

French Connections



11. French Taste, French Grit

FRENCH CULTURE IS CELEBRATED THE WORLD OVER for fashion and *cuisine* (the very word is French). Both came to the fore in the 19th century, and the French contribution remains important to this day. Both establish France as the arbiter of High Style. By contrast, the films of the *nouvelle vague* (New Wave) directors of the 1960s seemed to make a style out of its opposite, featuring ordinary protagonists in edgy situations. Their influence may have been more limited (Woody Allen is one obvious follower), but the world's leading cinema festival is still held in France, at Cannes.

With a few additional mentions, the artists in this class are grouped in pairs: Carême and Escoffier, Worth and Chanel, Resnais and Godard. In general, the first of each pair created something exquisite while the second, though remaining in the sphere of high art, extended the earlier tradition by simplifying, organizing, and taking inspiration from everyday life. *rb.*

A. Haute Cuisine

Both **Antonin Carême** and **Auguste Escoffier** have been described, with justification, as “King of Chefs and Chef of Kings,” and one built upon the innovations of the other. Nobody would describe **Julia Child** in such terms, for her mission was to make French cooking accessible to the American housewife, and her work reached many more people.

♪ **Video:** Antonin Carême (Biography.com)

♪ **Video:** Making the mother sauces

- Carême’s kitchen in the Royal Pavillion, Brighton

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- ♪ **Video:** Michel Roux on the brigade system
- ♪ **Video:** Michel Roux at the Ritz, London
 - Julia Child and *La Couronne* in Rouen
- ♪ **Video:** Julia Child makes onion soup

B. Haute Couture

The French fashion industry that we know today was created by an Englishman, **Charles Frederick Worth**. Though French born and bred, **Coco Chanel** also had strong ties to England, and her first ventures were underwritten by wealthy English lovers. But as a businesswoman in her own right, she initiated lasting changes to the world of fashion, and redefined the view of womanhood for the modern age.

- ♪ **Video:** *Cultured Elegance*, opening
 - Winterhalter:** *Empress Eugénie as Marie Antoinette* (1854)
 - Winterhalter:** *Empress Eugénie & her Ladies* (1855, Orangerie)
 - Some Worth innovations
 - Worth dresses in the Metropolitan Museum
- ♪ **Video:** Coco Chanel (Biography.com)
 - Some Chanel innovations
 - Chanel sailor outfits
 - Chanel's costumes for *Le train bleu* (Ballets Russes, 1924)
- ♪ **Nijinska:** *Le train bleu*, excerpt (reconstruction)
 - Laurencin:** *Mlle Chanel* (1923, Paris, Orangerie)
 - Chanel icons: Little Black Dress, flap purse, and *Chanel N°5*
- ♪ **Video:** *Chanel N°5* documentary, excerpt
- ♪ **Video:** *Chanel N°5 ad, The Night Train*

C. Cinéma, Haute and Otherwise

My original plan for the second hour of this course was to offer a stark contrast: the gritty realism of **nouvelle vague** directors like **Jean-Luc Godard**, who took the Hollywood B movie and raised it to the level of A-list art. But I must admit that the work of some of his contemporaries like **Alain Resnais** comes as close to *haute-cinéma* as you could wish.

- ♪ **Resnais:** *Last Year at Marienbad*, trailer (Delphine Seyrig, Giorgio Albertazzi, Sacha Pitoeff)
- ♪ **Resnais:** *Marienbad*, opening narration
- ♪ **Resnais:** *Marienbad*, Nim game and following scene
 - Some *nouvelle vague* films
- ♪ **Godard:** *Breathless*, opening sequence (Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jean Seberg)
- ♪ **Godard:** *Breathless*, the streets of Paris
- ♪ **Godard:** *Breathless*, ending

Marie-Antoine (Antonin) **Carême** (1783–1833, *French chef*), Coco **Chanel** (1883–1971, *French couturier*), Julia **Child** (1912–2004, *American cookery writer*), Auguste **Escoffier** (1846–1935, *French chef*), Jean-Luc **Godard** (1930–2022, *French filmmaker*), Marie **Laurencin** (1883–1956, *French painter*), Darius **Milhaud** (1892–1974, *French composer*), Bronislava **Nijinska** (1891–1972, *Russian choreographer*), Alain **Resnais** (1922–2014, *French filmmaker*), Alain **Robbe-Grillet** (1922–2008, *French writer*), François **Truffaut** (1932–84, *French filmmaker*), Charles Frederick **Worth** (1825–95, *English-French couturier*)

The course website is www.brunyate.com/FrenchConnections
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