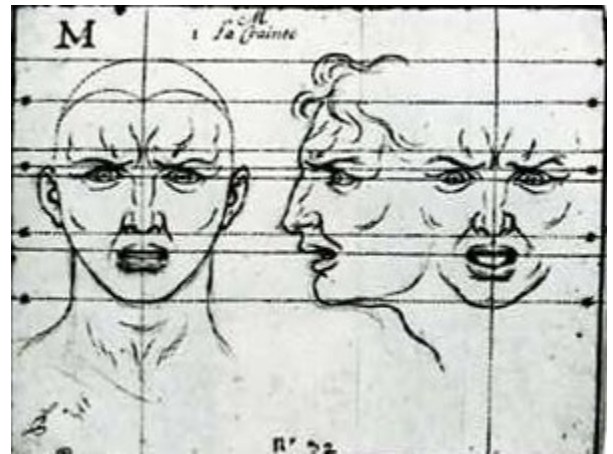




DAVID K. WAGNER

The Complex Force of Fear: Understanding Power, Faith, and Love in Seventeenth-Century France

How does fear exert its influence upon a society and its literature? How, for instance, might fear contribute to the creation of a literary genre, inform romantic choices, motivate religious practice, undermine political authority, or impede scientific advances? My dissertation explores these questions, still relevant to contemporary culture, in the context of seventeenth century French literature and argues that the French seventeenth-century can be understood above all as an age of fear. The foundation of my research lies in a detailed study of the passion treatises, a then-popular genre which catalogues and evaluates fear, love, anger, and other passions.



My close analysis of fear in these texts, including Descartes' *Les Passions de l'âme*, suggests an underlying tension between those who praise the constructive power of fear and others, such as Descartes, who view fear as a completely detrimental force. I then explore these opposing viewpoints across three pairs of literary texts. A study of Corneille's *Le Cid* and *Suréna* suggests that royal fear, if not properly managed, could quite possibly lead to the downfall of absolutism. Racine's *Britannicus* and *Athalie*, in contrast, underscore the beneficial role of fear which can enhance vision and give wisdom in the face of imminent danger. Further, the Choir in *Athalie* powerfully models the transformation of fear into renewed faith. Similarly, in Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, I argue that the Princess's fear of the dangers of love ultimately saves her from a life of inward suffering. A parallel reading with Lafayette's earlier novella, *La Princesse de Montpensier*, further suggests that the Princess of Clèves' fear directly contributes to the ground-breaking interiority of the first "modern" novel. In sum, a study of fear in seventeenth-century French literature allows for new understandings of inter-locking, interdisciplinary tensions at the heart of Early Modern culture.

Illustration: *La crainte* from LeBrun's "L'expression des passions"

10:00 am, March 28, 2016

Maple Room, Indiana Memorial Union

If you would like to attend, please contact the departmental graduate coordinator at fritgs@indiana.edu or call 812-855-1088.

Committee:

Hall Bjørnstad, French & Italian (Chair)

Alison Calhoun, French & Italian

Massimo Scalabrini, French & Italian

Robert Schneider, History