Please join us for a dynamic evening of discussion of early modern theatre. We have invited two of the most prominent scholars in the field to present their latest theatre research, while engaging with that of their co-presenter. The result is a reconsideration of the rules of the tragic stage and its complicated relationship with history.

Christopher Braider
“The Veritable Véritable Saint-Genest”
Jean Rotrou’s martyr play (c. 1645) exploits the illusionistic machinery of the stage both to promote theater’s quasi-demiurgical powers of illusion and to defend the art against its pious enemies. The play’s critics, who generally stop their accounts in act 3, when the saint-to-be is marched off to prison to await his death, accordingly miss one of the deeper ironies at work. The play’s final acts violate the taboo of staging tragic events liable to reactivate unhappy memories of France’s still recent Wars of Religion. Rotrou’s martyr drama thus doubles as a sardonic object-lesson on the damage even “true” religion can do, and affirms the very secularity theater’s pious enemies decried.

Christopher Braider (Professor of French, University of Colorado) is a prominent scholar of early modern theatre and of early modern French literature in general. He is the author of Indiscernable Counterparts: The Invention of the Text in French Classical Drama (UNC Press, 2002), and his recent work The Matter of the Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes (U Toronto Press, 2012) received the 2013 Scaglione Prize for best book in French and Francophone Studies from the MLA.

Blair Hoxby
“A Tragedy for All Times and All Nations?”
Voltaire described Racine’s Iphigénie as a tragedy for all times and all nations. But the play’s critical stock fell precipitously after the 1790s, when idealist critics defined a new philosophy of the tragic that denied its status as a true tragedy. This talk uses Iphigénie to draw the lines of battle between the early modern poetics of tragedy and this new idealist account that has triumphed ever since, while defining the choices available to any early modern dramatist (from Rotrou to Gluck) who revived Euripides’ tragedy under the old dispensation.

Blair Hoxby (Associate Professor of English, Stanford University) has focused his recent research on the theory and practice of tragedy from 1500-1800 – which differed sharply from the idea of tragedy that most of us now take for granted. He is the author of What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon (Oxford University Press, 2015) and Mammon’s Music: Literature and Economics in the Age of Milton (Yale University Press, 2002).

For more information, please contact Professor Hall Bjørnstad (hallbjor@indiana.edu) or Professor Alison Calhoun (abcalhou@indiana.edu).

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