History Incarnate
Genus and Genre in French Historical Drama

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Cover illustration: Roman wall painting of Cleopatra (or Sophonisba?) from Case di Giuseppe II in Pompeii, Italy, c. 1st century AD

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For Christian and Ruth, the love and joy of my life
This dissertation studies the rediscovery of Greek and Roman styled tragedy in 16th and 17th century France and its notable interest for two historical female figures from Roman history, the Egyptian queen Cleopatra VII (69–30 BC) and the Carthaginian noblewomen and Numidian queen Sophonisba (dead 203 BC). From being subordinary characters in the accounts of Roman and Greek historians such as Livy, Appian of Alexandria, Cassius Dio and Plutarch, Cleopatra and Sophonisba became the two most popular tragic heroines. Their popularity continued well into the 17th century until new dramatic expectations questioned their presence on stage.

The dissertation analyzes the significance of these two female figures a prismatic cases for dramatic reflections on history. It aims to contribute to the often noticed but unexplored question in modern scholarship of an interest in female victims in French early modern drama. The underlying argument is that the popularity of Cleopatra and Sophonisba is due to the period's concept of tragedy as a genre not only on history but about history. By this distinction is meant how this period's drama not only takes history, in the present case Roman history, as a source of inspiration but presents Cleopatra and Sophonisba as embodied historical reflection on historicity and historiography.

Part 1 puts forth the dissertation's aim, theoretical approach, mixed methods, main results, and perspectives. Part 2 consists of five articles which together offer a fresh look at what is often labeled humanist tragedy by combining distant reading, computational assisted social network analysis, comparative and literary text analysis. Thus, article 1 “Introduction: Rediscovering Sophonisba in Early Modern Literature” (Nordic Journal of Renaissance Studies, vol. 20, 2023) offers a discussion of the Sophonisba figure in French, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, Cretan, German and English drama and poetry from c.1400-1700. It uses the insights gained from other specialized articles to outline three main reasons for Sophonisba’s transnational importance in the early modern period.

Article 2 “The tragedy of being a historical creature” (Orbis Litterarum, vol. 78, no. 1, 2023) analyzes one of the neglected French Sophonisba plays, La Sophonisba (unknown performance, published 1691) by humanist and soldier Nicolas de Montreux. By engaging Walter Benjamin’s notion of the chaste martyr and her affinities with history in the German mourning play as well as Montreux’ deviations from
his dramatic predecessors, the article analyzes how the Sophonisba story is used to discuss different notions of history as either unpredictable or divinely ordained.

Article 3 “What is a protagonist?” *(Orbis Litterarum, vol. 78, no. 5, 2023)* studies the importance of Cleopatra and Sophonisba in 13 French tragedies from the sixteenth and seventeenth century by using computationally assisted social network analysis. By defining importance quantitatively based on four centrality measurements, the article qualifies recent scholarship’s highlighting of this period’s interest in female figures and questions traditional scholarly notions of protagonism.

Articles 4 “Tragisk hjältinna eller skurkaktig rollfigur? [Tragic heroine or villainous character]” (forthcoming on Appell Förlag, 2024) and 5 “Ghosting the past” *(Arrêt sur scène/ Scene Focus, vol. 11, 2022)* turn their attention to Cleopatra in a comparative and contextual perspective respectively. Thus, article 4 pinpoints differences in eight French tragedies from the sixteenth and seventeenth century and how these differences are connected to changing dramatic notions of morality and historical fidelity.

Article 5 once again turns to Benjamin to analyze how the ghost figure of Mark Antony in the prologue of Étienne Jodelle’s *Cléopâtre captive* (performed 1553, published posthumously 1574) engages audiences in a reflection on history as caught between divine intent and vicissitude. Besides Benjamin, the article also re-examines Jodelle’s merging of the protatic ghost found in Seneca’s *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon* and the ghostly dream vision from Pseudo-Seneca’s *Octavia*, as well as draws parallels to contemporaneous history writing by Louis Le Roy’s *De la Vicissitude ou la variété des choses en l’Univers* (published 15725).
Dansk resumé


Afhandlingen analyserer betydningen af disse to kvindelige figurer som prismatiske eksempler på dramaets historiereflektioner. Den ønsker at bidrage til det mange gange bemærkede, men endnu underudforskede spørgsmål om interessen for kvindelige ofre i tidlig moderne fransk drama. Det underliggende argument er, at Kleopatras og Sophonisbas popularitet skyldes periodens forståelse af tragedien som en genre, der ikke bare omhandler historiske personer, men handler om historieskrivning. Med det mener jeg, at periodens drama ikke bare tager historie, i dette tilfælde romersk historie, som inspirationskilde, men præsenterer Kleopatra og Sophonisba som legemliggjort historisk refleksion om historicitet så vel som historiografi.


Artikel 2 "The tragedy of being a historical creature" (Orbis Litterarum, vol. 78, no. 1, 2013) analyserer en af de underkendte franske Sophonisba-skuespil, La Sophonisba (ukendt opførsel, udgivet 1601) af humanisten og soldaten Nicolas de Montrex. Artiklen engagerer Walter Benjamins begreb om den dydige martyr og hendes affinitet med historien i det tyske sørspil så vel som Montrexus afvigelser
fra hans dramatiske forgængere til at analysere, hvordan Sophonisba-historien bliver brugt til at diskutere forskellige historieopfattelser om hvorvidt historien er uforudsigelige eller guddommeligt ordnet.


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Part 1: Introduction and discussion
1. Introduction: Questioning Sophonisba's historical suitability

Et voila comme il ne faut jamais s'attacher aux circonstances de l'Histoire, quand elles ne s'accordent pas avec la beauté du Theatre; il n'est point necessaire que le Poëte s'opiniastre à faire l'Histoire & quand la verité repugne à la generosité, à l'honesteté, ou a la grace de la Scene, il faut qu'il l'abandonne, & qu'il prenne le vray-s semblable pour faire un beau Poëme du lieu d'une méchante Histoire.

François Hédelin d'Aubignac, *Deux dissertations concernant le poëme dramatique* (1663), 14-15

[I]l y aurait quelque lieu de s'en prendre à ceux, qui sachant mieux la Sophonisbe de Monsieur Mairet que celle de Tite-Live, se sont hâtés de condamner en la mienne tout ce qui n'était pas de leur connaissance, et n'ont pu faire cette réflexion que la mort de Syphax était une fiction de Monsieur Mairet dont je ne pouvais me servir sans faire un pillage sur lui, et comme un attentat sur sa gloire. Sa Sophonisbe est à lui, c'est son bien, qu'il ne faut pas lui envier, mais celle de Tite-Live est à tout le monde.

Pierre Corneille, *Sophonisba* (1663), 5-6

Avid readers of French drama will be familiar with the literary dispute surrounding the tragedy *Le Cid* (1637, revised 1648, published 1661) by the 17th century playwright Pierre Corneille (1606-1684). Fewer will probably know of the debate caused by another of Corneille’s tragedies, his *Sophonisbe* performed in

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January 1663 at hotel de Bourgogne in Paris and published in April the same year. Like the dispute over *Le Cid*, the debate over *Sophonisbe* touches on fundamental questions of dramatic probability and propriety, of *vraisemblance* and *bienséance*, yet also adds a question of historical fidelity. One of the key critique points against Corneille by François Hédelin d’Aubignac (1604-1676) was his choice to follow the Roman and Greek historical sources too closely and let his title heroine marry one man, while her first husband was still alive. In this way, the debate over the virtue of Sophonisba pinpoints the central concern of this dissertation, notably the historical nature of tragedy and gender’s importance herein which is why I begin with Corneille who features only secondarily in the articles who make up the analytical part of this dissertation.

As Corneille stresses in the above quote, his tragedy goes counter to his predecessor Jean Mairet’s *Sophonisbe* (performed 1634, published 1635) and stays close to the historical events told in the 30 book of Livy’s (c.59 BC-17 AD) *Ab urbe condita* (27-9 BC). According to Livy, Sophonisba (dead c. 203 BC) used her beauty and charm to seduce the Roman ally Masinissa after her husband Syphax was taken captive. Masinissa married her and promised to keep her safe from the Romans. The Roman general Scipio Africanus, who was afraid that Sophonisba’s patriotism might turn Masinissa from the Roman side, insisted on taking Sophonisba to Rome. Torn between his political allegiance to the Romans on the one hand and his personal promise towards Sophonisba on the other, Masinissa brought Sophonisba poison which she took fearlessly and without hesitation.

Staging history was popular, and Corneille is the sixth French dramatist to represent the Sophonisba story. Though no Roman dramatic precursor exists, the story of Sophonisba was attractive as tragic material and became widely popular in all of Europe in the early modern period. The majority of French sixteenth and seventeenth-century dramatists follow the historical sources closely and gave

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3 For a notable exception, see Susan Baker’s reading of Sophonisbe, yet her political and feminist perspectives differentiates it from my present discussion of the play’s approach to presenting the historical sources. Susan Read Baker. *Dissonant Harmonies: Drama and Ideology in Five Neglected Plays of Pierre Corneille* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993).


6 Wiseman has noted dramatic elements in Livy’s account and speculates that Livy might have based his account on a now lost Roman *fabula praetexta*, see T.P. Wiseman *Roman Drama and Roman History* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1998), 4.
Sophonisba two husbands. Sophonisba’s virtue was only question relatively late in the history of French drama. The first to find the historical events unfit for tragic representation was Mairet who described Sophonisba’s marriage to Masinissa as a moral offense and opted to kill Syphax during the siege of Cirta to uphold dramatic decorum: “Il est vraie que j’ai voulu ajouter pour l’embellissement de la pièce, et que j’ai même changé deux incidents de l’Histoire assez considérables (...)” To Mairet, history needed to be embellished to uphold contemporaneous moral standards. But why does one have to wait to the second part of the seventeenth century for dramatists to feel the need to beautify the story of Sophonisba? The question only becomes more pertinent if one looks closer at Corneille’s version. His Sophonisbe departs from the historical sources in significant ways. For example, he accentuates Sophonisba’s patriotism and lets her, in contrast to his sources, openly criticize Masinissa for not dying alongside her.8 Corneille also introduces a new female character in the form of Éryxe who is in love with Masinissa and as such complicates the historical love triangle. Corneille himself in this way took liberties with history when it suited his dramatic plot which poses the question of how tragedy could and should represent history. Why even base tragedy on historical events and characters?

This question is no trivial matter as the two citations quoted at the beginning of this section shows. According to d’Aubignac, Corneille sacrificed dramatic artifice (la beauté du Theatre) and probability (le vraysemblable) for historical accuracy. In his attack, d’Aubignac specifically highlights the improbability of the female characters as so masculine that they are unable to evoke any sympathy.9 D’Aubignac is no ordinary spectator and had recently published a theory of dramatic representation, his

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7. Mairet’s second embellishment is his choice to let Masinissa kill himself after Sophonisba’s suicide, see Jean Mairet, La Sophonisbe, tragédie de Mairet, dédiée à Monsieur le garde des seaux. (Paris: Pierre Rocolet, 1635) Bnf, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12448/bpt6k1307788.image (Accessed 2 October 2023)
Modernized spelling by me.

8. See Sophonisba’s monologue in act 5:
"Voilà de son amour une preuve assez ample:
Mais s’il m’aimait encore, il me devait l’exemple:
Plus esclave en son camp que je ne suis ici,

Pratique du théâtre (1657). His critique of Corneille serves above all as an illustration of his own principles, yet also points to a change in attitude towards historical tragedy in the seventeenth century. The central difference between Corneille and d'Aubignac is not, as d'Aubignac would have it, a choice between historical fidelity on the one hand and dramatic artifice on the other. Corneille is no historian and does not aim to be one. Furthermore, d'Aubignac did not refuse historical drama as such and wrote a tragedy on Jeanne d'Arc, his La Pucelle d'Orléans, tragédie en prose, selon la verité de l'histoire et les rigeurs du Théâtre (1642). As the title tellingly points, d'Aubignac combined the essence of the historical event (la verité de l'histoire) with his own prescribed dramatic rules of the unity of time, place, and action, or, what Georges Forestier referring to the period at large has coined "une tragédie historique ahistorique." Cinthia Meli has recently argued that the dispute over Sophonisbe should not so much be considered as the result of personal animosity between Corneille and d'Aubignac nor a crystallization of two rival dramatic theories. Rather, the dispute lays bare a divide in the value claim of dramatic debate. Should dramatic theory overrule theatrical praxis? In other words, could a celebrated practitioner like Corneille be judged by d'Aubignac—or any others'—theoretical concepts? As Corneille points out in the case of Sophonisba, Livy's historical account belongs to everyone (celle de Tite-Live est à tout le monde). History is open for dramatic interpretation. It follows that dramatic characters and plots should be judged according to plot-internal logic and not according to moral standards imported into the dramatic universe as d'Aubignac would have it. Following Meli, the crucial point to me seems to be that d'Aubignac and Corneille had this discussion at all.

Something apparently changed in the second part of the seventeenth century. What suddenly made Sophonisba a potential problematic character? And how did dramatists before Mairet, d'Aubignac and Corneille conceptualize tragedy's use of history? These questions are at the core of this dissertation which claims that French dramatists' interest in Sophonisba—and other secondary female figures—is part of a tradition of historical drama. A tradition which still existed in Corneille's time but underwent significant formal shifts. My aim is to dig out and describe this tradition. My main focus will be on sixteenth and early seventeenth-century French tragedies, that is the period when this tradition took

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form, but I will also look at its reminiscences in the seventeenth century. As such, my interest in Corneille is only secondary and as a dramatist who critically engages with this tradition. I begin this dissertation with him to state the relevance of the studied dramatists. As John Lyons has pointed out, "Corneille is a late representative of the humanistic-jurist milieu that flourished in the sixteenth century and demonstrated a remarkable new emphasis in the study of history." The dissertation aims to elaborate and qualify the nature of this invoked humanist-jurist milieu and its staging of history. It follows Gillian Jondorf in claiming the dramatic interest in history as a key feature of French humanist tragedy, yet aims to analyze how this historical tradition is related to an interest in female figures as embodied historical reflection.

2. Aim and approach

This dissertation studies the rediscovery of Greek and Roman styled tragedy in sixteenth and seventeenth century France, specifically its notable interest for the two historical female figures from Roman history, the Egyptian queen Cleopatra VII (69-30 BC) and the Carthaginian noblewomen and Numidian queen Sophonisba. From being subordinary characters in the Roman and Greek accounts of historians such as Livy, Appian of Alexandria (c.95-c.165 AD), Cassius Dio (c.165 – 235 AD) and Plutarch (c.46 – after 119 AD), Cleopatra and Sophonisba took center stage in the second half of the sixteenth century in France and became the two most popular tragic heroines in this period far ahead of Roman wives or female figures from Greek mythology. The popularity of both women continued well into the seventeenth century until new dramatic expectations questioned their presence on stage and shifted focus from female figures to

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On Corneille's relationship with the humanist tradition, in particular in his treatment of history, see also David Clarke. *Poetics and Political Drama under Louis XIII* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially part 2. For more on Corneille's use of historical subject matters in relation to gender, see Mitchell Greenberg. *Subjectivity and Subjugation in Seventeenth-Century Drama and Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chapter 2. For or more on his staging on Roman history in relation to, amongst others, sixteenth-century dramatists, see Guðrún Kristinsdóttir-Urfalino, "La guerre civile romaine dans la tragédie française (1550-1650): Analyse poétique et politique" University of Iceland, 2022, unpublished PhD dissertation.

their male Roman counterparts as French drama took a turn from, roughly, Sophonisba to Scipio Africanus and from Cleopatra to Pompey the Great.\(^6\)

Overall, the early modern period counts six French tragedies on Sophonisba and seven on Cleopatra. In comparison, the same period has left us only four tragedies on Lucretia, three on Brutus’ widow Portia and two on Pompey the Great’s widow, Cornelia Metella, of which one is labeled as a tragi-comedy as well as two independent translations of Pseudo-Seneca’s historical tragedy on Claudia Octavia and Poppaea.\(^\ast\) Virtuous Roman wives clearly did not spark the same creative interest as morally ambiguous figures such as Sophonisba and Cleopatra. Yet particularly Pseudo-Seneca’s Octavia is said to have inspired French dramatists in their interest in (Roman) history as the only surviving example of the once popular Roman tradition of fabula praetexta, that is drama with a historical subject matter.\(^7\) The dramatic interest in Sophonisba and Cleopatra also exceeds two popular figures from Greek mythology such as Medea and Antigone. The period features two tragedies on Medea and three on Antigone, including one early translation of Sophocles’ Antigone.\(^8\)

The only female figures to rival Cleopatra and Sophonisba in popularity are, interestingly, two other oriental females, Panthea, the noblewoman of Susa taken from Xenophon’s Cyropaedia (written around 370 BC) who feature in six tragedies as well as another famous Carthaginian, Dido, with five extant tragedies centered around her suicide and another two presumed lost.\(^9\) This points to a particular interest

\(^5\) This is not the place to do an extensive mapping only to note how the interest in the Second Punic War and the Roman Civil War takes a new male centered plot focus as witnessed in Jean Desmaret’s tragicomedy Scipion (1639) and Jacques (or Nicolas) Pradon’s historical tragedy Scipion (1697) or Charles Chaulmer’s La Mort de Pompée (1638) and Pierre Corneille’s La Mort de Pompe (1642), published 1644.

\(^\ast\) These are on Lucretia: Nicolas Filleul, Lucrèce, tragédie (1566), Alexandre Hardy, Lucrèce, tragédie (1628), Urbain Chevreau, La Lucresee romaine, tragédie (performed 1636 in Paris, published 1637) and Pierre Du Ryer, Lucrèce, tragédie (performed in Paris 1636, published 1638); on Portia: Robert Garnier, Porcie, tragédie fransoise, représentant la cruelle et sanglante saison des guerres Civiles de Rome : propre et convenable pour y voir depeintce la calamité de ce temps (1658), Guyon Guérin de Bouscal, La Mort de Brute et de Porcie, ou, la Vengeance de la Mort de César, tragédie (performed 1635-1636 in Paris, published 1637) and Claude Boyer, La Porcie romaine (performed 1645 in Paris and published the same year); on Cornelia: Robert Garnier, Cornélie, tragédie (1574) and Alexandre Hardy, Cornélie, tragi-comédie (1625); on Claudia Octavia: Roland Brisset, Octavie (1589) and Guillaume Regnauld, Octavie (1599).


\(^\ast\) These are on Medea: Jean Bastier de La Péruse, La Médée, tragédie (performed before 1553 and again 1572, published 1555) and Pierre Corneille, Médée, tragédie (performed 1634-35 in Paris, published 1639); on Antigone: Jean-Antoine de Baif, Antigone (1573), a French translation of Sofokle’s play, Robert Garnier, Antigone, ou La Piété, tragédie (1583), Jean de Rotrou, Antigone, tragédie (performed 1675 in Paris, published 1679).

\(^9\) These are on Panthéa: Caye Jule de Guersens, Panthéh, tragédie prise du grec de Xénophon, mise en ordre par Caye Jule de Guersens (1571), C. Guerin Daronnière, La Panthéh ou l’Amour conjugal, tragédie nouvelle (1608), Claude Billard de Courgenay,
in foreign and somewhat exotic figures found in authorial Roman and Greek sources, yet whose non-Roman origin and secondary status gave the dramatists more room for poetic creation and tragic uncertainty. The previous generations of humanists had sought different characters and genres for their historical reflections. The above examples are united by containing some form of personal—often romantic—intrigue. In this way, the figures combine the personal and the political in their lives which made them interesting tragic characters. A radical different perspective is found in the unpersonal and institutional reflection on Roman history in for example Machiavelli’s Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio (published posthumously in 1531).

While any—or, indeed, all—of the above female figures would have been interesting to study, this dissertation focuses on Cleopatra and Sophonisba for three main reasons. First, the choice set a pragmatic limitation on my research which is crucial in a time fixed research grant. Second, Cleopatra and Sophonisba are closely connected in the period with Nicolas de Montreux, Jean Mairet and Pierre Corneille writing tragedies on both figures. Yet their connection can also be traced further back. The cover illustration of the dissertation features a Roman wall painting from a house in Pompeii. It depicts a banquet scene where a woman is the center of attention. She thrones with easy on a sofa and in one hand she holds a cup. Behind her stands a man with an arm around her. Archeologists have since its discovery in 1769 debated who this woman might be. For a long time, it was assumed to be a depiction of Sophonisba, while Duane W. Roller has recently argued for identifying the woman as Cleopatra and the man as Mark Antony. This is not the place to dispute such an interpretation, yet I find Roller’s argument telling for modern unawareness of the importance of the Sophonisba figure. His argument rests on the fact that Cleopatra’s

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Panthée (1610), Alexandre Hardy, Panthée, tragédie (1624), Jean-Gilbert Durval, Panthée, tragédie (performed 1637 in Paris, published 1639) and Tristan L'Hermite, Panthée, tragédie (performed 1637-1638 in Paris, published 1639); on Dido: Étienne Jodelle, Didon se sacrifiant, tragédie (maybe performed around 1562, published posthumously 1574), Guillaume de La Grange, Dido, tragédie de feu Guillaume de la Grange, natif de Sarlat en Perigord, excellent poète tragique : laquelle tant pour l'argument, que la gravité des vers et senteces, outre ce qu'elle n'a pas cy devant est eue, n'est moins digne de voir que profitable à tous (1582), Alexandre Hardy, Didon se sacrifiant, tragédie (1624), Georges Scudéry, Didon, tragédie (performed 1635-1646 in Paris, published 1637) and François Le Mété, abbé de Boisrobert, La Vraye Didon ou Didon la chaste (performed 1642 in Paris, published 1643). On the two Dido tragedies presumed lost, see Vincent Dupuis. Le Tragique et le Féminin: Essai sur la poétique française de la tragédie (1553-1663) (Paris: Classique Garnier, 2015), 206n1&n2.


death would have been much closer to Roman visitors to the house." Maybe the proper identification of the woman is a moot point. As the dissertation will show, Cleopatra and Sophonisba share a multitude of features in the Roman and Greek historical sources as well as a long tradition of allegorical treatment. This makes them particularly interesting to study in comparison.

The dissertation focuses on French sixteenth-century tragedy with comparative analysis of seventeenth-century tragedy and aims to show how this period's interest in female figures is part of its interest in history. Thus, Cleopatra and Sophonisba function as prismatic examples. The time frame is roughly 1550-1660 with a brief mention of Jean de la Chapelle's Cléopâtre (1682). The time span follows other recent studies on early French tragedy amongst others Vincent Dupuis' Le Tragique et le Féminin (2015) which studies French tragedies from 1553-1663, that is from the performance of Étienne Jodelle's Cléopâtre captive in 1553 to the performance of Pierre Corneille's Sophonisbe in 1663. Dramatists of this period were inspired by both mythological, biblical, and historical subjects. For example Robert Garnier wrote tragedies based on all three kinds of sources which should make us think before importing modern divides between history, myth and religion into this period, yet this blurring should not prevent us from looking closer at the use of (Roman) history. As such, the present focus on (Roman) history goes back to the pragmatic selection of Cleopatra and Sophonisba.

This dissertation analyzes the generic significance of Cleopatra and Sophonisba. It aims to contribute to the often noticed but still unexplored question in modern scholarship of the interest in female victims in French tragedy with a historiographical dimension. The underlying argument of this dissertation is that the popularity of Cleopatra and Sophonisba is due to the period's concept of tragedy as a genre not only on history but about history. By this distinction is meant how this period's tragedy not only takes history, in the present case Roman history, as a source of inspiration but also engages with history in a philosophical way by using the historicity of their characters to make audiences reflect on history writing.

This is done partly through literary text analysis of one particular sixteenth or early seventeenth-century tragedy (article 2 & 5) and through comparative analysis of sixteenth and seventeenth century French tragedies (article 3 & 4) or transnationally in European drama and poetry (article 1). Besides an introductory and discussion chapter (part 1), the dissertation consists of five articles (part 2). The five articles offer a fresh look at what is often labeled 'humanist' tragedy by combining digital methods, Walter

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Ibid.
Benjamin’s discussion of the female martyr and the ghost figure in the German mourning play tradition, literary and historical contextualization of both ancient Greek and Roman tragedy and history writing as well as contemporaneous French historiography and poetics. Taken together, the five articles relate the significance of Sophonisba and Cleopatra to evolutions in dramatic theory and historiography and aims to define a French tradition of historical drama to be compared with contemporaneous dramatic traditions such as the English history play.

In the following I will lay out the dissertation’s intervention into the field as well as my theoretical approach to the study of gender and historicity. The anthological format of the dissertation has enabled a multitude of different methodological approaches. These are discussed in a methodological subsection. This first part of the dissertation also comprises a brief discussion of the main results of the individual articles, before a conclusion which gives a joint discussion of this French tradition of historical drama and its use of gender, allegory and historicity.

3. State of the art

Overall, this dissertation aims to connect current scholarship on French sixteenth-century tragedy’s notable interest in female figures as noted by amongst others Nina Hugot, Emmanuel Buron and Vincent Dupuis with a contextual and historico-philosophical approach. As the individual articles engage more in detail with specific strands of scholarship, the present review is intended as an overview. Studies on French sixteenth-century tragedy has predominantly followed two main lines of enquiry: one tradition of

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24 I here focus on tragedy which has also dominated scholarly debate until recently. For notable exceptions see the series of modern critical editions founded by Eneas Balmas and Michelle Dassonville, the Théâtre français de la Renaissance (1994-now), which to date compromise six books on comedies as well as the early works by Lebègue and Lazard on sixteenth and seventeenth-century comedy and humanist tradition respectively, see Raymond Lebègue. Le théâtre comique en France, de Pathelin à Mélité (Paris: Hatier, 1972); Madeleine Lazard. La Comédie humaniste au XVIe siècle et ses personnages (Paris: PUF, 1978). For recent studies on French sixteenth-century comedy which also relate the genre to the French Wars of Religion, see Lucy Rayfield. Poetics, Performance and Politics in French and Italian Renaissance Comedy (Oxford: Legenda, 2022); Corinne Noirot, “French Humanist Comedy during the Wars of Religion: The Familiar and the Strange in Jean de la Taille’s Les Corrivaux”, Explorations in Renaissance culture, 39: 2 (2013), 135-153.
more formal or conceptual analysis with rhetorical and poetical studies as derivatives and one tradition, recently more prevailing, especially in Anglophone scholarship, of political and historizing interpretations.

The former is exemplified by Marc Fumaroli's still formative study L'âge de l'éloquence: rhétorique et “res litteraria” de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique (1980) which stressed the continuities between antiquity and the renaissance in oratory and this field's influence in political and religious discourse, education and literature.25 Or, in the field of French seventeenth-century tragedy with Georges Forestier's La tragédie française: Reglès classiques, passions tragiques (2003).26 In scholarship on sixteenth-century tragedy, this line of enquiry is most strongly represented by Richard Griffiths. In The Dramatic Technique of Antoine de Montchrestien (1973) he put forward a reading of sixteenth-century tragedy as a non-dramatic style, or 'set-piece', uninterested in extra-literary discussions defined by the dramatists' reading of Seneca and classical humanist education. Drama is perceived as a kind of school exercise of imitating characters.27 Though Griffiths' aim was to acknowledge sixteenth-century tragedy as an independent tradition not to be judged through comparison with later seventeenth-century norms as done by for example Antoine Adam,28 Griffiths did so by explicitly divorcing drama from society. Indeed, his presentation of Antoine de Montchrestien as “the culmination of Renaissance drama”29 rests on his interpretation of him as a dramatist interested in style over such non-literary concerns as politics.30

The non-dramatic nature of sixteenth-century tragedy had also been highlighted as a key feature by Gustave Lanson who characterized the tradition as more pathetic than dramatic.31 Donald Stone's French Humanist Tragedy (1974) took a more conceptual approach, yet still stressed sixteenth-century tragedy's lack of dramatic action. Contrary to Griffiths and Lanson, Stone stressed the medieval

28 See Griffiths' comments about the need to grasp sixteenth-century tragedy on its own terms: “For too long sixteenth-century tragedy has been regarded as some kind of forerunner of the tragedy of the classical age, differing from it only in its imperfect nature.” Ibid. 27. In contrast, Antoine Adam reads sixteenth-century tragedy in relation to later norms of unities and distinguishes between 'regular' and 'irregular' tragedy, see Antoine Adam. Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle. Livre 1: L'Époque d'Henri IV et de Louis XIII (Paris: del DUCA, 1962), 182-183 & 192-193.
29 Richard Griffiths, The Dramatic Tecnique of Antoine de Montchrestien, 27.
30 Ibid., 82.
inheritance and interpreted the tradition's engagement with, for example, figures from Roman history not as an interest in history but as an interest in edifying tales. Stone remains the clearest analysis of sixteenth-century tragedy's didactive nature, an analysis reiterated in Charles Mazouer's discussion of the treatment of historical subject matters in *Le Théâtre français de la Renaissance* (2002).

Also belonging to this formal tradition are the multiple published collections on sixteenth-century dramatic theory presenting prefaces to tragedies and excerpts from poetics going back to Bernard Weinberg's 1950-collection *Critical prefaces of the French Renaissance* and followed by Paulette Leblanc (1972) and H. W. Lawton (1972). This interest in dramatic theory over dramatic practice is telling for the perception of sixteenth-century drama as a literary phenomenon of "transition"—to use the word of Françoise Charpentier—towards a perceived French golden age of seventeenth-century tragedy. In contrast, the still ongoing series of modern critical editions of the *Théâtre français de la Renaissance* initiated by Enea Balmas and Michel Dassonville published its first volume in 1989. The series continues to make a wide range of sixteenth-century dramatists available to literary scholars outside the discipline and showcases the genre's heterogenous character.


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37 On this point, see Biet: "Diverse, contradictoire, étonnante de cruauté et de tendresse, valorisant l'imitation des Anciens, puis privilégiant l'imagination libre, soutout marquée par une opposition frontale entre les partisans d'une liberté d'invention dramaturgique et scénique et les partisans d'une nécessité poétique de simplicité, cette tragédie est clairement 'hétérogène'." Christian Biet. *La tragédie*. 2 edition (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013), 44.
interest in questions of kingship, clemency and the French Wars of Religion "to reflect to some extent the events of the civil war". The analysis moved sixteenth-century tragedy out of a narrow literary space and into society by stressing Garnier’s relation to political theorists such as Jean Bodin and Machiavelli. By engaging with these contextual non-literary works as well as paratextual texts such as prefaces, Jondorf sought to extrapolate a political vision in the works of Garnier thereby showcasing drama as an intervention into society.

The attention to the political and historical situation of sixteenth-century tragedy and, in particular, its connection with the French Wars of Religion has since gained ground as both a philosophical, political, and historiographical challenge. Thus, Mazouer has pinpointed the contemporaneous descriptions of the dramatic stage as a scaffold, while Christian Biet has defined a Senecan aesthetic of cruelty as a historically conditioned response to the traumas of the French Wars of Religion thereby shedding new light on tragedy’s historicity. Biet works with a specific provinsiel dramatic tradition opposed to Parien humanist tragedy, yet his historico-philosophical approach has been influential for the present study.

Others such as Philip Usher, Jonathan Patterson and Jeff Kendrick & Katherine S. Maynard have investigated how tragedy can mimic contemporaneous political institutions such as the Parisian parliament or be used as a polemical tool to move audiences for a specific cause, while Andrea Frisch has

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39 Ibid., 143-144. For a similar aim yet with focus on moral concerns, see Françoise Charpentier. Pour une lecture de la tragédie humaniste, 74. Jondorf’s later work has taken a more formal approach, see Gillian Jondorf. French Renaissance Tragedy: The Dramatic World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
42 Christian Biet et al. (eds.) Théâtre de la cruauté et récits sanguitens en France, xv-xx.
43 The dissertation also shares a turn to Walter Benjamin as a starting point to discuss sixteenth-century tragedy with Biet, see ibid., xxv.
looked at parallels in tragedy and historiography in debates about what it meant to be moved, and how to relate historical events in both tragedy and history writing. These studies have returned to a definition of the dramatic propensities of this tradition highlighting tragedy as a culturally and historically embedded form of expression. This has brought research from text to context and back again.

Following the above trends, tragedy's use of historical characters and intrigues has been read as an ahistorical interest as either moral examples in Stone or as pathetic effect by Lanson to a reservoir of terrible tales without a clear solution by Biet. Neither of these take tragedy's interest in history at face value but subordinate it to formal or conceptual concerns. In contrast, Mazouer has read the interest in history as a philosophical reflection on political problems yet without the outlaying of a clear political theory. Similarly, Buron has called attention to tragedy as a critical pondering, what he calls "une méditation intellectuelle", reiterated by Biet as moral meditation. While Margaret M. McGowan and Frisch have treated Roman history as allusions to contemporaneous experiences under the French Wars of Religion. The dissertation aims to add a stress on tragedy's engagement with history—in the sense of a philosophical pondering of different visions of history—over political allusion or moral lesson. I am not looking for a statement by the author but rather wish to explore how history is interpreted for critical reflection. Part of this endeavor is a reappraisal of a historical subgenre of tragedy which does away with the chronological and aesthetic classifications prevalent in scholarship.


_46 Donald Stone, _French Humanist Tragedy_, 140-141; Gustave Lanson. _Esquisse d'une histoire de la tragédie française_, 19; Christian Biet, _La tragédie_, 36. For a recent study of such a work-internal approach, see Matilde Lamy. _Cléopâtre dans les tragédies françaises de 1553 à 1682: Une dramaturgie de l'éloge_. Université d'Avignon et des Pays de Vaucuse, 2012, unpublished PhD dissertation._

_47 Charles Mazouer, _Le Théâtre français de la Renaissance_, 231._

_48 The full quote reads: "La tragédie n'apelle ni identification (au tyran? au roi déchu?) ni catharsis, mais une méditation intellectuelle sur les malheurs d'autrui, pour en tirer une leçon pratique de conduite, essentiellement a contrario: ne pas se flatter de sa victoire, ne pas abuser de son pouvoir, etc." Emmanuel Buron, _Théâtre tragique du XVIe siècle_, 17._

_49 "La tragédie propose une méditation sur le destin des princes à travers la décision de Cléopâtre de se tuer pour échapper au triomphe romain, une méditation en forme de lamentation où l'action n'est pas encore qu'ébauchée." Christian Biet. _La tragédie_, 36._

4. Why terminology matters

While tragedy from the second half of the seventeenth century more consistently, yet not necessarily more adequately, has been defined as 'regular', 'classical' or 'neoclassical', sixteenth and early seventeenth-century tragedy has received a surprising number of different genre classifications in scholarly literature, ranging from 'humanist', 'renaissance', 'baroque', 'irregular', 'early modern' to 'théâtre de la cruauté'. Some of these terms overlap, while others express an attempt to pinpoint notable subgenres, and others again carry chronological demarcation and/or aesthetic judgment. As part of this dissertation's interest with defining a tradition of historical drama, I want to briefly address these differences and their latent value judgements before discussing my own use of classification in the articles. As modern genre theory has argued, genre is as much an epistemological category as literary historical or stylistic classification. As such, genre classifications enable critical thinking about traditions and the unconscious biases inherent in our perception of them. Following this, I believe the term 'historical drama' can bring elements in sixteenth-century French tragedy to the forefront.

The most persistent term has been the term 'humanist drama' or 'humanist tragedy' used by Buron & Julien Goeury, Jondorf, Charpentier and Stone, while Lebègue and Mazouer use the designation as a subcategory of 'renaissance' tragedy. Despite the pitfalls of imagining an artificial clean break with

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51 This subsection benefited from discussions at a workshop on “Shakespeare & The Baroque” (October 2023) arranged under the auspices of the Center for Early Modernity Studies at the University of Aarhus directed by Karen-Margrethe Simonsen and Edward Alan Payne. I thank all the participants for sharing their thoughts.


medieval dramatic traditions, humanist tragedy remains a productive term to highlight the overwhelming turn to Greek and Roman styled tragedy and comedy in France in the second half of the sixteenth-century written by an university-educated secular elite trained in classical rhetoric and literature and destined for public civil performance. However, the term becomes problematic when used to sort out perceived pre-classical forerunners or 'classical' tragedies from 'irregular' or 'baroque' ones often with a derogatory undertone in the latter.

More recent French scholarship has seen a revival of the term 'baroque'. Thus, Biet has called on the term 'baroque' to describe the neglected dramatic tradition of the 'théâtre de la cruauté'. In a similar vein, Michael Meere has sought to reclaim 'baroque' to contrast 'humanist' tragedy and put focus on "works of art and literature that favor movement, instability, metamorphosis, illusion, and ostentatious spectacle such as death and torture." While the works themselves bring due attention to overlooked traditions, I find such a juxtaposition of a vibrant baroque and a rule-bound humanism overemphasizes differences and overlooks shared interests, for example in historical characters or sources, notably Plutarch. The rigidity of Meere's characteristic of a baroque dramaturgy above is questioned with the inclusion of Robert Garnier in the volume as his dramatic style of long monologues and no violence on stage dilutes the definition somewhat. Similarly, Biet's contrasting of Jean de la Taille's De l'art de la tragédie found as preface to the 1572-edition of the biblical tragedy Saül le furieux with Pierre de Laudun d'Aigalier's L'Art poétique François (1597) as illustrative for a turn away from an alleged unified humanist aesthetic is in

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57 Charles Mazouer, Le Théâtre français de la Renaissance, chapitre VI; For Stone's defence of the term to stress a shared poetic, see Stone, French Humanist Tragedy, 136 & 148.
59 See also Jean-Claude Turner. Lucain et la littérature de l’âge baroque en France: Citation, imitation et création (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2000).
60 Christian Biet et al. (eds.) Théâtre de la cruauté et récits sanglants en France, xxx.
62 For example Alexandre Hardy’s Scédaœ, ou l’hospitalité violée, tragédie (1624) which is presented as part of the volume on ‘théâtre de la cruauté’ takes its subject matter from Plutarch, see Biet et. al. Théâtre de la cruauté et récits sanglants en France, 2006, 333-390.
need of elaboration. Thus, Buron has questioned la Taille's reputation as an early follow of Aristotelian unity, just as the final discussion will lay out the intention of dramatists such as Robert Garnier and Nicolas de Montreux to depict historical events as a bloody spectacle. In essence, Biet's and Meere's reclaiming of the baroque reproduces the old derogatory distinction with classical only with reversed signs.

Because of this problematic use of the term, the dissertation does not use the term 'baroque', though it engages with one of the most prominent literary theorists of the term, Walter Benjamin. Rather, in the articles, I alternate between 'humanist' for the sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century tradition specifically and the more encompassing 'early modern' when analyzing continuities and differences between humanist dramatists and later seventeenth-century dramatists such as Mairet, Corneille, and Charles Chaulmer. Thus, articles 2 and 5 use with the term 'humanist' in relation to the tragedies of Montreux and Étienne Jodelle respectively, and articles 1, 2 and 4 use the term 'early modern' to stress continuities across the centuries.

The use of the term 'early modern' is pragmatic. I fully acknowledge the problematic teleological implications in the term as pointed out by amongst others Helen Hills and Terence Cave. I opted for 'early modern' instead of 'rennaissance' as 'early modern' is more established in Anglophone scholarship. These terms have been productive for the analytical work involved in the articles as well as pragmatic ways to intervene into already existing scholarly discussions. The final discussion of this first part of the dissertation will build on the above reflections and propose the term 'historical drama' as a generic classification of the analyzed tragedies, thus highlighted as a continuous dramatic subgenre beyond chronological and stylistic demarcations.

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63 Emmanuel Buron, "Modèle(s) générique(s) de la tragédie humaniste. La dramaturgie des frères La Taille," Seizième Siècle, 6 (2010), 17-32.
65 For a discussion of the lack of an equivalent French term of the 'early modern', see Terence Cave, "Locating the Early Modern", 12. For a notable exception, see the monography series "Les Seuils de la Modernité" published by Droz and directed by Michel Jeanneret, https://www.droz.org/section/Collections/Les%20Seuils%20de%20la%20Modernit%C3%A9 (Accessed 14 February 2024).
6. Theoretical approach to gender and historicity

This dissertation is interested in gender but not from a feminist theoretical perspective. This means that it studies the relationship between gender and dramatic genre without paying attention to questions of representation. All of the articles knowingly disregards any connection between dramatic female characters and contemporaneous political, social and cultural debates about women or gender, most notable *la querelle des femmes* or *la querelle des dames* defined by Nicole Dufournard as, “une polémique (...) sur la place des femmes dans la société et leurs capacités ou leurs droits à tenir les mêmes rôles que les hommes.”66 While much remains to be said about the dramatic interest in female figures at large and Cleopatra and Sophonisba in particular in light of this debate, this dissertation leaves such questions to others.67

Instead, I am interested in Cleopatra and Sophonisba as prisms to study a specific dramatic tradition, one that in my argument uses gender as part of a reflection on the nature of history. As such, its perspective on gender is rhetorical rather than discursive. This choice has both theoretical and literary historical reasons. One of the fundamental categories in feminist theory has been the distinction between 'gender' as a discursive category constructed and represented through language in contrast to the biological category of 'sex'. Though Judith Butler has criticized this gender/sex distinction, she has not abolished the discursive nature of gender but rather argued for the constructive elements of the sex category.68

In contrast hereto, my dissertation looks at gender as part of the drama's rhetoric. By this I mean that I look at gender as a figure of style and not how this might or might not reflect text external sociopolitical and/or cultural relations. This line of thought follows a well-established scholarly tradition of pinpointing especially sixteenth-century French drama’s declamatory style as inspired by the dramatists’ humanist training in rhetoric and, in particular, their reading of Senecan tragedy, the latter,


According to Gillian Jondorf, focused "on arguments presented in elegantly worked language rather than on action and character development". More recent work has stressed the theatrical aspect of rhetoric as part of a reappraisal of sixteenth-century drama with increasing attention to Seneca as a model for historical subject matters. Whether in form or content—or both—scholars agree that Seneca proved an enduring model for French tragedy. Thus, Florence de Caigny has highlighted the continued popularity of Senecan tragedies in France throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century in the form of translations and adaptions, while Christian Biet has pointed to what he calls ‘a Senecan poetic of cruelty’ with direct depictions and vivid descriptions of murder and violation on stage in contrast to classical dramatic norms of bienséance and vraisemblance.

Antony J. Boyle has characterized Seneca's declamatory style such as Seneca's abundant use of long speeches, hyperbole and stichomythia, that is short contrasting lines as part of an argument, as part of the tragedies' theatricality and pointed to its endurance in early modern drama amongst others by William Shakespeare. According to Boyle, what might look like anti-theatrical word-games to a modern audience, is a verbal technique to lay out characters' inner life in an effectful way, what he names 'a style of shock':

I refer to its ability to represent and to cause 'shock', and to do it, here and often elsewhere, through a self-dramatising rhetoric of cosmic and psychic violence, in which the speaker does not so much express as construct him-or-herself out of the very language used. Seneca's declamatory style was and remains a powerful, shocking mode; but also a psychological one.

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70 See for example Emmanuel Buron's presentation of the performative element in rhetoric: "Toutefois, si l'on n'a pas vu la théâtralité de cette tragédie, c'est qu'on ne l'a pas vraiment cherchée, et qu'on s'est contenté de lire le texte en oubliant que la rhétorique, comnprimérente, inclut action et prononciation, et qu'elle appelle une performance." Emmanuel Buron, "Présentation", Théâtre tragique du XVIe siècle, 11.


Boyle points to the rhetorical dimension of Senecan tragedy and its early modern imitations as a part of character creation, of how to show and create a character’s mind on the page or on stage. Though he does not mention any of the studied French dramatists, I believe that rhetoric as a dramatic technique holds equally true for them. Emmanuel Buron has analyzed what he calls “spectacle de la parole” in the archetypical scene of petition (‘la supplication’, literally pleading) in French sixteenth-century tragedy and pointed to its gendered dimension since one often finds a vanquished woman pleading in front of a victorious man. Buron hereby not only stresses the stereotypical—in the rhetorical sense of the word—of this tradition of tragedy but also points to how gender works within it. Following Boyle and Buron, this dissertation looks at gender as part of the tragedy’s rhetorical framework, of how Cleopatra and Sophonisba are used to reflect on history.

5.1. Benjamin

Instead of feminist theory, the dissertation takes another theoretical starting point in the form of Walter Benjamin’s discussion of the German mourning play in Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels (written 1924-25, published 1928). In the book, Benjamin discusses German seventeenth-century drama in German called Trauerspiel, literally ‘mourning play’74, as the expression of a historically conditioned refashioning of Greek and Roman styled tragedy for a new audience with a new political as well as religious, that is Christian, horizon. In the book, Benjamin aims to interpret the mourning play’s rewriting of for example Roman history in the light of contemporaneous cultural and political culture. One of the mourning play’s key figures who is discussed time and time again in the book, Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, went on to become a jurist and diplomat during the Thirty Years’ War. Benjamin stresses how the mourning play is a product of its time, particularly ongoing discussions of sovereignty, Christian dogmatic differences between particularly Lutheran Protestantism in Germany and Catholicism in Spain as well as a new secular attitude towards history.

A central concept in the book for my purpose has been Benjamin's highlighting of the German mourning play as an independent tragic aesthetic which encapsulates contemporaneous attitudes towards history writing. Benjamin discusses the female body in the mourning play as a key figure in this drama's historical engagement, albeit indirectly. Female characters are both situated within history as particular women who suffer and connected to ahistorical religious concepts such as chastity, virtue and redemption. As such, the female tragic character, most notably the martyr, and her victimized body, becomes a prismatic figure of the mourning play's more general refashioning of Greek and Roman styled tragedy. It is this ambiguity that I claim holds equally true for the interest and framing of Cleopatra and Sophonisba in my French context. This highlighting of the relationship between tragedy, history and gender initially drew me to Benjamin as a stimulating theoretical starting point.

It of course needs to be said that Benjamin's book does not present any kind of unified theory, and scholars tend to latch on to one aspect of the work without considering the book in its entirety.\footnote{See for example Blair Hoxby's critique of Benjamin's notion of allegory which overlooks Benjamin's discussion of performative elements such as corpses and emblems discussed here, see Blair Hoxby, "The Function of Allegory in Baroque Tragic Drama: What Benjamin Got Wrong" in Brenda Machosky (ed.). Thinking allegory otherwise (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 87-116. Christine Buci-Glucksman focuses on the concept of melancholy and forgets its connection with apotheose, see Christine Buci-Glucksman. La Raison Baroque: De Baudelaire à Benjamin (Paris: Galilée, 1984).}

In contrast Sofie Kluge has pointed out how much of the criticism against Benjamin's proclaimed melancholy or methodological opacity moves to the background if the book is viewed as a dialectical exploration of different baroque dramatic traditions by Shakespeare, Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón de la Barca as expressions of an epochal "which grappled differently with the problem of a historical world perceived as devoid of metaphysical meaning and urgent meaningful interpretation."\footnote{David Hasberg Zirak-Schmidt, Sofie Kluge, Anastasia Ladejoged Larn and Rasmus Vangshardt, "Epilogue: Reflections on Historical Comparativism Prompted by the Case of Sophonisba," Nordic Journal of Renaissance Studies, 23 (2023), 211-223, 216. See also Sofie Kluge, "Walter Benjamins bog om det barokke drama," in Walter Benjamin. Det tyske sorgespils oprindelse. Translated by Sofie Kluge (København: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2014), 9-66, 52-63.} As such, Benjamin's comments on gender in the mourning play with which I have engaged is not restricted to one particular section but sprinkled out over the work. For that reason, it is necessary to give a brief discussion of the work as such with a focus on the mourning play's fusion of emblem, Christian iconography and secular historiography.

Benjamin is also discussed at some length in two of the articles, notably article 2 and 5. Both of these focus their analysis on one figure from Benjamin's discussion of the mourning play, notably the
female martyr in article 2 and the ghost figure in article 5. I will therefore not go into detail with these figures here but rather engage with Benjamin's book on a more general plane to show how these two figures fit together. Likewise, both articles also justify the relevance of a specific German tragic tradition for a French context. This means that I will not repeat my discussion of Hall Bjornstad and Katherine Ibbett's special issue on Benjamin and seventeenth-century French tragedy here, nor the striking similar interest in history, both recent events and the Greek and Roman past, in both the German mourning play tradition and the French tragedies. Rather, I want to turn my attention to Benjamin's argument about the mourning play as an independent tragic tradition with a specific Christian interpretative framework and this idea's implication for the French context.

In *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Benjamin oftentimes stresses the mourning play as a misunderstood tragic tradition with an independent poetic horizon to be judged on its own terms regardless of later and more canonized German dramatists such as Friedrich Schiller and Johan Wolfgang von Goethe. This is connected to a more general point about the pitfalls of literary history writing discussed in the first part of the book in the "Erkenntniskritische Vorrede". For the present purpose, I will focus on how Benjamin presents the mourning play's engagement with history as a key differentiating feature from both later German drama and Greek tragedy. The difference is not only a question of whether the dramatists take their inspiration from myth or history, but also his understanding of what he calls the mourning play's 'historical-philosophical' attitude. By this is meant how the mourning play stages historical life:


\[77\] Walter Benjamin. *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Hamburg & Frankfurt: SEVERUS Verlag, 2016 [1928]), 36, 81. For Benjamin's comparison of the mourning play and the later historical drama by Schiller and Goethe see for example ibid., 60, 92 & 104-105.

\[78\] Ibid., 85.

\[79\] Ibid., 39.
Whereas the heroes of Greek tragedy achieve their heroic status through the mythological tales told about them after their death, the hero of the mourning play is the sovereign. His status as tragic hero is not dependent on past deeds but on his (tragic) fate of being a ruler, and for Benjamin his entrance on the tragic stage is intimately connected with debates from the sphere of politics about sovereignty, jurisprudence and good statesmanship in this period. This political element is important as it forms part of the mourning play’s dealing with earthly life and not a mythological past. As Benjamin puts it, in the mourning play history takes center stage: “Die Geschichte wandert in den Schauplatz hinein.”

Following this, the sovereign does not only represent himself but all of humanity. His tragic fate is the tragic fate of all humans. The mourning play, Benjamin argues, is not about a tragic figure but about tragic entanglements, what he calls “Konstellationen”. A feature which also leads him to stress how the term ‘tragic’ in this period was used of both drama and historical events alike. This implies a joint imaginative world of both drama and history which once again accentuates how the mourning play points to the world beyond the stage. All of this engages the audiences in self-conscious contemplation:

Wenn nämlich jener nicht nur als Person in seinem eigenen, sondern als Herrscher im Namen der geschichtlichen Menschheit scheitert, so spielt sein Untergang als ein Gericht sich ab, in dessen Urteil auch der Untertan sich mitbetroffen fühlt.

Spectators are encouraged to recognize and compare their own situation in the tragic spectacle, not only as a political or moral lesson but as a reflection on their mortality. I do not believe that Benjamin by this means that Greek tragedy should be devoid of contemplation. Rather he wants to stress the mourning play’s original use of drama as a highly sophisticated medium to contemplate what he at one instance calls

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80 Ibid., 42.
81 Ibid., 70.
82 See Ibid., 42 & 67.
84 Ibid., 49, 55 & 126.
85 Ibid., 49.
'the idea of the catastrophe'. The word catastrophe is used both about dramatic denouement, political crisis and as a theological concept which once again highlights the interconnection of all three spheres in the mourning play. Theologically it points to how the mourning play displays the sovereign—and through him all humans—coming to terms with living a life in a world without divine justice and presence, yet with the Christian promise of salvation still present.

For Benjamin, this element is present in all Baroque drama, for example also in the works of the already mentioned Calderón and Shakespeare. Yet Benjamin does argue for a specific melancholy in the German tradition due to Lutheran Protestantism. This is not the place to trace Benjamin’s strategic contrasting of different baroque traditions. It is just to mention that the allegorical aesthetic of the German mourning play holds a kind of surpassing of hopelessness so that Benjamin does not propagate bleak sadness and meaninglessness. The mourning play contains what he also calls an apotheose, or, a kind of hope in the acknowledgment of the melancholic:

Wo das Mittelalter die Hinfälligkeit des Weltgeschehens und die Vergänglichkeit der Kreatur als Stationen des Heilswegs zur Schau stellt, vergräbt das deutsche Trauerspiel sich ganz in die Trostlosigkeit der irdischen Verfassung. Kennt es eine Erlösung, so liegt sie mehr in der Tiefe dieser Verhängnisse selbst als im Vollzuge eines göttlichen Heilsplans.

The medieval Christian dramatic tradition such as the morality play used allegory to turn its spectators towards Christian virtues. In this sense, drama became a map towards salvation. The morning play gives no safe roads. If there is salvation (Erlösung), it is found in the awareness of man’s earthliness. In this way, the mourning play becomes a kind of celebration, or, at any way a staging of, the catastrophe. As is stated

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86 “Denn antithetisch zum Geschichtsideal der Restauration steht vor ihm die Idee der Katastrophe.” Ibid., 43. See also 26, 42, 155, 177 & 178.
87 Ibid., 58-59.
88 See for example ibid., 62, 113 and 122.
89 See the already mentioned discussion by Sofie Kluge, “Walter Benjamins bog om det barokke drama”, 52-63 & David Hasberg Zirak-Schmidt, Sofie Kluge, Anastasia Ladefoged Larn and Rasmus Vangshardt, “Epilogue: Reflections on Historical Comparativism Prompted by the Case of Sophonisba,” 215-216.
90 See for example ibid., 144, 165, 177, 183, 218.
91 Ibid., 59.
elsewhere in the book, the mourning play does not make sad, but it is through it that sadness finds its redemption."

Despite the very grand scope of the above, the majority of the book is actually spend in outlining of this sad but also hopeful aesthetic. How this melancholy takes form and is expressed. Benjamin in a very detailed way pinpoints central figures and props. Amongst these is the tyrant-martyr dynamic and the ghost figure, both of which I dive into in the articles. According to Benjamin, the sovereign can be staged as both a tyrant and a martyr.92 Both represent one aspect of statesmanship and historical life taken to extremes. Gender comes to play a role here as many of Benjamin’s examples of martyrs from the mourning play are women. As discussed in article 2, this leads Benjamin to briefly characterize women as the archetypical victim of the mourning play. Articles 2 and 5 will extrapolate this aspect which I believe has even greater potential for our understanding of the mourning play in its different variants than Benjamin himself extracts from it.

6. Mixed methods

The five articles make use of both digital and traditional literary text analysis, yet the overall approach remains the same: to study the generic specificities of French sixteenth and early seventeenth-century tragedy through one or both of my two female figures. The justification for this approach is found in Aristotle’s Poetics wherein French dramatists could find a highlighting of the difference between drama and other kinds of poetry as the author’s choice of letting characters speak for themselves. Character (ἦθος, éthos) is central to the tragic medium as an imitation of an action94, and Aristotle names character as the second most important feature after plot (μῦθος, mythos).95 The prevalence of plot is due to the fact that a tragedy without plot is impossible, but a tragedy without characters is possible.96 It is the plot which arouse

92 “Denn sie sind nicht so sehr das Spiel, das traurig macht, als jenes, über dem die Trauer ihr Genügen findet: Spiel vor Traurigen.” Ibid., 103.
93 “Tyrann und Märtyrer sind im Barock die Janushäupter des Gekrönten. Sie sind die notwendig extremen Ausprägungen des fürstlichen Wesens.” Ibid., 46.
95 Ibid., 1450a35.
96 Ibid., 1450a24-25.
the famous tragic effect of pity and fear through which katharsis occurs. Character for Aristotle, of course, does not only mean dramatic person but also mind set which led French sixteenth-century dramatists to read the comments about tragedy’s characters as better than most people (βελτίων, beltión) as primarily a social trait defining tragedy as the representation of the misfortunes of historical kings and nobles. Tragedy’s historical affinity thereby became linked to its character gallery. This makes characters an analytically productive angle of entry for studying French tragedy’s relationship with history.

The majority of articles (article 2, 4 & 5) rely on traditional literary text analysis with varying degrees of historical, theoretical and intertextual contextualization, while article 3 combines this approach with computationally assisted social network analysis. Article 1 uses distant reading of other scholars’ articles which in turn rely on literary text analysis of individual dramas. I purposefully avoid the term ‘close reading’ here though I have used the term in article 3 as a juxtaposition to the computational analysis. Yet the term seems unfit to display the diversity in the three articles under discussion here. Furthermore, only two of the articles, notably article 2 and 5, pay attention to metaphorical and stylistic elements, and neither of these looks exclusively at the work itself. Thereby none of the articles can claim to offer a close reading in the New Critical sense of the word. For the present purpose I prefer the broader term literary text analysis when compared to computational analysis which works with a larger amount of texts and approach stylistic elements in the form of conceptual abstractions and not through textual readings.

Though it only features in one article, in the following, I begin with discussing my use of computational analysis. The focus is on the differences between computational and literary text analysis in order to better qualify my approach in the remaining articles. In my opinion one of the main benefits of the digital humanities is how it can make literary scholars reflect on traditional ways of reading.

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97 Ibid., 1448a15, also reiterated in 1481a1.
98 For the argument that character is the key dramatic feature of sixteenth-century drama, see Emmanuel Buron, Théâtre tragique du XVIe siècle, 12.
99 See for example the Cleanth Brooks who famously claims the impossibility of representing the inner core meaning of a poem in paraphrase as the poem’s meaning is inseparable from its language. Cleanth Brooks. The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (New York: Hartcourt, Brace and Company, 1947), 188
100 For the term literary analysis see for example Louis Hebert. Introduction to Literary Analysis: A Complete Methodology (Milton: Routledge, 2022).
6.1. Reading computationally

Article 3 was co-written with Ross Deans Kristensen-McLachlan for a special issue on the affordances of combining computational analysis with traditional textual analysis for Orbis Litterarum. As guest editor Lucie Duggan argues in her foreword, opponents of computational analysis often falsely present it as being in opposition to literary text analysis. As such, their call for scholars to read the text remains methodologically unclear. Paraphrasing a recent implacable and much debated critic, Nan Z. Dan, Duggan asks: “[W]hat does it mean to ‘just read the text’?” Following Sybille Krämer and Andrew Piper, Duggan argues for a fruitful hermeneutical integration of data driven analysis within the literary toolbox where quantitative computational analysis is combined with a qualitative based interpretation of the texts.” Duggan also points out how the claims of big data driven literary studies rarely meet the reality of the actual research done, and she stresses the validity of working with a small or mid-scale corpus, for example when faced with literary traditions which remain to be digitalized.***

Following Duggan, my article combines computationally assisted social network analysis with traditional literary text analysis on a relatively small corpus of 13 French tragedies from the sixteenth and seventeen century. I say relatively small as this number might seem small in comparison to studies on hundreds of texts. The corpus size was above all a pragmatic choice. As I discuss in the article, French sixteenth-century drama is lacking from the available digital databases such as www.theatre-classique.fr, www.dracor.org or www.cfregistres.org/#1/ (the Registres de la Comédie-Française). The théâtre-classique website presents its wealth of scope of 1,710 dramas within a large timeframe, "de Jodelle à Jean

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* Lucie Duggan, "Between Proximity and Distance", 2.

Giraudoux"; yet only 13 dramas in the collection predate 1601. While I in no way want to reject the importance of this database, this selection is not representative. The same problem is found in DraCor, which presents the same limited number of sixteenth century plays, while the RCF, as its name indicates, focuses on the seventeenth century and up. French sixteenth-century drama remains to be digitalized, and therefore I have been very pleased since writing the article to learn about the project "MELPONUM–Mélpomène à l’ère numérique" which aims to digitalize the sixteenth-century tradition. Yet as Amanda Gailey has argued, even the most comprehensive database imaginable will never exhaust all literature as some texts are lost, sometimes deliberately for political or institutional reasons. Gailey’s argument is based on her own work on race in children's literature, yet her case holds equally true for (French) drama as much of the medieval dramatic tradition, for example, has not been preserved for posterity. No collection can claim total comprehensiveness, and computational analyses making large claims should acknowledge this.

The current lack of digitalized French dramas set up a pragmatic boundary for my corpus size if the article was to be done within the allocated time frame of my PhD studies. It is also the reason for why I characterized my approach as 'computationally assisted'. The limited number of texts readily available for computational analysis for the studied period made it necessary to combine computational data extraction with manual annotation. As this is discussed in more detail in the article, I will here only note how I used computational analysis as an analytical perspective and a visual aid. My relative small-scale corpus of 13 tragedies allowed me to read and study each tragedy prior to the computational analysis. Likewise, the computational data sets was interpreted using my knowledge of the texts and their contexts for example in relation to changing theatrical norms. As such the work follows the hermeneutical circle and switches between quantitative, hypothesis-driven analysis and qualitative interpretations in a way...

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108 Raymond Lebègue. La tragédie française de la renaissance, 7-9.
that Sofie Kluge & Ross Deans Kristensen-McLachlan following Andrew Piper has coined a "computational-hermeneutical approach".

This kind of specialized knowledge is not possible within a big scale corpus comprising hundreds of dramas from different periods. As such my article argues, indirectly, that computational analysis is not a question of reading more texts but of reading them differently. The combination of computational and traditional literary text analysis is relevant for two main reasons. First, when scholars—myself included in the other articles—talk about a prevalence of female characters, it begs further systematic scrutiny. This can either be answered statistically or theoretically. The first approach has been pursued by for example Françoise Charpentier and Nina Hugot. I therefore wanted to discuss what it means for a character to be important on a more general level—hence the title of the article: "What is a protagonist?" As such, I am using computational literary analysis as a means for theoretical exploration.

This line of enquiry was inspired by Mark Algee-Hewitt who has argued for the usefulness of computational analysis as a tool for confirming—or challenging—what he calls scholarly ‘intuition’. For him, computational analysis is particularly useful for noting historical transformation as the computer can process much more texts than the human reader and, as such, make it easier to find patterns and texts which break the pattern. I claim the same not on scale but on a conceptual level. As the article discusses, traditional notions of importance in the concept of protagonism is undertheorized and often rests on the scholar’s biased and, in the case of Sophonisba and Cleopatra, gender-biased interpretation. As Katherine Bode has argued, computational analysis does not dispel with biases whatever the scale of the analysis as the data will always need contextualization and interpretation. Just as non-computational collections of texts, digital collections remain biased and incomplete. Following Bode, I am not proposing

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111 See also Franco Moretti’s reflection on the term ‘distant reading’ as a means to read differently and not more as well as his call for less more (large scale) explanation and less (single work) interpretation in literary history, see Franco Moretti. Distant Reading (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 46 & 152-155.
112 Françoise Charpentier, Pour une lecture de la tragédie humaniste, 25 & Nina Hugot, D’une voix et plaintive et hardie, 515-518.
113 Mark Algee-Hewitt, "Distributed Character," New literary history, 775. A similar point is reiterated by Moretti: ‘Intuition is a good thing, but concepts are better (…).’ Franco Moretti, Distant Reading, 212.
computational assisted social network analysis as a superior non-biased tool for judging importance but as a more systematic and clearly conceptualized one.

A second reason for the inclusion of computational analysis in my analysis of female figures was as a reliable tool for comparison of the two different characters as well as of the different dramas on a formal level. The computational analysis presents an abstraction of each text in metrics and tables. This abstraction focuses the researcher’s attention on structural elements and as such functions as a tool for comparison of different texts and plots. As Evelyn Gius and Jania Jacke point out in their defense of computational literary studies against claims of reductive structuralist ideology, computational analysis produces an abstraction of the text(s) but not a reduction. Instead, they argue that computational analysis makes the steps between hypothesis, analysis and interpretation more visible. Computational analysis yields a surplus of data which needs to be interpreted and contextualized. In comparison, traditional literary text analysis lacks theoretical and methodological conceptualization to make sense of such an amount of data, seeing that it usually works with a few designated ‘exemplary’ texts:

Established/non-computational approaches usually circumvent this problem by only considering and referring to a small amount of descriptive observations that is regarded as ‘exemplary’. The exemplariness, however, is rarely argued for – instead the observations gain their value for the individual scholar because they are in line with their interpretation hypothesis.¹¹⁵

I will return to the notion of the exemplary text later on. For now, I want to highlight how methodological and conceptual choices form a vital part of the computational analysis’ ability to incorporate (a more) waste material than traditional literary analysis. As already noted above, the computational approach presupposes a rigidity which is often neglected in more traditional readings. Specifically, it forces one to pay closer attention on a very early stage of the research process to categories and research questions as these determine methodological choices. Going even further, Franco Moretti has argued for the operationalizing involved in digital humanities as a way to question and amend concepts of literary theory

such as protagonism or tragic conflict, what he calls, "a theory-driven, data-rich research program". As such, computational analysis proves itself a productive tool for theoretical consideration as well an analytical exploration.

In relation to my own article, the first step was to define what counts as a connection between two characters. In the article, a connection is defined by dialogue, that is two characters are connected if they speak to each other, what is called 'a speaking-in-turn principle'. In contrast, the networks found in DraCor are based on a principle of 'co-occurrence'. This entails that two characters are connected if they appear in the same scene. Both methods can be justified but will yield slightly different results. Following this, computational analysis demands and should be judged on the link between research question and method just as any qualitative approach. As such, computational (assisted) literary analysis presents itself as one way of doing comparative work. One which is suited to compare large(r) amounts of texts within a clearly defined conceptual framework and particularly apt to notice formal aspect and question theoretical concepts. In theory, the number of texts is infinite, yet, in reality, it is restricted by time and digital availability making a combined method the more valuable in the selection of texts and in judging the blind spots of the work being done.

6.2. Reading comparatively
The dissertation also presents two other ways of doing comparative work. Article 1 relies on what Franco Moretti has coined ‘distant reading’ defined as “a patchwork of other people's research, without a single direct textual reading” to bring forth three main reasons for the early modern interest in Sophonisba." Like computational literary analysis with which it has over the years merged, the approach has been heavily criticized by amongst others Katie Trumpener and Katherine Bode for a surprising return to a New Critical framework by discarding context. However, distant reading has established itself a method to study literary works as part of a literary system as well as challenge the European canon in the subfield of world

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118 Moretti himself has moved from discussing distant reading as an approach to challenge to canon to a tool of quantitative formal analysis, see Franco Moretti. Distant Reading, 180-181.
literature. Subsequently, David Damrosch highlighted the loss and gains in meaning when literary works travel across linguistic, geographical and chronological boundaries as part of a global literary web. 

Instead of world literature, the article uses the term ‘transnational’ as defined by Jan Bloemendal as a concept which “focuses on the ways in which the interrelationship and circulation of texts by authors, readers, and the institutions of print culture constitute the works’ literary-historical significance—also within and across certain identities—and their meaning within a specific economic, sociopolitical, and religious context.” Following these insights, the article uses distant reading to synthesize other literary text analyses to describe the many transnational literary system of Sophonisba. The article is a preface to a theme issue on the Sophonisba figure for Nordic Journal of Renaissance Studies. The theme issue presents different theoretical and analytical approaches to Sophonisba in such diverse contexts as French, Italian, Dutch, English, German, Cretan, and Spanish drama as well as Italian art. The preface builds on these highly specialized studies to compare the diversity and similarities in the early modern interest in Sophonisba. As such, it looks at Sophonisba as a cultural phenomenon rather than a literary figure.

The theme issue predominantly presents non-canonized works and authors which called for specialized knowledge to understand them. As Moretti has highlighted, scholars tend to read the same canonized texts which covers up literary transformations and developments. Following this, Moretti argued for distant reading as a tool to understand both canonical and non-canonical works, or, with a term inspired by Margaret Cohen, ‘the great unread’ as part of a literary field.” In the present case, distant reading helped me get acquainted with works which I have not studied myself and, indeed, would not have been able to read such as the Dutch and Spanish material.

Whereas article 3 pursues a theoretical question of protagonism in relation to both Sophonisba and Cleopatra, article 1 focuses on one of these figures, Sophonisba, in her cultural and literary historical context. The focus is not so much on the importance of the figure within the text(s) but rather on her importance within literary and cultural history. As such, the abstraction found in article 1 is a

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The approach is comparative in a different way than article 3. Whereas article 3 compares the same element in a multitude of texts, article 1 seeks out common features across different contexts. The former demands an alignment, the latter thrives on differences. As is stressed in the epilogue of the theme issue with an image from Walter Benjamin, this kind of comparative work is like assembling a mosaic where each piece is self-sufficient but also forms part of a pattern.

In contrast, the comparative analysis in article 4 rests on an analysis of reading of eight French tragedies featuring Cleopatra from the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Just as in article 1, the analysis both traces transformation diachronically and synchronically, yet only in relation to one figure. Both articles read more than one text (13 in article 3 and 8 in article 4), yet with different scopes. Whereas article 1 compares Cleopatra and Sophonisba both with each other and across time, article 4 focuses on Cleopatra and expands the analysis with a reading of paratextual writings such as contemporaneous prefaces and poetics and, in addition, an analysis of selected Greek and Roman poetic and historical works on Cleopatra. In this way, the article substitutes the conceptual approach of article 3 or the cultural perspective in article 1 with a literary historical informed contextualization of one figure.

This approach is suited to bring out more nuances and draws attention to differentiating elements of different types of literary texts (for example the historical perspective in Plutarch vis-à-vis Cassius Dio), while computational analysis subsumes a highlighting of just one, deemed key feature, and effaces other subtle differences. The same goes for article 1 which leaves more subtle differences of specific genre classifications or political allusions aside to gain overview over the literary field at large. In this way, the conceptual difference between computational or other kinds of distant reading and traditional literary text analysis is not between scale and detail but rather between synthesis and multiplicity.

### 6.3. Never just reading

The remaining two articles (articles 2 and 5) read one selected tragedy. Both analyses focus on a particular monologue, while also relating this passage to the tragedy in its totality. The articles came about as conference papers (article 2 for the 67th Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in 2021; article 5 for the conference Scènes de spectres/Ghost scenes in 2021). This format made it productive to

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63 David Hasberg Zirak-Schmidt, Sofie Kluge, Anastasia Ladekoged Larn and Rasmus Vangshardt, "Epilogue: Reflections on Historical Comparativism Prompted by the Case of Sophonisba," 219-220.
focus on one key passage in relation to one theoretical concept given the time constraints in a presentation. The textual examples were expanded for the article format. Contrary to the other articles, the analysis pays attention to such detailed stylistic and poetic elements as metaphors, rime and alliterations. Both also departs from a theoretical engagement with Walter Benjamin to stress the presented tragedy's engagement with broader literary and cultural debate in the form of intertextuality and contemporaneous historiography. While these two articles rest on a close reading of a particular passage, I still retain the term literary text analysis for the approach as a whole as the analysis rests as much on a reconstruction of the sixteenth century's aesthetic framework as a reading of the text itself. As Margaret Cohen has argued, close reading falls short when working with non-canonical traditions: "Close reading, as it is generally practices, depends on a naturalized set of aesthetic expectations derived precisely from a history of reading the works that have not fallen out of circulation."124 The articles turn to aspects outside the texts themselves to reconstruct their tragic aesthetic.

Whereas articles 3 and 4 work within a paradigm of exhaustibility (comparing all available French tragedies) to claim insight, articles 2 and 5 treat one tragedy as representative. This brings us back to the question of the exemplary text. In "Narratology in the Archive of Literature" Cohen outlines what she calls a method of literary archaeology to engage meaningfully with non-canonized genres, texts and authors. To remedy the inadequacy of close reading when faced with the archive, she proposes a strategic rather than a close reading perspective which entails at the outset to read for patterns before choosing 'the representative example'. A method which she characterizes in the following:

This example might be a work in a genre where many of the features are clustered together. Or it might be a work in a genre at the time it was emergent. Precisely because such a work's features are incompletely perfected, the genres framing it are visible and can help define the genre's specificity. Such a use of the representative example could be confused with close reading, since it focuses on a single text. But the text takes on its importance as the abstraction of a class rather than in its unique specificity.125

124 Margaret Cohen, The Sentimental Education of the Novel, 21.
Cohen suggest one way for literary historians to justify their use of the exemplary text as one which based on extensive yet never exhaustive reading—what Cohen calls ‘just enough reading’—displays key features for the genre at large. Cohen pervasively lays out a path for seeking patterns within literary analysis within traditional literary analysis. Following Cohen, the articles bring forth Montreux’s *La Sophonisbe* and Jodelle’s *Cléopâtre captive* as two such exemplary texts. While Jodelle’s tragedy is the closest to a canonical text one can find in sixteenth-century drama, Montreux is located at the periphery of the literary field. Much of Montreux’s work still lacks modern critical edition, and he has received condescending treatment as “un des auteurs les plus insipidus, les plus ennuyeux, les plus fastidieux qui aient jamais existé.” The two tragedies are also located at the very beginning of the rediscovery of Greek and Roman styled tragedy fifty years later respectively. This time span makes them interesting as illustrative examples.

The tragedies are also treated in the comparative analysis of article 1, 3 and 4 which comes back to the fruitful combination of computational and literary text analysis, both comparative and one-work-focused. While literary readings in article 3 of specific scenes or tragedies was intended to check the computational analysis, the (more) texted focused analyses of articles 2 and 5 aim to stand alongside the computational analysis as building blocks of a larger exploration of gender and historicity. The literary textual analyses and the computational and other distant reading approaches are fruitful in combination because of their different affective engagement with the text, what Piper calls the third law of computational hermeneutics to stress how new digital tools, “impacts argument not solely through the new truths it produces, but also in the ways it changes our affective attachments to the texts that we read.” The pleasure normally associated with reading is hard to find in computational analysis’ abstract modelling. Put another way, computational tools yield new analytical and theoretical insights, but I would never have pursued this path, if I had not been fascinated—and estranged—by Jodelle’s and Montreux’s dramatic universe first. My choice of these two tragedies as exemplary rests on non-statistical judgment calls and my pleasure in reading them.

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126 Ibid., 60-61.
127 On the importance of Jodelle, see Charles Mazouer, *La tragédie de la renaissance*, 258.
129 Andrew Piper, “Novel Devotions,” 92. For a similar point see Franco Moretti who in looking back on this article “Network Theory, Plot Analysis” notes how did not need netowrk theory but needed the abstractions of the dramas as network visualisations to reach his conclusions, see *Distant Reading*, 211.
The combination of computational and literary text analysis is difficult to carry out in a single article, as part of one coherent argument, due to their different value claims and level of abstraction. A challenge which the anthological format dispenses with. This remains, perhaps, the main challenge for computational-hermeneutical work going forward: to integrate the different methods as combinable approaches in the reading process.

7. Critical Assessment of Results and Contribution to the Field

After the above introduction and laying out of the intervention into the field as well as the theoretical and methodological approaches, I now turn to a discussion of the main results and perspectives of the five articles which form the analytical core of this dissertation. In the following, I will present a summary of the main results of the articles one by one, before, briefly, discussing their joint contribution to the field.

7.1. Summing up article 1

Article 1 “Introduction: Rediscovering Sophonisba in Early Modern Europe” puts forward three main reasons for the widespread interest in Sophonisba in early modern European drama and poetry. Overall, the article lays bare, on the one hand, a long and continued engagement with this minor figure from Roman history and, on the other, a striking diversity in treatments of her. As the first reason for Sophonisba's endurance, the article pinpoints two different perspectives found in the Greek and Roman historical sources with whom the early modern imagination worked. One tradition is represented by Livy who depicts Sophonisba as a dangerous patriot and femme fatale who was in danger of disturbing the Roman campaign of Scipio Africanus during the Second Punic War. Though Livy praises Sophonisba's determinacy to die, she ultimately serves as a lesson on the importance of remaining unmoved by passions. By giving up Sophonisba, Masinissa turns away from his—racialized Numidian—lust and towards Roman virtue. The other tradition is found in Appian who told that Sophonisba and Masinissa had previously been engaged to be married. This made Sophonisba less of a calculated seductress and more of a prey of changing political alliances. This in turn transformed Sophonisba and Masinissa from lustful characters into pitiable lovers.
The article argues that dramatists and poets were drawn to the Sophonisba material because of the complexity of the classical tradition. Dramatists and poets display an awareness of both versions which points to a direct engagement with the historical source materials and not only to the first dramatic rendering of the story by Gian Giorgio Trissino. In this way, the article reappraises the importance of Trissino's _Sofonisba_ (written 1514-15, published 1524, performed posthumously 1562) so often evoked by scholarship and suggests that the tragedy is better understood as part of a network of intertextual references. Part of this network was an original playing around with the character gallery and sympathies as presented in the historical accounts. The different historical expositions by Livy and Appian left dramatists with room for poetic invention as both Sophonisba and Masinissa are secondary characters in the historical sources.

Following this, the article links the duration of the Sophonisba story with the contemporaneous interest in Roman history as the second main reason for its popularity. The interest in Greek and Roman styled tragedy coincides with a translation boom of Greek historians in the same period. Besides Appian, the article also mentions the importance of the Greek historian and moralist Plutarch whose biographies of Greek and Roman men in the _Parallel Lives_ inspired dramatists across Europe. The claim here is twofold. First, Plutarch's presentation of the past focuses on the motivations and fates of humans over political or natural events. The relationship between history and tragedy and the (French) translation of Plutarch is explored in more depth in article 4. Article 1 connects the interest in Plutarch with a more general reappraisal of Roman history through a Greek perspective. In the case of Sophonisba, Appian's information about Sophonisba and Masinissa's betrothal was used to question the legitimacy of Scipio. Consequentially, the article locates Sophonisba as a key figure in early modern engagements with Roman history much like, I would like here to add, Julius Cesar who has received a thought-provoking prominence over someone like Sophonisba in modern scholarship which, in turn, has formed modern understanding of the thematic interest of this dramatic tradition.

Thirdly, the article points to the use of Sophonisba as an enduring political allegory. Surprisingly, she went across the confessional and political divides which increasingly tore Europe apart in the early modern period such as the French Wars of Religion or, I will add here, the Thirty Years’ War. Independently of such divides, Sophonisba was often used as a reflection on the devastating consequences
of war and the importance of good government with a particular gendered focus on women who, like Sophonisba, suffer from the hardships of war and strife by being unable to control their own fate.

These three reasons stress Sophonisba as a shared and potent figure in the early modern imagination. The article builds on analyses of French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Cretan, English and German drama, poetry and one example of visual art from roughly the period 1300-1700, and thus gives a broader cultural background on which to assess the studied French tradition of historical drama. Furthermore, as the legendary status of Cleopatra is well established, the article brings out the importance of Sophonisba as a just as paramount early modern figure.

7.2. Summing up article 2

Article 2 “The tragedy of being a historical creature: Gender and history in Nicolas de Montreux’s *La Sophonisba* (1601)” goes into more depth with the Sophonisba figure in the French context by paying close attention to Montreux’s reworking of the figure in the tragedy *La Sophonisba* (1601). The article stresses Sophonisba as a reflection on the precariousness of living with its unexpected reversals. The article engages Walter Benjamin’s description of the female mourning play martyr and her archetypical fight to protect her chastity faced with a tyrant as a meaningful parallel to Montreux’s framing of Sophonisba and Scipio. My reading highlights how Montreux presents Sophonisba and Syphax’s joint defeat as a reflection on unpredictable and uncontrollable force and not, as their victor, Scipio, would have it, as a consequence of divine right.

The contribution of the article is both theoretical and analytical. First, the article digs out Benjamin’s notion of the allegorical embeddedness of the female body in the mourning play. An aspect which has not received sufficient attention in scholarship. This aspect is important because the female body in Benjamin’s theory is connected to the mourning play’s historical turn. In this reading, the female martyr is both a specific historical character (such as Mary Stuart, Catharina of Georgia, Sophonisba etc.)

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and an allegorical figure. As such, she embodies the mourning play's dialectical contemplation of contemporaneous political and historical reality on the one hand and, on the other, the allegorical surpassing of this in a more abstract reflection on human mortality. As I have already discussed, Benjamin's aim in the *Ursprung* book is comparative, and the tyrant-martyr figuration is a common feature in baroque drama at large. Yet the French tradition is strikingly absent from the book. The article highlights the female martyr figure as such another common feature.

Second, the article posits a link between tragedy, historicity and gender in a French dramatic tradition with Montreux as an exemplary text. This leads to an analysis of Montreux's Sophonisba as a martyr in the Benjaminian sense in contrast to existing studies on martyrs in French drama. These distinguish Christian religious martyrs dying for their faith from Roman allegorical ones. In contrast, the article uses Benjamin to propose the fruitful merging of these two groups and present a martyr figure beyond confessional conflict and a perception of (Roman) history that is more than an allusion to the French Wars of Religion. The article interprets Montreux's use of the Sophonisba figure as more than a comment on contemporaneous political and historical events and, rather, as a medium for reflection on abstract concepts such as divine justice, chance, and human agency. These themes have a bearing for Montreux's own time, yet also tackle how to make sense of earthly historical life, or, what the article characterizes as the tragedy's historico-philosophical dimension. Following this, the article highlights the interest in Greek and Roman history writing discussed in article 1 but substantiates it by accentuating a connection between an interest in Roman history as dramatic subject matter and historicity. Taking its cue from Benjamin, tyrant and martyr are explored as dramatic figures which juxtapose two different versions of history. The article argues that the dialogical format proves itself particularly apt for an open-ended discussion between these different notions. Montreux's reworking of the historical sources and of previous French tragedies showcases an engagement with history. In particular, Sophonisba comes to exemplify human mortality as part of the tragedy's gendered historical reflection.

### 7.3. Summing up article 3

Article 3 “What is a protagonist? A computationally assisted analysis of the character centrality of Cleopatra and Sophonisba in early modern French drama” returns to the question of the popularity of Sophonisba examined in article 1 but adds a comparative discussion with Cleopatra. The cultural-historical
perspective in article 1 and the theoretical ditto in article 2 is replaced with an interest in formal features. The article looks at the importance of both Sophonisba and Cleopatra in 13 French tragedies from 1553-1663. By using social network analysis, the article pinpoints a gendered discrepancy between the tragedies’ structure and the treatment of these tragedies in existing scholarship. In the majority of cases, scholarships’ focus on title character(s) misses the significance of the two female characters within the dramatic structure. As such, the article makes a wider methodological claim, questioning the traditional interpretative importance of title character(s). Titles can and do carry interpretative meaning as they focus the readers’ or spectators’ attention on a specific character, term or concept, and this focus can indeed be intended by the dramatist or publisher. However, the present analysis aims to challenge the ‘title character fallacy’ questioning whether traditional notions of protagonism suit this dramatic tradition.

In the case of Cleopatra, the social network analysis uncovers a character who interacts more and with more different characters than Mark Antony, also in the tragedies which do not (solely) carry her name such as Robert Garnier’s *Marc Antoine* (1578) and Jean Mairét’s *Le Marc Antoine, ou la Cléopâtre* (1635). These and the other tragedies, place Antony at the periphery of the network with few interlocutors. The article interprets this as a structural underpinning of a character portrait of a man bereft of friends and supporters. In contrast, Cleopatra moves beyond the tragedy’s different groups of both female and male as well as Egyptian and Roman characters.

For her part, Sophonisba features as title heroine in all the here analyzed tragedies, yet only one tragedy places her at the center of character interactions: Corneille’s *Sophonisbe*. Corneille is the first and only dramatist to present Sophonisba as the character around which all interaction centers. The other dramatists place her more at the periphery with no or little interaction beyond one or two female companions. This difference between Sophonisba and Cleopatra is already found in the historical sources where Sophonisba never encounters Scipio, while Plutarch and Cassius Dio tell of Cleopatra’s meeting with Octavian after Antony’s death. As such, dramatists stay close to the sources and only rarely invent situations—one notable example in seventeenth-century tragedy about Cleopatra is discussed in article 4. The other tragedies have Masinissa or the chorus at the center of dramatic interaction which points to a stress on Masinissa’s dilemma caught between his marriage vow to Sophonisba and his pledge of allegiance to Scipio as depicted by Antoine de Montchrestien’s *La Carthaginoise, ou La Liberté* (1601). In all besides
Corneille, Sophonisba becomes someone to talk about more often than someone to talk with. Contrary, Cleopatra does most of the talking herself.

The article claims that these two figures' prominence is achieved in the dramatic structure. The dramatists stay close to the sources when it comes to character gallery and plot. Their elaboration lies in their dramatic depiction of social relations.

7.4. **Summing up article 4**

Article 4 “Tragic heroine or villainous character? The many faces of Cleopatra in early modern French drama (org. Tragisk hjältinna eller skurkaktig rollfigur? Kleopatragestaltens förskjutningar i det tidigmoderna franska dramat)” brings out a significant shift across the sixteenth and late seventeenth century in dramatizations on Cleopatra. In this period, Cleopatra goes from being a reflection on change in Jodelle, Garnier and Montreux to a morally problematic figure in the tragedies by Isaac de Benserade, Mairet, Charles Chaulmer, Corneille, and Jean de la Chapelle. While this change is interesting in itself and goes hand in hand with a turning away from Plutarch as dominant source, the article connects it with changing norms of tragedy, notably the genre's relationship with history and morality.

The article discusses both sixteenth and seventeenth-century tragedies, yet it primarily uses the later tragedies to pinpoint key features of the sixteenth-century dramatists. By exploring sixteenth-century definitions of tragedy, the article points to how tragedy was understood as a staging of historical powerful men's sudden fall from grace. The article highlights the understanding of the historical nature of the tragic characters as a prerequisite of tragedy's instructive quality and entertainment. This is connected with the popularity of Plutarch who according to his French translator, Jacques Amyot, transforms history into a philosophical meditation on human life and its tragic ups and downs. The article highlights how Jodelle, Garnier and Montreux make Cleopatra and not Antony the tragic example to mediate on. All depict Cleopatra and her death as a reflection on unpredictability which is said to point to the conditions of human life more generally. As such, they turn Antony's death into a tragic event in the life of Cleopatra.

The article locates a shift in the seventeenth century beginning with Mairet's *Le Marc-Antoine, ou La Cléopâtre* which juxtaposes Cleopatra with Octavia Minor presented as an incarnation of virtue. This questions the previous exemplary status of Cleopatra. The article argues that Octavia's exemplarity is of a radical different kind than Cleopatra's. In the sixteenth century, Cleopatra's fate is
framed as a story about human passion. Jodelle, Garnier and Montreux depict Cleopatra as a constant lover and loving mother, yet without omitting her bad traits. In these, Cleopatra is not an exemplary person. Her tragic fate is. Her misfortune is in this sense human, all too human. In contrast, Octavia is an ideal which an audience might aspire too. As such, the seventeenth-century dramatists remain interested in female figures, yet radically different ones and for different reasons. While the seventeenth-century dramatists stage virtue incarnated on stage, the earlier sixteenth-century predecessors engage with questions of virtue and vice indirectly.

7.5. Summing up article 5

Article 5 “Ghosting the past: Exploring Mark Antony’s ghost as an allegory on history in Jodelle’s Cléopâtre captive” continues the discussion of tragedy’s reflection on history from article 2 and 4 but adds a discussion on contemporaneous historiographical, notably the French historian, translator and professor of Greek, Louis le Roy (c.1510-1577) and his concept of ‘vicissitude’. Like article 2, this last article in this dissertation takes a closer look at one sixteenth-century tragedy: Jodelle’s Cléopâtre captive. The article focuses its attention on act 1 which features a lengthy monologue of 106 lines by Mark Antony’s ghost. The article deals with the figure of Cleopatra only indirectly prompted by reflections on what role Antony might play in a tragedy about Cleopatra.

The article interprets Antony’s ghost as an embodied reflection on ‘vicissitude’ as both a tragic concept and a historiographical one. The article once again turns to Benjamin, yet this time his discussion of the ghost figure as an integral part of the mourning play’s fusion of Christian interpretative framework with historical characters. Where other scholars have pointed the ghost figure as a plot device or symbolic reappearance of the past, the analysis uses Benjamin to discusses the ghost figure as an embodiment of the mourning play’s allegorical form and historical interest. As such, the ghost figure works in much the same way as the martyr figure as a dramatic figuration to engage audiences in critical reflection on history.

The article argues that Jodelle merges a Senecan protatic ghost with a ghostly dream vision from the Octavia to produce a ghost which both comments on the action and takes part in it. Antony’s ghost ponders the possibility of divine intent. Interestingly, this revolves around a reflection on the meaning and direction of history. His tragic fall is presented as, on the one hand, a just punishment for his
own wrongdoings and, on the other, as a sudden outburst by jealous gods. The article argues that the pity which audiences are encouraged to feel for Antony stems from the fact that his tragedy is not only his own fault but a common human predicament of enduring life's unforeseeable reversals. The article ends with pinpointing common points between tragic reversal and Louis le Roy's presentation of vicissitude as both God-given order and an aim to judge historical changes in their cultural and historical situation independent of moral meaning. The comparison stresses Jodelle's tragedy as part of a historiographical movement away from exemplary moral history and towards history writing as relative and variable.

7.6. Overall discussion

Taken together, the five articles comprising the main body of this dissertation stress French tragedy's enduring engagement with history as subject matter and historico-philosophical reflection with their reworkings of Cleopatra and Sophonisba as analytical case studies. The articles uncover a multitude of displacements and different framings of these two figures in order to get hold of this historical tradition, from Nicolas de Montreux's staging of Cleopatra as a virtuous woman comparable to Roman figures such as Portia and Lucretia in Cléopâtre to Pierre Corneille's depiction of a calculated seductress seeking power over love in La Mort de Pompée, or from the focus on Masinissa's dilemma in Antoine de Montchrestien's La Carthaginoise, ou La Liberté to a tragic love story in Jean Mairet's Sophonisbe. The dissertation argues that these changes are not adequately understood with reference to altering dramatic aesthetics or performance practices between so-called 'humanist' and 'classical' tragedy. Rather, I argue for reading these as changes in tragedy's use of allegory, morality and history. To discuss this tradition and its changes, I want to suggest that the generic classification 'historical drama' is a more precise and analytically rich subcategory of tragedy.

8. Conclusion: Introducing historical drama

As discussed in the subsection on terminologies, tragedies about Cleopatra and Sophonisba have received, and continue to receive a multitude of classifications. In my opinion, none sufficiently highlight this tradition as a reflection on history. Furthermore, the existing classifications do not sufficiently stress the endurance of this interest across such chronological demarcations as 'humanist', 'baroque' or 'classical'.

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Moreover, these terms put more emphasis on stylistic differences than framework. However, I share the endeavor to qualify and subdivide the term 'tragedy' underlying these various classifications. As discussed in several articles, the concept of tragedy was heavily debated by dramatists and theorists from the reintroduction of this term in the middle of the sixteenth century. The aim to delineate tragedy therefore falls well within the period’s own spirit.

I propose the term 'historical drama' as is not only brings content to the forefront and disperses with potentially misleading chronological limitations but also points to possible comparative exploration with contemporaneous European dramatic traditions such as the English history play which, despite recent criticism, remains in use. The English history play and the studied French historical drama co-exist and cross over, yet lack more comparative analysis. Moreover, I want to use the term to discuss differences within the French tradition.

My preference for the term 'historical drama' to tie together and reflect on the articles is inspired by Dirk Niefanger’s comparative work on historical drama (org. Geschichtsdrama). In his Geschichtsdrama der Frühen Neuzeit 1495-1773 (2005), Niefanger identifies a transtemporal and transnational dramatic tradition of historical drama. Niefanger’s work defines historical drama as an independent dramatic category to be understood on its own terms: "Mit der Neuakzentuierung der Vorstellung vom Geschichtsdrama treten Texte in den Vordergrund, deren geschichtsreflexives Potential bislang weitestgehend verkannt wurde." Identifying historical drama as a generic constant over such a considerable period of time, Niefanger admits, is a scholarly creation aiming to capture the evolving and historically specific traditions of historical drama while also providing a term for comparing these different

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131 Antoine Adam and Charles Mazouer have proposed the term ‘tragédie historique’ as a subcategory of French tragedy, yet for Adam this term is restricted to the 1630s, see Antoine Adam, Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle, 544-549; Charles Mazouer, Le Théâtre français de la Renaisssance, 225-234.
traditions. As Niefanger stresses, his category is “nicht historisch gebunden aber historisch jeweils”. Niefanger’s work goes counter to essentializing one modern historical perception (historicism) as the prerequisite for historical drama (Goethe). In contrast, his book maps a multitude of different traditions shaped by different dramatic practices and historiographical trends, yet with a main focus on the German tradition. Niefanger mentions Corneille and Racine as comparative cases for the German mourning play tradition, and the earlier French tradition therefore remains to be explored as part of this tradition.

Niefanger pinpoints five features of historical drama across the different tradition studied in the book, which I will briefly discuss here. First, this kind of drama is characterized by a claim of authenticity, that is the drama claims to stage history. This ‘illusion of history’ can be created by including historical events or characters, yet the central point is not the actual historicity of these elements, only the drama’s claim to historical authenticity: “Ob das Drama tatsächlich auf historisches Geschehen rekurirt, spielt natürlich keine Rolle.” Following Niefanger, it becomes less interesting to superimpose a modern understanding of what counts as history than to question whether the dramas stage the events and characters as historical. This opens up for exploring mythological and biblical subject matters as part of this period’s historical drama. This also differentiates Niefanger’s term from Mazouer which differentiates between historical, biblical, mythological and contemporaneous historical tragedies. Where Mazouer looks at subject matter, Niefanger highlights dramatic form. According to Niefanger, such an inclusive category of history makes drama prismatic for studying a period’s perception of history (“den historischen Diskurs”), of what counts as history in a given period.

Second, historical drama claims historicity not only for its characters or event but also in the dramatic situation itself. The characters might use words recognizably from a different time or mix past religious systems and Christian dogma. In historical drama, the past literally returns on stage. A such, the dramatic medium constitutes a reflective engagement with history. This reappearance always contains an

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135 Ibid., 29.
136 Ibid., 40.
137 For Niefanger’s discussion of the state of the art on historical drama, see ibid., 11-24.
138 Ibid. 36. Niefanger explicitly references the French literary theorist Roland Barthes and his essay on “the reality effect (org. l’effet de réel) which claims the inclusion of objects without narrative value into fiction as signs of reality aimed at convincing the reader of the credibility of the fictive universe, see Roland Barthes, “L’effet de réel” Communications, 11 (1968), 84-89.
139 Ibid., 36.
element of interpretation.\textsuperscript{141} This is connected with the third key feature which highlights how historical drama stages an event with significance for posterity (Niefanger mentions Andreas Gryphius's presentation of the beheading of king Charles I as the death of a saint in \textit{Carolum Stuardus}, 1657),\textsuperscript{142}, and the fourth element which stresses how the dramatic presentation engages with or even questions historiography by including quotes or in other ways referencing accounts found in historical sources, or by having characters situate the plot in a wider historical context in a prologue. In these ways, the dramatic plot is given a broader historical scope.\textsuperscript{143}

The fifth characteristic concerns historical drama's pondering of the past in relation to its own time, or what Niefanger calls “in der politisch-gesellschaftlichen Öffentlichkeit”.\textsuperscript{144} Just as important as the drama's claim to authenticity is its contemporaneous engagement. When historical drama stages a king, this king is not—or not only—interesting as a private individual but as a political representative. Though he does not mention him at this time of the book, Niefanger circles around some of the same aspects as Benjamin and his reading of the mourning play's engagement with history. Niefanger's fifth characteristic is close to Benjamin's point about the ruler as the representative of history as previously discussed in my theoretical section. One major difference is Benjamin's highlighting of the mourning play's allegorical shaping of the historical content. However, I do not see these two as mutually exclusive. Niefanger is defining common features across different aesthetic traditions, and Benjamin highlights a specific baroque allegorical tradition. This allegorical framework is a key feature of the French sixteenth-century tradition and a key differentiating factor between the Sophonisba/Cleopatra representations of for example Montreux and Mairet which I will discuss below. At the core of Niefanger's definition is the perception of historical drama as a dramatically formed and historically conditioned reflection on historical truth: Drama both reflects and questions contemporaneous historiographical trends. As such, it is to be understood as a serious and independent kind of history writing.

I find Niefanger's combination of historicity and contemporaneous reflection within the historical drama particularly illumination for the French tradition. The analyzed dramatists follow the

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 36-37.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 37-38.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 38-39.
\textsuperscript{144} The full quote reads: “Das Geschehen spielt sich zumindest in relevanten Teilen in der politisch-gesellschaftlichen Öffentlichkeit ab.” Ibid., 39.
general tendency in sixteenth-century drama and name their historical sources in detail in the "Argument" prefacing the published dramatic text. Here they also frequently draw attention to any fictitious elements. This tradition is continued with Corneille who elaborates on his deviations from his sources to refute critique resulting from the performance of his plays at some length. Following Niefanger, I read this as a claim of authenticity.

The arguments also relate the dramatic plot to bigger historical events and thereby reflect on the events' significance for their audience. Sometimes history's significance is invoked already in the subtitle as in Garnier's Porcie, tragédie francoise, represantant la cruelle & sanglante saison des guerres Civiles de Rome : propre & conuenable pour y voir depeincte la calamité de ce temps (1568). The suffering of Portia is brought forward as an adequate and fitting reflection for the disasters of the ongoing French Wars of Religion. Garnier here relates his own time to a historical event. With Niefanger and the category of historical drama in mind the proposition could also be reversed to highlight how Garnier interprets a historical event in light of his own time. The tragedy of Portia is a minor event in the Greek and Roman historical sources but with new historical significance for Garnier and his time.

I want to end this first part of this dissertation with outlining three perspectives inspired by the term historical drama and prompted by the analytical work of the five articles.

8.1. A multi-generic tradition

If we look at the dramatic interest in history under the broad term of historical drama, one feature springs to mind: in France, history reveals itself as tragedy. One could argue that the term 'historical tragedy' might therefore suit the French case better, but this would exactly make one lose sight of comparative differences which is why I suggest using the term historical drama here. All the dramas on Cleopatra and Sophonisba are designated as tragedies. This is initially not surprising as they stage the tragic downfall and reversals of their main characters. Interestingly, other retellings from the same period stage the same events as (more) comic. I will here restrict myself to three English comparative examples.

Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra (1607, printed 1623)\(^{45}\) ruptures the solemnity of Cleopatra's suicide so central to the French dramatists by the entrance of Clown. Clown is a buffoonish character who seems unable to understand—or unwilling to accept—his designated role as simple

\(^{45}\) Listed as The tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra in the First Folio.
messenger who brings Cleopatra the snake in order for her to commit suicide. Clown needs to be told five times to leave, and as editor John Wilders notes, his talk is full of sexual double-entendre on words such as "lie" and "die". This sexual undertone mocks Cleopatra's self-staging as a tragic character. Cleopatra herself seems aware of this and foresees that her and Antony's ends can be told as either tragedy or comedy depending on the perspective. Earlier in the same scene, she tells Iras of her fear of becoming a laughing matter on stage:

Cleopatra: Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras. Saucy lictors
Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
Bald us out o'tune. The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us and present
Our Alexandrian revels; Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth; and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I'th' posture of a whore.

Cleopatra's words are highly ironical as she, in Shakespeare's version, would actually have been played by a boy actor, and forms part of the play's general play on the theatrum mundi trope. The appearance of the clown functions as a comic interlude and fractures the tragic framework. In Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, history may be tragic to the characters themselves but offers comic relief for the theatre goers.

This English combination of the tragic and comic register is also found in Samuel Brandon's The tragicomoedi of the vertuous Octauia (1598) which tells the story of Cleopatra and Antony's death from

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147 Ibid., n251.
148 Ibid., act 5, scene 2, L213-219.
149 For an overview of the discussion of Cleopatra played by a boy actor in both scholarship and performance history as well as an interpretation of its performative significance, see Juliet Dusinberre, "Squeaking Cleopatras: Gender and performance in Antony and Cleopatra," in J. C. Bulman (ed.). Shakespeare, theory and performance (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1995), 49-70.
151 See also Kluge: "In the theatrum mundi of ever changing human fortunes, these perspectives occupy the stage, yet to the seventeenth-century dramatist they are still mere stories invented by God for his own amusement, the shadows of a dream." Ibid., 326.
the perspective of Antony's wife Octavia. As discussed, Octavia also appears in two seventeenth-century French tragedies, Mairet's *Le Marc-Antoine ou la Cléopâtre* and Jean de La Chapelles *Cléopâtre* (1682). Yet neither Mairet nor La Chapelle make her the title character. The choice influences Brandon's labelling of his drama as a tragicomedy ('tragicomoedi') and, in turn, his presentation of history. Where a dramatist such as Mairet presents Octavia as a tragic figure, Brandon shifts the place where history is told from, and tells a story of a virtue revindicated.

*The tragicomoedi of the vertuous Octauia* takes place in Rome far from the dramatic events themselves. The audiences follow Octavia and her distress at the different news being brought to her about the (wrong)doings of Antony and Cleopatra in Alexandria. Despite the other characters' endeavors to make her reject Antony, Octavia remains the constant wife, hoping for Antony's reformation until the end. She is a perfect embodiment of virtue, and the ending chorus song stresses her as a monument which testifies to women's capability for virtue:

Time shall endeare thy name,
With honors breath make sweet:
The garland is most meete,
For such as winne the same;
Thy virtue best deserued.
Whiles any sparke of worth,
Doth lodge in womans brest:
Be euermore henceforth,
In noblest mindes preserued.\(^{5a}\)

The tragic in the tragicomedy is justified by the showcasing of Octavia's suffering caused by Antony's abandonment of her and the 'comic' by the fact that she stays alive. Octavia's life is a tragedy of circumstances, and she must bear her fate with patience and strength. In the end virtue is victorious. Antony's death liberates Octavia. In Brandon, history proves moldable depending on who's story is told.

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Like Cleopatra, Sophonisba is given a comical turn in John Marston's *The Wonder of Women, or The Tragedie of Sophonisba* (1606). In Marston's play, Syphax is an unscrupulous man overcome with lust. In act 3, scene 1 he tries to rape Sophonisba who manages to keep her chastity by drugging a slave and placing him in Syphax's bed. In act 4, Syphax's renewed attempts to master Sophonisba by engaging the witch Erichto once again fails, as she tricks him into having sex with her instead of Sophonisba. Marston's Syphax is as far removed from the dignified captive king found in Montreux as could be imagined. These farcical elements offer comic relief amidst the tragic fate of Sophonisba—who still dies at the end, hence the play's classification as a 'tragedie'. Amidst these comic confusion scenes, the play pays novel attention to the political power-play behind all the love intrigue. Act 2, scene 1 opens with a parliamentary scene in Carthage where Sophonisba, despite having been married to Masinissa at the opening of the play, is given to Syphax. Sophonisba accepts the Senate's wishes, yet warns them of the consequences of betraying promises sanctioned by God. The play takes great liberties with the historical material, and in his initial address to his readers, Marston makes a point of working as a poet and not as a historian: "Know, that I haue not labored in this poeme, to tie my selfe to relate any thing as an historian but to inlarge euery thing as a Poet". This poetic elaboration involves not only inventing character and events but also a playing around with different modalities. Where history seems to have only one register in Marston's view (as expressed in the prologue)—the serious—, historical drama can combine the serious with the comic.

Of course, history was not always a laughing matter for English dramatists. John Dryden's play about Antony and Cleopatra, *All for Love* (1677), is devoid of comic elements and stage the events as a

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54 Ibid., act 4, scene 1-act 5, scene 1.
55 Sophonisba My answer's thus, What's safe to Carthage shall be sweet to us.
Carthalon Right worthy.
Hanno Magnus Royalist.
Gelosso O very woman!
Sophonisba But 'tis not safe for Carthage to destroy. Be most unjust, cunningly politics, Your head's still under heaven. O trust to Fate: Gods prosper more a just than crafty state; 'Tis less disgrace to have a pitted loss, Than shamefull victory.
Ibid, act 2, scene 1, l.110-118.
56 Ibid., A2.
moral tale about “unlawful love.” Likewise Nathaniel Lee’s *Sophonisba, Or, Hannibal’s Overthrow* (1676) stresses the political aspects of the story just as Marston, yet without the latter’s comical inclusions. However, any inclusion of comical elements seems to have been far from the French dramatists’ minds. In contrast to Marston, Shakespeare and Brandon, their style of historical drama seems to have one dominant register: the tragic. As John Lyons has pointed out, French “tragicomedy is seldom historically precise and is set vaguely in time and place. The characters’ problems have little effect on the historical world as the spectators knows it.” Yet French historical tragicomedies do exist. Hugh Gaston Hall has discussed one example particularly illumination for the present discussion, Jean Desmaret (1595-1676) and his *Scipion, tragi-comédie* (1639). The drama plays on Scipio’s famous continence and stage a Scipio who overcomes his temporarily infatuation with a female prisoner. Despite Scipio’s momentary lack of self-control, virtue triumphs in the end (“de voir en un ouvrage ou triomphe la vertu”). Desmaret justifies his genre classification with reference to his combination of illustrious characters and serious incidents with a happy ending. According to Hall, Desmaret is inspired by the Spanish *comedia* in his framing of the events under the headline of tragicomedy. More apparently evident is how Desmaret shifts the perspective from Sophonisba to Scipio which renders history with another mode, one which lets virtue triumph in the end. Historical tragicomedy seems to need another kind of protagonist, one who is more clearly in the wrong than the French presentations of Cleopatra and Sophonisba.

These differences roughly outlined above revel a spectrum of historical drama in need of further comparative analysis. While the existence of a tragedy such as Lee’s *Sophonisba, Or, Hannibal’s*
*Overthrow* and a tragicomedy such as Desmaret’s *Scipion* hinders any easy national essentialization, the French dramatizations stand out for their dominant tragic register incarnated in their complex heroines.

8.2. **Gender, allegory and spectacle**

If French dramatists share an interest in Cleopatra and Sophonisba as intriguing historical characters, their different treatment is due to changing perceptions of the didactive nature of drama and allegory. These elements are nowhere as evident as in the framing of Cleopatra’s and Sophonisba’s inconstancy. Both figures are united by accusations of insincerity going back to the Greek and Roman sources. Here, both women are depicted as politically ambitious and dangerously charming. The dramatists all take up this element as part of their character portrait and tragic intrigue, yet with markedly different emphasis and allegorical framework. Much of the attraction of the story of Cleopatra for Jodelle, Garnier and Montreux resides in the fact that inconstancy is presented as a female trait. Men can behave faithlessly but women are naturally of a more inconstant nature. The dramatists play around with this cultural and historical inheritance in a way which invokes Niefanger’s description of historical drama’s historicity. While the other dramatic characters expect Cleopatra to behave only to serve herself as if they had read about her in Dio Cassius or Lucan, she herself proclaims her constancy. In Montreux’s version even her most vehement opponent, Octavian, acknowledges his misreading at the end. As such, Cleopatra is at the same time the most inconstant and constant character. Cleopatra’s constancy on the one hand underscores her exemplarity as someone who is able to transcend her gender, and on the other hand makes her a powerful image of history’s changeability. Cleopatra embodies this principle of instability powerfully through her gender and points to this tradition of historical drama’s intermingling of gender, historicity and allegory.

Likewise, neither Montreux nor any of the other sixteenth-century dramatists found the need to amend the fact that Sophonisba married Masinissa while her first husband Syphax was still alive. Indeed, Montreux’s tragedy takes advantage of this and gives Syphax a major speaking part in order to juxtapose his fate of living in captivity with Sophonisba’s liberation through death. His claim of Sophonisba being the root of all his misfortune is not contradicted, just as Sophonisba’s love for Masinissa is left intentionally unclear. Like Cleopatra, the story of Sophonisba is said to point beyond itself and tell a tale of the precariousness of human life.
The association of women with sudden change is also found in Greek and Roman mythology which depicts chance (Tyche, Τύχη or Fortuna) as a woman. This highlights the historical and cultural association of women with change which Benjamin also circles around as discussed in article 2, and which would have been familiar to the French dramatists due to their humanist training. The ends of Cleopatra and Sophonisba carry a strong emblematic meaning, yet the tragedies’ use of them to reflect on history is a new addition to this genre. One popular precursor of the gender-historicity-allegory nexus is Giovanni Bocaccio (1313-1375) who includes both women in his De mulieribus claris (written 1361-62, published 1374). Bocaccio treats Cleopatra as a wicked woman, while Sophonisba is praised for her willingness to die despite her youth and gender. The didactive usefulness of these two as counter example and virtuous role model, respectively, rests on their divorce from any historical considerations. Just as the other women in the work, they are treated as moral figures without the historical significance Niefanger highlights for historical drama. Generally, emblematics are uninterested in historical accuracy and shape the historical events at will to suit a moral purpose.

In contrast, this dissertation stresses the dramatists’ reading and selection of their historical sources and engagement with historiographical concepts such as vicissitude or Plutarchian biography. This concern about historical veracity combined with an emblematic allegorical structure is central to the sixteenth-century dramatists. In contrast, the later part of the tradition seems more interested in their protagonists as historical characters in the modern sense of internally coherent and believable. This subtle difference explains why Sophonisba’s two husbands suddenly became a problem for a seventeenth-century audience; Montreux is interested in Sophonisba’s situation, while Mairet’s and d’Aubignac’s controversy with Corneille over Sophonisba’s virtue—with which I began this dissertation—points to a different perception of her as a historical character who must be consistent and relatable. In the sixteenth-century tradition, both Sophonisba and Cleopatra are much more morally ambiguous. The sixteenth-century dramatists feel no need to justify them but portray them as on the one hand inconstant and destructive.

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forces and on the other as constant wives. They are wronged victims yet not absolved from guilt, just as they are close to power yet without real power. The dramatists thrive on and exploit these complexities.

In contrast, later playgoers expect to see virtue incarnated on stage. This points to a different notion of historical drama. For someone like d'Aubignac, audiences need to be able to empathize with the characters in order to be moved,\(^{65}\) and the fundamental problem with Corneille's Sophonisba is precisely her lack of vertu.\(^{66}\) The success of the drama rests on the credibility of the characters and the plot. In other words, the historicity of the drama must not offend contemporaneous moral values. For someone like Jodelle and Montreux, the credibility and exemplary quality resides in its historical content: this and this happened, they seem to say, learn from it, if you can.

Following this, it is worth reevaluating the much-noted didactive nature of sixteenth-century dramatic tradition. As often described in the period, tragedy and history are connected by their exemplarity, yet the moral lesson in historical drama proves much more difficult to assess. Sixteenth-century dramatists stress how the tragic mode does something with the historical material. In his argument to the already invoked Porcie, Garnier stresses his choice to elaborate on the historical facts of his sources for pathetic effect:

Voilà l'abrégé de l'histoire, où j'ai fondé le project de cette Tragédie, que vous verrez, Lecteur, au XLVII livre de Dion, au quatrième et cinquième d'Appian en sa guerre Civile, et en Plutarque aux vies de Cicéron, de Brute et d'Antoine. Au reste je lui ai cousu une pièce de fiction de la mort de la Nourrice, pour l'envelopper d'avantage en choses funèbres et lamentables, et en ensanglanter la catastrophe.\(^{67}\)

Garnier names his specific sources with great detail to point to his own invention of the death of a minor character. The drama ends with two suicides, one historical and one of his own invention. Portia kills herself by swallowing coal off stage. Her death is reported to the spectators and a terrified chorus by the


\(^{66}\) "Sophonisbe en est l'Heroïne; mais, helas, quelle Heroïne! elle n'a pas un seul sentiment de vertu..." Ibid., 148.

character Nourrice before she stabs herself on stage. By Garnier’s own account, this fictive element serves a dramatic function and underscores the tragic effect by making the spectacle sadder and bloodier. While the historical sources give the drama its authenticity, Garnier’s invention codes the narrative as a tragedy.

The same wording is found in the argument of Montreux’s *La Sophonisbe*: “Sa nourrice ensanglante l[a] catastrophe de son sang. Appian Alexandrin et Plutarque escit ce fait en la vie de Scipio l’Affriquain.” Given the popularity of Garnier, Montreux is very likely to paraphrase Garnier and following him in understanding historical drama as an effectful elaboration of historical facts. I mention the concurrence between Garnier and Montreux to stress the endurance of historical drama’s fictitious license, also in relation to my material. In both cases, the word "catastrophe" can mean both a plot element (by referring to the suicides in the end, the literal catastrophe of the plays) and akin to an Aristotelian concept of tragic effect (by referring to the tragedy’s rendering of fear and pity, φόβος, fóbos and ἔλεος, éleos). In the first meaning, the catastrophe concerns the characters and in the second the spectators.

I believe that both meanings are intended. The central point for me seems to be Garnier’s and Montreux’s reflection on dramatic effect. The tragic medium does something with history which brings out new aspects of the historical events. It aims to present a living and breathing spectacle and not only tell historical facts. Dramatic renderings of history, Garnier and Montreux seem to say, rests on making the historical events, themselves sad and bloody, even more bloody and tragic.

The interest in figures such as Cleopatra and Sophonisba can be read as an extension of this aim for historical elaboration. What makes both Cleopatra and Sophonisba interesting compared to their male lovers is how they are framed as images of a common human predicament at the same time as they are depicted as transgressing this condition. In Montreux’s *La Sophonisbe*, both Sophonisba and Syphax are subject to the instability of human life. Their royal status does not protect them from the suffering and change. On the contrary, they fall the harder and more suddenly. Sophonisba is the embodiment of this condition, yet she also transgresses this law. By killing herself, she escapes the life of captivity which awaits Syphax. For all her mourning, Sophonisba’s death becomes liberating. This interpretation is put

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69 On the popularity of Garnier in the sixteenth century, see Charles Mazouer, *Le théâtre française de la renaissance*, 274.

forth by Montreux in his dedication to Monsieur Montgommery, count of Lorges and captain in the Catholic League in Brittany who helped the dramatist gain his liberty in a literal sense after his imprisonment as a soldier for the League:

Cecy est une liberté pour une autre: feu Monsieur de Lor[ges] vostre frere et vous me fistes libre de prison, et je vous offre la Sophonisbe libre de servitude. Mais qui vous cogostra ne s’estonnera moins de vostre acte que de celuy de ceste royne. Pourriez-vous retenir les Muses captives, vous qui l’estes souvent de leur doceur? Non plus pouvoit Sophonisbe servir aux serfs de son courages.

Montreux plays with liberty as both a political and poetic force. Like many of his fellow dramatists, Montreux participated directly in the French Wars of Religion, in his case on the side of the militant Catholic side, first as soldier and from 1585 as librarian for Philippe-Emmanuel de Lorraine, duke of Mercœur (1558-1602), a central figure within the League in Northern France and one of the most powerful regional opponents to Henry IV. One can be freed from political constraints (from prison or Roman captivity), but tragic poetry is itself always free. The tragedy becomes a celebration of both kinds of freedom. Read in this light, Sophonisba’s fate for all her suffering becomes an almost happy ending.

Likewise, Cleopatra’s suicide is a praiseworthy event full of defiance of Roman power in both Jodelle, Garnier and Montreux. All three tragedies place Cleopatra’s suicide at the near or very end as the dramatic climax. Jodelle ends with the chorus proclaiming the death of Cleopatra and her two waiting-women, Eras and Charmium, as a tragic spectacle:

Mais tant y a qu’il nous faudra ranger
Dessous les lois d’un vainqueur étranger,
Et désormais en notre ville apprendre
De n’oser plus contre César méoprendre.
Souvent nos maux font nos morts désirables :
Vous le voyez en ces trois misérables.

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Nicolas de Montreux, "A Monsieur," La Sophonisbe, 1976, 33. For more on the biography of Montgommery, see ibid 33n1.

Cleopatra's suicide transforms her from a troublesome character to a pitiful case which will move even her enemies. Through death, she escapes not only the humiliation of being paraded in Rome as war booty but also her own bad reputation. In contrast, Antony haunts the play as a miserable and malevolent figure.

The words also function as metacommentary on the drama's ability in general to depict history and make it tragic, that is something worthy of the audience's time and emotional involvement. Indeed, the chorus seems to suggest that the tragic framing of the events can turn wrong into right. A such, Jodelle ends not only with the exaltation of Cleopatra but also of his own tragic artisanry. Already in the prologue, addressed to Henry 2 of France (1547-1559), Jodelle highlights the genre's ability to present a whole world only using the body, voice and gestures of the actor ("d'un visage humain"173). Being one of the first original French tragedies written and acted in France, it is hardly surprising that Jodelle should want to establish his drama as a piece of high art and himself an able poet. Jodelle undoubtedly wished the audiences to marvel at the fact that he did not adapt an already existing Greek and Roman drama. In general, the secondary status of Cleopatra and Sophonisba gave dramatists room for poetic invention to rival and even aim to surpass the celebrated ancient models. Thus, playing with history could mean liberation for the dramatist and the female figure alike.

8.3. The decline of exemplary history
As a third and final perspective I want to point out how the preoccupation with tragic spectacle comes in a period which increasingly demanded objectivity and emotional detachment in historiography. Numerous scholars have mapped how the early modern period saw a crisis in the tradition of exemplary history going back to Cicero and the magistra vitae tradition.174 In this period, French sixteenth-century

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173 The full quote reads:
Reçois donc (Sire) et d'un visage humain
Prends ce devoir de ceux qui sous ta main
Tant les esprits que les corps entretiennent,
Et devant toi agenouiller se viennent;
En attendant que mieux nous te chantions,
Et qu'à tes yeux saintement présentions
Ce que ja chante à toi, le fils des Dieux,
La terre toute, et la mer, et les Cieux. Ibid., prologue, l.55-62, 72.

174 The phrase magistra vitae goes back to Cicero's De Oratore, see: "Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua voce alia, nisi oratoris, immortalitati commendatur? [And as History, which bears witness to the passing of the ages, sheds light upon reality, gives life to recollection and guidance to human existence, and
historians questioned the memorable quality of history and instead stressed history as relative, multiple and as something different from the present, which can be seen in the works of Louis Le Roy and others.\textsuperscript{75} In a similar way, Jean Bodin called for emotional disinterest in his \textit{Methodus ad facillem historiarum cognitionem} (1566).\textsuperscript{76} The work is critical of classical historians' historiographical approach, notably Plutarch, yet history as such remains instructive for Bodin as it combines abstract reflections on law and politics with the instructive particularity of past lives. Bodin criticizes Plutarch for being too unreliable and for arranging the parallel biographies in the \textit{Parallel Lives} in advantage of the Greeks. Montaigne famously defended Plutarch in his \textit{Essais} by arguing not to judge the past by our own standards. According to Montaigne, what Bodin called incredible in Plutarch's rendering of the past said more about him than the past. Any faults must rest on careful consideration of a case-by-case example. Bodin's call for methodological clarity stands in contrast to Montaigne's relativism. This controversy underlines a conflict in the period between abstraction and particularity.\textsuperscript{77}

Following this, I want to suggest a connection between dramatists' reflections on tragic effect and the decline in exemplary history. The gradual turn away from the exemplary in historiography is interesting in relation to the highlighting of tragic effect by dramatists such as Garnier and Montreux as discussed above. At a time when French historiography proclaimed critical disinterest, historical drama retained the exemplary, yet also developed this concept by giving new precedence to secondary and

\textsuperscript{75} On the distinction between the memorable and the relative trends in French historiography, see Andrea Frisch, \textit{Forgetting Differences}, 67. For the renaissance's turn towards historicism more generally, see Donald R. Kelley. \textit{Foundations of modern historical scholarship} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970); Zachery S. Schifman. \textit{The Birth of the Past} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

morally ambiguous female figures such as Cleopatra and Sophonisba. French historical dramas on Cleopatra and Sophonisba are not the kind of violent spectacles discussed by Christian Biet under the headline of theatre de la cruauté, yet they express a similar interest in infusing history with the kind of emotional excess which historians came to see as unreliable in history writing and which would also be deemed unfit for tragedy in the seventeenth-century. A such, historical drama became a reservoir of what was left behind in historiography.

French historical drama engages with history writing in the form of historical concepts such as vicissitude but also by exploring secondary perspectives and questioning historical commemoration and interpretation. Contrary to the growing body of historiography, historical drama takes the perspective of the particular in order to explore historical change, human agency and the meaning of the past. After these introductory remarks it has become time to pull the curtains and let Sophonisba and Cleopatra take center stage.

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Part 2: Analysis