The Department of French & Italian presents a lecture by

Maurice Samuels
Yale University

France’s Jewish Star:
Rachel at the Comédie Française

6:00 pm, Monday, April 7, 2014
Persimmon Room, Indiana Memorial Union

About the talk: This talk examines one of the most stunning cases of Jewish integration in the “golden age” following emancipation: Rachel Félix, who became France’s most celebrated actress in the 1830s and 40s with her electrifying performances as the heroines of Racine and Corneille at the Comédie Française. The daughter of poor, Yiddish-speaking peddlers, Rachel single-handedly revived the neo-classical theatrical tradition while at the same time maintaining — some would say flaunting — her Jewish identity. Reading the critical response to Rachel from the time, the speaker shows how she offered a model for the way French universalism, embodied in the neo-classical tradition, could be enabled rather than hindered by Jewishness.

About the speaker: Maurice Samuels is the Betty Jane Anlyan Professor of French in the Department of French at Yale University. He specializes in the literature and culture of 19th-century France and in Jewish Studies. He is the author of The Spectacular Past: Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century France (Cornell UP, 2004) and Inventing the Israelite: Jewish Fiction in Nineteenth-Century France (Stanford UP, 2010), which won the MLA’s Scaglione Prize. He is also co-editor of a Nineteenth-Century Jewish Literature Reader (Stanford UP, 2013) and is currently working on a new book on the relationship of antisemitism and philosemitism in France, from the French Revolution to the present.