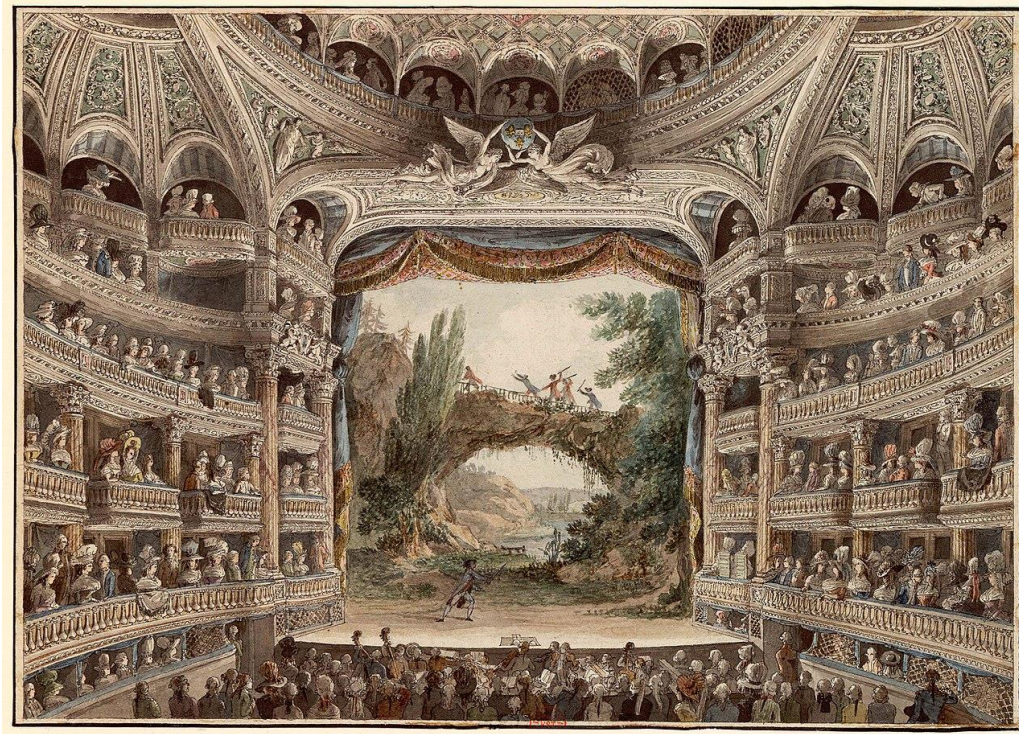


GESM 120 (35367): What Makes a Good Plot? French Classical Theatre in conversation with Opera and Modern Film



The seventeenth century is often presented as the Golden Age of French theatre. While constantly in dialogue with Greek and Roman classics, playwrights such as Corneille, Racine, and Molière revolutionised the early modern theatrical scene. Their legacy was taken up in the eighteenth century by authors such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Beaumarchais who further tested the boundaries of the genre of the play, adapting it to constantly evolving needs and circumstances. These authors' tragedies and comedies have represented an inexhaustible source of inspiration for writers, composers, and directors over the past centuries and are still widely performed to this day.

Focusing primarily on the structure of the plot as well as on the depiction of characters, this course will look at some of the most important plays written by Corneille, Racine, Molière, and Beaumarchais to understand the reasons behind their tremendous success. All seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French texts discussed will be read in English translation and analysed in conjunction with either their literary sources or with literary, operatic, or cinematic masterpieces that they inspired or that are otherwise connected to them. Adopting this trans-medial and trans-cultural approach will allow students to understand the specificity of early modern French theatre, while at the same time getting a better sense of the many ways in which a single story or theme can be treated to achieve different results. With the exception of two more theoretical sessions in weeks 1 and 8, every week we shall be focussing on a particular plot or character type to see how and why it continues to produce effective dramatic art.