. They mock one another, and the maid slaps the lady. The clock strikes, and the scene breaks. The figure perceived as the lady is in fact not the lady; she is one of the two maids who has assumed her role in her absence. Her name is Solange. Claire is the one playing the lady and has treated Solange as the lady would. When the lady goes out, the maids repeat the same performance. It is an imaginary game. They harbor a mixture of erotic love and hatred toward the lady, who is younger and more beautiful than themselves. They have written an anonymous letter to the police, causing the arrest of the lady's lover. However, they receive a phone call and learn that the man has been released on bail. Their scheme is about to be exposed. For this reason, they decide to kill their mistress by poisoning her tea. The lady returns. They conceal from her the release of her lover, but in the course of conversation one of them inadvertently reveals that he has been freed. The lady leaves without drinking the tea in order to meet her lover. The maids are left alone and return to their game. Claire takes on the role of the lady, drinks the poisoned tea, and dies while embodying the lady. Esslin refers to this section as the "Hall of Mirrors." The maids resemble one another, as if they see their own reflections when they look at each other's faces. They are bound to one another by both love and hatred, and they share a similarly ambivalent bond with the lady. While assuming the role of the lady, Claire observes and articulates the humiliating aspects of the maids; she says, "I am tired of seeing my image returned to me by a mirror like a bad smell." When in the role of the lady, Claire describes the maids as their own shame and residue. This structure of imitation, humiliation, and deferred violence places resentment at the center of the play's dramatic movement.

In the Audience Guide for The Maids (2016–2017 season) at A Noise Within Theater (2016) (anoisewithin.org), it is stated that Claire and Solange immerse themselves in another identity and are almost unable to return to their own selves and identities. According to the interpretation presented in the guide, the maids' weak grasp of their own identities is both an indication and a symbol of the instability of their reality. The most central and driving structure in the play is "power". Claire and Solange, who seek to escape their powerless positions as maids, aspire to attain a higher social status. At the same time, they engage in a struggle for power over one another. Both in their real lives and in the imagined world of

the game they construct, they employ power dynamics against each other. Although they are dependent on one another, they refuse to acknowledge this dependency, resulting in an irregular and unstable power dynamic between the two sisters.

Sevda Şener, in her book The Relationship Between Life and Play in Theatre (Şener 2019, p. 115), writes that in Jean Genet's *The Maids*, the dichotomy between reality and play is dissolved, thereby anticipating postmodern theatre. According to Şener (2019), the play contains a form of suffering similar to that found in Samuel Beckett's theatre, and this suffering is foregrounded through the structure of a play within a play. The absurd emerges through the interchange between play and reality, with the play replacing reality and ultimately being defeated by it. The game performed by the two maids leads them to become more conscious of their humiliation and degradation. When they step out of the game and return to reality, they encounter a danger that cannot be overcome through play. The admiration that drives them to imitate their mistress fuels the hatred within them. They attempt to carry out the death sentence they have devised for their mistress upon themselves in order to confront the obstacle before them. Claire disrupts reality through the final game; however, this remains an illusion, and nothing changes for the mistress, who remains entirely unaware. According to Şener (2019), Claire's death cannot go beyond being a game that culminates only in a grand funeral ceremony.

Jean Genet's *The Maids*, the second play he wrote after *Deathwatch*, is said to have been inspired by a real event. Genet initially describes this as inspiration and later acknowledges it. The event became known through a report by Jacques Lacan. Two sisters, aged twenty-one and twenty-eight—the Papin sisters—worked for a bourgeois family in the countryside, who treated them poorly. One day, when the electricity went out, the family returned home and blamed the sisters, shouting at and scolding them. In a fit of rage, the maids gouged out the eyes of the mother and daughter and killed them. After committing the murders, they washed the instruments of the crime and went to sleep as if nothing had happened. Genet adopts the outline of this murder plot, excluding the act of eye-gouging, and reworks it. He does not treat the criminal dimension of the event with seriousness; instead, he focuses on elements of heroization and ritual. Moreover, the origin of the play is also linked to the actress Marie Bell, who asked Genet to write a play for her. Genet promised to do so but did not keep his word. During that period, he wrote a play, yet he did not conceive any role in *The Maids* specifically for Bell (Jelloun 2012, p. 81).

Poyraz Deniz Genç, in his book Masochism as a Means of Catharsis in Jean Genet's Plays (Genç 2024, p. 50), states that sadistic and masochistic tendencies are intensely present in *The Maids*. Genç argues that experiences of domination and submission lie at the core of sadomasochistic tendencies. The sadistic persona that Claire reflects when she assumes the role of the mistress appears as a response to her own reality. Her essential self, on the other hand, is the masochistic side subjected to sadism. The statement "The maids exist only through me" seems to be uttered under the influence of sadomasochism. The sadistic subject dominates and believes this to be its purpose of existence, whereas the masochistic subject is dependent and likewise believes that it exists for this purpose. In the struggle for existence, the control lies in the hands of the sadist, who directs the life of the masochist. This dynamic reflects a system of class inequality. The masochistic subject is unaware of its own dependency, while the sadistic subject—Claire—attributes to herself powers that go beyond even a divine quality. When Claire plays the role of the mistress, Solange assumes the role of the maid. A state of mutual neutralization emerges. This balance of opposites both sustains and annihilates one another (Genç 2024, p. 51).

In his commentary written for a 2014 production of *The Maids* and published in JSTOR Daily (29 September 2014), Schmidt (2014) argues that the Hegelian master–slave dialectic, often attributed to the play, is in fact not present. According to him, the surreal and

fantasy-like behaviors of the characters disrupt such a dialectic. Moreover, despite Genet's identity as an activist, he does not adopt a position in favor of the oppressed; rather, he prioritizes the dramatic situation within the play. In this view, the play relies less on ordinary human interactions and more on fantasies and dreams. From this perspective, the requirement of engaging with "reality," which is central to underground literature, is weakened, and the play's incompatible, absurd dimension comes to the forefront. Claire and Solange resemble mirrors reflecting one another within a labyrinth of reflections. When one becomes passive, the other becomes active. Solange is the elder, Claire the younger. Although Solange appears more dominant, it is Claire who carries out the decisive action. Initially sympathetic toward her mistress, Claire later develops a deep resentment. Becoming increasingly aware of her position as a servant—with Solange's influence—she comes to feel dirty, wretched, and even nonexistent. Through this realization, she resolves to carry the game she repeatedly plays to its conclusion. Solange, the elder sister, remains inactive; she fails to kill the mistress but succeeds in destroying her sister. Does a class only destroy itself? Claire answers this through her action: it can destroy itself if it so chooses. Suicide takes on the quality of a revolt against the oppressors. Their anger and resentment continue to grow, and this intensification stems from their class position. As Solange assumes the role of Claire, Claire takes on the role of the mistress and succeeds in becoming her. She then kills Claire, who has transformed into the mistress. The mistress never sees or acknowledges what has occurred; it does not even occur to her that something harmful could happen to her. She is already unattainable. The maids perceive her as utterly untouchable. Within the realm of absurd theatre, *The Maids* becomes the tragedy of two confidants, and through its dual-ending structure, the play establishes a kind of ritual (Akın 2017, pp. 50, 51).

In several productions of *The Maids* staged around the world, it has been observed that the roles of the maid characters are performed by male actors. This approach is likely grounded in Jean Genet's own statements. In his first novel, Our Lady of the Flowers, Genet addresses this issue directly. In the work, he states, "If I were to write a play with female roles, I would have young men perform them, and I would place a sign at the edge of the stage to draw the audience's attention to gender."

The play, in one aspect, engages with a shadow archetype shaped by the influence of the unconscious. The characters move back and forth between the self and the other. There is a constant process of transformation into one another. As Claire transforms into her mistress, she simultaneously encounters her own "other" self. Although her elder sister Solange appears passive, she triggers Claire's resentment. In turn, Solange also confronts an "other." The other she encounters belongs to the same class and resembles herself. This transformation and the continual presence of the shadow—what Otto Rank refers to as the "double"—are accompanied by a corrosive resentment. Moreover, this resentment is directed toward one's own kind, even toward oneself. It is such a form of resentment that, at no point in the play, is there even the slightest sign of forgiveness.

6. Resentment

> *"…Resentment nails us all to the cross of a ruined past. It demands the reversal of what cannot be reversed, that what has happened should not have happened. Resentment blocks the path to the truly human dimension, that is, to the future. In a person who is captive to resentment, the sense of time is distorted—or, if you prefer, displaced—because this feeling demands two different impossibilities: a return to the past and the annulment of what has already occurred…".* (Améry 2022, p. 95)

Having traced how resentment structures the relationships, the identities, and the central action of *The Maids*, it is now necessary to examine the concept itself in more

theoretical detail, before returning, in the following section, to its operation within the play. In her work The Book of Human Emotions, Smith (2020, pp. 110–12) defines resentment as "anger entering into a cycle together with our own intransigence." According to Smith, when we are hurt, humiliated, or forbidden to speak out, we suppress our hatred, and through our own dependency, a wound is formed. Over time, anger intensifies and settles into the dark recesses of the soul; it emerges only when it reveals itself in provocative, competitive, and punitive small acts. Resentment is a silent and ugly emotion. The notion of its silence dates back to earlier times. Its medieval precursor, malice, signified an unfulfilled bitterness. This bitterness, combined with inaction, would disappear only to give rise to toxic conditions, like a form of internal decay. The fear that resentment leaves traces on the body remains relevant today. In the United States, studies on resentment began in the 1950s, revealing its harmful effects. Resentment is an inwardly bleeding, buried emotion. It is described as something felt by individuals who are sly, unable to express their emotions and thoughts, unable to speak, fearful yet convinced that they have been wronged, and who, as if afraid that the problem might actually be resolved, say nothing to anyone.

Solomon (2016, pp. 165–80) defines emotions associated with resentment as unpleasant and anti-social. He considers envy, malice, jealousy, resentment, and revenge as interconnected emotions. Solomon explains envy as the inability to possess what another person has; one may feel envy toward someone's talent or well-deserved fame. The harmful aspect of envy to the self lies in the constant frustration accompanying the desire for what belongs to another, despite having no rightful claim to it. If a person feels entitled to the object in question, this becomes jealousy. Malice, on the other hand, is a form of ill-intentioned envy shaped by an additional and deceitful distortion. Solomon explains resentment primarily through Nietzsche. Resentment is a feeling extensively examined by Nietzsche, who identifies it as a driving force behind Judeo-Christian tradition and moral thought. According to Nietzsche, resentment serves as a means for the weak to feel better about themselves. If power and authority are considered evil, then not possessing them becomes preferable, and the world, in this view, ought to belong to the powerless. Resentment is also an emotion that stimulates cleverness and ingenious subversion, presenting itself as it is while maintaining a constant appearance of righteousness. This grants the emotion both a high status and persuasive power. Nevertheless, Nietzsche attributes its destructive effect on the self to self-deception and the pervasive hypocrisy that undermines it (Solomon 2016, p. 178). Nietzsche develops this argument most systematically in the first essay of On the Genealogy of Morality. Through the image of the birds of prey and the lambs, he explains how moral judgments may arise from a position of weakness rather than strength. The lambs condemn the birds of prey as "evil" because they are incapable of acting in a similar manner. In this reversal, weakness acquires a positive moral value, while strength becomes associated with evil. Ressentiment thus operates as a process through which values are created and sustained. Instead of affirming their own condition, the weak define themselves through opposition to those whom they perceive as powerful.

In one of her important works, Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag begins by arguing that looking at the suffering of others is not easy. This aligns with Nietzsche's view. According to Nietzsche (2010, p. 248), it is impossible to truly look at another person's pain. He suggests that the elimination of suffering does not accord with the cycle of life, and that compassion or witnessing another's pain constitutes a form of pathology or infection that enslaves the individual. Sontag (2024, pp. 138, 139) also approaches the concept of resentment through relations between nations. She notes that after 11 September 2001, the United States was viewed with sympathy for a time, but that this later dissipated, giving way to a sense of alienation. She illustrates this through her observations in Germany, where she was at the time. At the same time, she describes the United States as a country

that is envied, admired, and resented. Europeans, she argues, tend to see Americans as belonging to a militaristic nation, while Americans perceive Europeans as their adversaries. From this perspective, it becomes possible to see that the concept of resentment—despite its negative connotations—has a meaningful application not only at the level of individuals but also at the level of societies and nations. In this context, the suffering produced by mutual conflicts and wars cannot be denied.

Accordingly, Friedrich Nietzsche, proceeding from the notion of suffering, employs the concept of resentment as "ressentiment." In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche (2015, p. 149) argues that suffering is a Dionysian "yes" uttered by the human being in the eternal recurrence. For Nietzsche, the Dionysian signifies an affirmation of life despite suffering, instability, and loss. Instead of rejecting pain, the individual accepts it as an inseparable part of existence. The idea of eternal recurrence similarly requires an affirmation of life as a whole, including its hardships and contradictions. From this perspective, ressentiment appears as the opposite tendency, since it remains attached to past injuries and seeks relief from them rather than their affirmation. Ressentiment, on the other hand, directs the individual toward the divine with the promise of salvation and the cessation of suffering. According to Nietzsche (2011, p. 97), ressentiment is also a counter-movement, a revolt against the dominance of noble values.

7. A Reading of *The Maids* Through Resentment (Ressentiment) in Scheler and Nietzsche

> *"Oppressors, who exploit, dominate, and expropriate through the use of their power, cannot derive from this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only the power that emerges from the weakness of the oppressed will be strong enough to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressors"*. (Freire 2014, p. 27)

On the back cover of *The Maids*, the way in which the characters are prepared for resentment is described in a striking manner: according to Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Maids* is a play of exceptional significance. Solange, Claire, and the Mistress are tested, on the night when violence turns into death, as to whether they will transcend their social roles. The two sisters, in particular, disguise themselves; under the pressure created by their social identities, they transform their desires into a game of illusion, thereby denying their own existence. They are engaged in a ritual. They stand at the boundaries of both good and evil, questioning and prompting others to question the meanings of innocence and sin. According to Sartre, in the play, the "Good" is merely an illusion, while the "Evil" is a "void" that attempts to assert itself among the ruins of the good. Within a labyrinth of intertwined discourse, everything becomes highly complex, and perhaps the central focus of the play is "to love." In Sartre's own words: "Do these women love one another?" Or do they hate each other? They hate passionately, like Genet's other characters.

The philosopher Max Scheler explains the concept of ressentiment by drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas, particularly through quotations from On the Genealogy of Morality, along with his own interpretations. According to Scheler (2015, pp. 28, 29), if a person consumed by a desire for revenge takes action, exacts revenge, and harms the object of their hatred, then ressentiment does not arise. Even if one openly expresses anger in front of others, one moves away from ressentiment. In *The Maids*, Claire and Solange constantly harbor hatred toward the woman they serve; however, they do not respond in any way to her negative and dismissive behavior toward them. They continue to live with these negative feelings internally but do not act upon them. For this reason, ressentiment does not disappear. According to Scheler (2015, p. 29), ressentiment encompasses those who serve, those who are under domination, and those who are consumed by a futile sense of resentment in the face of authority. If a mistreated servant is able to express their

grievance before entering the room, they have a chance to free themselves from the poison of ressentiment. However, if they are required to conceal their emotions, to suppress their negative and hostile feelings, ressentiment comes to dominate them.

For Scheler, ressentiment is the self-poisoning of the mind, a condition with specific causes and consequences. It is a mental state produced by the systematic repression of certain emotions; once these emotions are repressed, particular value-illusions emerge, along with the corresponding tendency to adopt distorted value judgments, and this condition becomes persistent. The emotions in question are the desire for revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to defame, and a devaluing spite. The most important source of ressentiment is what Scheler calls the thirst for revenge—a reactive impulse preceded by an attack or an injury. This impulse is marked by two features: the immediate reaction that accompanies anger is transient; it is quickly restrained and deferred until a suitable opportunity arises, since an immediate response is thought likely to end in defeat (Scheler 2015, pp. 24, 25). In *The Maids*, ressentiment comes to an end when Claire dies, since there is no longer any need to wait for the right moment; once the repressed desire for revenge itself disappears, ressentiment vanishes with it.

Other sources of ressentiment include envy, jealousy, and the ambition for rivalry. Envy arises from the sense of powerlessness we feel when another person possesses something we covet. If we are displeased that someone possesses a given thing, this feeling drives us to acquire it—through effort, purchase, violence, or theft. Envy emerges precisely when we cannot do so, when we feel powerless; rather than spurring the will to acquire, it weakens it. When the coveted good proves unattainable, envy gives rise to ressentiment. Existential envy is its strongest source (Scheler 2015, p. 36).

Scheler observes that, within the society of his time, ressentiment is not to be found in the industrial proletariat but rather among declining artisans, the petty bourgeoisie, and minor officials. He identifies two types of the ressentiment personality: the apostate class and the romantic mentality. The apostate is not simply someone who has radically changed their beliefs; rather, they neither embrace their new belief nor cease struggling against their former one, remaining preoccupied with devising acts of revenge against their past convictions—a figure locked in opposition to the true believer who has genuinely transformed their life through a new faith. A latent ressentiment thus inhabits this mode of thought, prone to denial and critique. According to Scheler, a manner of thinking nourished by ressentiment has penetrated the depths of modern philosophy: whenever ideas are created not through direct contact with the world and with things themselves, but through the critique of other people's ideas, such thought is pregnant with ressentiment (Scheler 2015, pp. 57–60). In the play, the maids possess no original or creative ideas of their own; they generate all their thoughts through words borrowed from their mistress, repeating memorized phrases verbatim and using these very words to trigger the ressentiment they feel toward her. It is not only their ideas but even their behavior that imitates her. One of the two sisters always plays the mistress's role, partly as an effort to renew her words and to produce, out of them, an emotion of ressentiment.

The mind of the person governed by ressentiment is filled with envy, the impulse to defame, malice, and concealed vindictiveness. These states harden into fixed attitudes and go on to shape perception, expectation, and memory. Phenomena such as joy, splendor, power, happiness, fortune, and strength draw the ressentiment-driven person toward themselves, who wants to look at them yet at the same time averts their gaze, sensing that, however much they might wish to possess these things, they cannot. This distorts their entire view of the world. The impulse to flee from positive values drives them toward the opposite, negative emotions; they begin, in effect, to slander the world. However persistently they reject these positive values, such values continue to reassert themselves

before them. Even when these qualities have caused no harm, a drive of hatred develops against whoever possesses them—even dwarfs and cripples, who are not humiliated on account of their appearance, frequently fall prey to this same peculiar hatred. Scheler illustrates this deep hostility through a line from Goethe: "Why do you complain of your enemies? Could they ever have become your friends? Is not your very existence to them a silent reproach?" Scheler notes that Goethe understood this question could never be resolved (Scheler 2015, pp. 71–73). Such hatred also appears in life itself: those who harbor it create enemies for themselves and come to feel that everyone hates them—a type of anger also found in dramatic works, in anti-heroes who regard everyone around them as an enemy, or even assume the entire world is hostile to them. Once their enemies are exhausted, they begin to see the whole of life arrayed against them. The characters created by American playwrights such as Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, who do not feel they belong where they are and who, believing they might exist in some other world, change country or city (as in plays such as The Crucible or The Glass Menagerie), are ultimately met with disappointment; for, as Montaigne writes, they "carry their chains along with them." The life and the people they regard as enemies are a fiction constructed in their own minds—they have, as Scheler puts it, poisoned their own minds, and ruined their lives through ressentiment.

This is also where Scheler's concept of the tragic becomes relevant. Scheler holds that the tragic does not arise in a world already whole and complete; tragedy requires the presence—and the ruin—of high values, a view Schopenhauer shares. In a world where every evil is permitted, and this is precisely the world of the ressentiment-driven person: the world of Claire and Solange, the world of the maids. Yet tragedy belongs to their mistress, since tragedy occurs among those of the upper class. Within the tragic, the human being cannot see values and abandons themselves to the flow of events, within which values lose their importance and no longer correspond to any fixed state of affairs. The tragic cannot be prevented; the tragic is necessary. Dying of a hereditary illness is not tragic, nor is the death of a mentally ill person who jumps from a window—in such cases, the values of which Scheler speaks are absent from the outset, even as lives are destroyed (Kuçuradi 1996, pp. 20–21). The situation of the maids is the same: they possess no high values of their own to cling to, only the values they have observed in, and coveted from, their mistress.

In the play, the two sisters, who are maids, assume the role of their mistress when she leaves and engage in a series of performances. Within these performances, the mistress is portrayed as treating them poorly and insulting them. In fact, the Mistress's hostile behavior is evident through the words articulated in their games. There is a constantly repressed desire for revenge in *The Maids*. As fantasies and feelings of revenge are suppressed, ressentiment intensifies. It is only when Claire assumes the role of the mistress and dies that ressentiment comes to an end. Death eliminates ressentiment. The resentment experienced by Claire and Solange—just as Friedrich Nietzsche suggests—serves as a form of relief for them. When they seize power through the game, they immediately begin to degrade their own class, conveying the implication that one should not align oneself with the powerful.

The idea, developed by Friedrich Nietzsche through his analysis of Judeo-Christian morality, that oppressed societies and classes arrive at certain value judgments under the influence of ressentiment is clearly visible in *The Maids*. When ressentiment begins to generate values, the revolt of the slaves also begins. Slave morality negates everything that is not itself and, in order to exist, requires an opposing, hostile world. The envy that Max Scheler identifies as the source of ressentiment arises from the feeling of powerlessness caused by another's possession of something desirable and the impossibility of attaining it.

This feeling transforms into ressentiment. Scheler suggests that envy constantly whispers: "I can forgive everything except you—what makes you who you are, what you have that I do not—indeed, the fact that I am not you." Ressentiment also carries, at its core, a tendency to compare oneself with others. Scheler illustrates a dual condition through his example of Caesar and Brutus, in which envy and love coexist prior to the emergence of ressentiment (Scheler 2015, pp. 22–35). In *The Maids*, Claire and Solange continuously experience this dual emotion toward their mistress. On the one hand, they admire her; on the other, their feelings turn into envy, driven by the frustration of never being able to reach the position she occupies.

The maids' resentment binds them so tightly together that they move toward victory as victims, resembling at once the reflection in a mirror and the reality it reflects. Their madness constitutes a form of defiance in which, as in a duel, they have turned the weapon upon themselves: unconscious, naïve, and shallow, yet daring enough to act on what they could not otherwise achieve. Those who occupy the upper strata of society, viewing events only from their own position, are unable to perceive the potential for action among those below; likewise, the mistress cannot perceive the maids' betrayal. What is presented here is the tragedy of two sisters who, although not explicitly aiming to transcend their class, enact an individual action that seeks to bring about a form of revolution. Within uncertainty and fluctuation, the two sisters both complete and diminish one another, ultimately being driven toward a madness that leads to their own destruction. After their mistress leaves the house, Solange strangles her sister, though it later becomes clear that she has not died. She then forces Claire to drink the linden tea they had intended for their mistress and attempts to end her life. Claire has now found her identity; when she assumes the role of the mistress, she addresses Solange as Claire. To be Claire, to be a maid, is for her a source of shame. Solange is unable to become fully active. The way she holds her hands as if they were shackled evokes another form of captivity imposed by society upon this class, suggesting the beginning of a transition into yet another space of confinement (Akın 2017, pp. 47–49).

Nietzsche, through a historical analysis, classifies human beings into types, arguing that these types differ in their ways of understanding and evaluating life, and that their decision-making processes and patterns of behavior develop accordingly. The two fundamental Nietzschean types are the "master" and the "slave." Rather than being produced by moral systems, these types emerge from different ways of experiencing and responding to life. Master morality and slave morality are expressions of these differing orientations and forms of valuation (Doğan 2022, p. 9). Nietzsche (2020, p. 37) conceptualizes this distinction in The Antichrist as noble morality and the morality of ressentiment, noting that he had previously developed this argument in On the Genealogy of Morality. Within this framework, ressentiment is not simply a moral judgment but a condition that shapes the values through which individuals interpret themselves and others. Nietzsche states that, despite the opposition between master and slave morality, the two remain locked in an ongoing struggle. This argument is closely related to his critique of Judeo-Christian morality and to his analysis of decadence, which he regards as a recurring feature of cultural life (Başaran 2024, p. 158).

The creation of two types by Friedrich Nietzsche, based on his two concepts of morality, is presented in different terms and from another perspective in Albert Camus's The Rebel (Camus 2009, p. 59), again drawing on Nietzschean thought. Camus states that Nietzsche's intellectual journey is unparalleled and that his rebellion must be carefully examined. If the slave says yes to everything, then he also says yes to killing; if the master says yes to everything, then he also says yes to slavery and to the suffering of others. In this framework, tyranny and killing are elevated. According to Camus, affirming both positions ultimately

results in the validation of the master. In *The Maids*, Claire and Solange likewise elevate the act of killing. Their sole aim is to kill their mistress. They even attempt it once and fail—Solange is unable to carry it through. When Claire once again assumes the role of the mistress, she wishes to drink the poisoned linden tea they had prepared for her and asks her servant—her sister—to bring it. Solange, confronted with what is happening, attempts to return to reality and insists that they should leave and end the game; however, Claire does not listen, persistently insists on drinking the tea, and eventually does so. From Solange's gesture of extending her wrists as if they were shackled, it can be understood that Claire has died. The ending of the play remains open; whether she has truly died can be debated. The one who dies is not the mistress but one of them, yet even this suffices for them. As one prepares for death, one goes toward it willingly—despite earlier attempts to resist—and after Claire drinks the tea, Solange does not show distress at her sister's death. For them, the one who has died is the mistress whose role they have assumed. From Solange's final words and extended monologue, one can perceive the discomfort of being excluded and stigmatized. Solange repeatedly states that she has bowed to everything but will bow no longer. This reflects precisely the intense ressentiment that the slave feels toward the master, as conceptualized by Nietzsche.

David Hume and Adam Smith, as thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, approach resentment as a sentiment that can be reformed. According to Smith, resentment and anger even have a public function as guardians of justice. Not feeling resentment in response to wrongdoing or insult, he argues, renders a person base. Individuals, in Smith's view, feel resentment toward what they judge to be unjust (Ure 2022, p. 21). Michael Ure contrasts Smith's optimistic perspective with Friedrich Nietzsche's pessimism by examining their views of nature. According to Ure, Smith regards nature as a divine gift, and natural feelings as capable of being cultivated through proper discipline. Nietzsche, by contrast, sees nature as mechanically determined. In Smith's framework, the divine design of nature aims to preserve humanity, and human beings are endowed with emotions that serve this purpose; resentment, too, is among these, and it is necessary for the realization and maintenance of justice. For Nietzsche, however, ressentiment is a physiological illness. If this resentment—understood as a symptom of evolutionary degeneration—is not eliminated, the degeneration of the human species will continue (Ure 2022, p. 25). In *The Maids*, this pathological condition is felt from the very beginning of the play. Ressentiment, which Nietzsche defines as an illness, is abundantly present in both maids. The behavior of the characters consistently reflects a process of degeneration. Particularly in the scenes where the play-within-the-play unfolds, an atmosphere of uncanniness prevails. Although this may be a feature of the genre, it remains a dimension that requires attention. This condition can be understood as arising from the pervasive ambiguity that continually generates a sense of unease and instability.

Jentsch and Freud (2019, p. 14) explain, through examples, that the uncanny arises from uncertainty. He begins with the example of the sunrise: according to Jentsch, no one is surprised when the sun rises in the morning, as this routine is embedded in the human mind. However, when the situation is approached from a different perspective and one begins to question how this event actually occurs, uncertainty emerges and a sense of mystery is produced. It becomes evident that the sunrise is not caused by the sun itself, but by the movements of the Earth. Thus, when uncertainty and mystery arise, individuals begin to reflect upon them, to feel curiosity, and to investigate the source of this uncertainty. In place of the old, familiar, and known, new concepts such as the unfamiliar, the foreign, and even the hostile begin to emerge.

8. In Lieu of a Conclusion

The Maids presents a world shaped by ressentiment. Claire and Solange's hostility toward the Mistress develops from a persistent sense of humiliation, envy, and frustrated desire. Read through the perspectives of Nietzsche and Scheler, the play reveals how resentment extends beyond an immediate emotional response and gradually influences perception, judgment, and action. The conflict between the characters is sustained by this accumulated resentment, which comes to define both their relationship with the Mistress and their understanding of themselves. Genet's own experience of exclusion and stigmatization gives additional force to the resentment dramatized in *The Maids*. Although this study reads the play primarily through the lens of resentment, other aspects—though not examined in detail—also contribute additional layers to its structure. The characters Claire and Solange continually act through their "other" identities and are unable to fully assume their own. The characters repeatedly attempt to escape their own identities through role-playing and imitation. Yet these efforts do not free them from their condition; rather, they deepen the resentment that structures their relationship with themselves and with the Mistress. When death arrives, no emotion remains; a routine comes to an end. This routine, beginning with the game and sustained through it, is itself an illusion. Theatre, in this sense, is an art form in which the relationship between life and play is profoundly felt.

The Maids, perhaps owing to the author's distinctive and unconventional character, both confronts the audience with reality in its starkest form and privileges the absurd over the real. While a play within a play is constructed in *The Maids*, the discordant nature of the absurd is foregrounded; beyond this, there is also a genuine class struggle that can be grasped through Karl Marx's perspective, as well as—following Friedrich Nietzsche—a conflict between slave morality and noble morality. Although the situation may recall Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's master–slave dialectic, there is no actual reversal between master and slave. The servant (slave) assumes the role of the mistress (master) and performs it, yet a conscious master–slave dialectic is not fully realized. In this study, detailed discussions of the play's genre or narrative have not been pursued, nor has a comprehensive analysis of the play been undertaken. Features of the play beyond its relation to Nietzsche's concept of "ressentiment" have not been examined in depth. Likewise, concepts such as existential philosophy—often associated with the genre—and the master–slave dialectic, which may be interpreted through Hegel's framework, have been excluded from the scope of the study. Instead, the study is grounded in emotions and seeks to develop a perspective particularly through negative effects such as resentment.

The Maids is a story of ignored resentments, deviations, and characters who remain outside the system: a world marked by death, anger, malice, and resentment, in which trust and loyalty have no place, and which for this reason speaks in the discourse of the underground. This falseness of values is not merely stated but staged, since the play unfolds within an uncanny space and time that reflects the fragmented nature of the underground itself. Yet its theatrical distortions do not remove it from reality; rather, they expose forms of social and psychological violence that ordinary realism might leave concealed, embedding these truths within the absurd and the discordant. In this sense, the play carries the characteristics of absurd theatre—surprising, disturbing, and disrupting harmony—while simultaneously embodying the realities of the underground. As the play progresses, its individuals grow only more isolated: communication fails, human beings are devalued and know themselves to be so, and a constant state of absence prevails, in which love, goodness, and truth have no place. Because life and play become interwoven to the point of indistinction, the characters experience an alienation that is continuous rather than episodic; life, for them, is meaningless and corrosive. Out of this condition, the play brings to the surface the dreams of individuals who suffer from an identity crisis,

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who cannot establish a stable sense of self, who are oppressed, and who remain hidden—sustaining an ongoing, seemingly futile rebellion in which, despite all its incompatibilities, the characters nonetheless confront reality and their own identities, until a lasting awareness ultimately emerges.

This study emerges from the convergence of a concept with a play that represents the increasingly widespread alienation of the contemporary world—the growing meaninglessness of life for the individual, lovelessness, resentment, anger, intolerance, the denial of the other, and social fragmentation. In this sense, Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment remains useful for understanding the forms of anger, envy, and moral reversal that shape both Genet's theatre and contemporary social life.

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