9: Paris: Bridges, Light, and Love

A. Sous les ponts de Paris

1. Class title 1 (Pont des Arts)
2. Section title A (Sous les ponts de Paris)
3. Class title 1, repeat

I love the lighting in this slide; one of the soubriquets for Paris is **City of Light**, which will be our subject for most of the rest of this hour. But I also chose this slide for my title because it showed the ***Pont des Arts*** in the foreground; when I was a student in Paris in the early 1960s, I stayed in a cheap hotel on the Left Bank and walked across this bridge every day to study in the Louvre. But those of you who have been there between 2008 and 2015, do you notice anything missing in the picture?

4. Love locks on the Pont des Arts

Beginning in around 2008, and apparently started by visitors from Serbia, lovers used to come to this bridge to attach a **padlock** engraved or painted with their names lock it to the railings, kiss, and throw away the key as a symbol of their commitment. It's a charming custom, but it caught on until by 2015 there were 45 tons of locks on this bridge alone. After sections of the railings collapsed under the weight, the city addressed it as a safety concern, and removed the locks—well over a million—and replaced the grilles with glass. So is this the end of Paris's other nickname, the **City of Love**? Fortunately not, and this will be our subject for the second hour. But first, as a kind of prologue, I want to stick with the topic of **Bridges**, by showing two more videos. The first is factual, and is part of a series by author **Elaine Sciolino** promoting her 2019 book *The Seine: the River that Made Paris*. I find it interesting in showing how the bridges span over four centuries of Paris history. The second is part of a longer video of a boat trip along the Seine (something that, believe it or not, I have never done); I cut the prosaic narration, though, and replaced it by the **Edith Piaf** song *Sous le ciel de Paris,* in a cover by the California group **Pomplamousse**. I'll put both videos on the website; a large part of the enjoyment of Pomplamousse is watching the lead singer, **Nataly Dawn.**

5. Know Paris by its Bridges
6. Seine cruise with Piaf/Pomplamousse

B. City of Light

7. Repeat of original title

So why is Paris called *The City of Light?* There is one academic reason, I think, but it also fits in numerous other ways, not least of which is the reflection on the water in this photograph. So let's brainstorm for a moment: in what ways do you think *The City of Light* fits Paris? I put a few bullet points together in a little video; I wonder if they match whatever you came up with?

8. Section title B (some interpretations of "Light")
9. Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau

The usual explantion, I'm sure, is that Paris was the epicenter of the 18th-century Age of Enlightenment, and the city where most of the *philosophes* lived and debated. But these catch phrases seldom stick unless they fit in other ways also.

10. Still from video #8, above

So here are a few alternative meanings that occur to me: the magical effect of the **stained glass** in the great gothic churches, such as Notre Dame and the Sainte Chapelle; the fact that Louis XIV proclaimed himself the **Sun King**, and likened himself to Apollo, the God of Light; the multiple arts that reflected the 18th-century **Enlightenment** in addition to philosophy and science; the **Impressionist** insight that the light of Paris was not only special in quality, but that light in general contained a multitude of colors; the importance of Paris to **photography**, through the work of Daguerre and the aptly-named Lumière Brothers; and the lights of **Paris at night**, whether inviting patrons in to cabarets and night spots, or picking out landmarks by *son-et-lumière.* This gives us a kind of menu for the rest of the hour.

11. Light palette reveal
12. Palette 1 (stained glass)

You might still be tempted to call Paris the City of Light if you were to go into either of the great churches on the Ile de la Cité. The glass in **Notre Dame Cathedral** (1163–1260) may not be quite as impressive as that at Chartres, but it is still remarkable. Miraculously, most of it survived the 2019 fire. But that is nothing to the later **Sainte Chapelle** (1238–48) a quarter-mile away, whose glass is remarkable mainly because there is so little stonework to support it! I'll show you a still picture from above, and then a section of a choral piece written in its honor by the American composer **Eric Whitacre** (1970–); although modern, he takes great care to evoke the sort of music that would have been heard in the chapel when it was first built.

13. Stained glass in Notre Dame
14. Paris, La Saine-Chapelle
15. Whitacre: *Sainte-Chapelle*

Notre Dame Cathedral was renowned for its music too. The choirmaster while it was being built was a composer known only by a single name, **Pérotin** (c.1160–1240), who took the first steps away from straight Gregorian chant towards the polyphony that would characterize church music for the next few centuries. But rather than playing a lot of monks singing in an echoey space, I want to give you this solo singer, **Sarah Le Van**, because her voice is so beautiful, because her video is a tribute to all those who worked to save Notre Dame after the fire, and because in its own way the video is also about Light.

16. Pérotin: *Beata Viscera*
17. Palette 2 (le Roi Soleil)

Le Roi Soleil, "The Sun King," was not a nickname given by others to **Louis XIV** (1638–1715), but a role in which he cast himself deliberately. For example, in this family portrait painted for him by **Jean Nocret** (1615–72), he appears in gold as the sun god Apollo, surrounded by other family members as lesser deities. As a young man, he used to dance in political masques in which he, as the Sun, would rise from a trapdoor in a cascade of fireworks and receive the homage of his court. His dance partner in those early days, and the court composer for the rest of his life, was **Jean-Baptiste Lully** (1632–87), an Italian street busker who ended up with a virtual monopoly on music in France

18. Nocret: *The Family of Louis XIV* (1670, Versailles)
19. Louis XIV as dancer
20. Lully and Molière

Louis did not merely dance himself; he supported the performing arts in all its forms. Go to the old Opera in Paris, and you visit an institution originally founded by Louis as the Royal Academy of Dance. Attend a play by **Molière** (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 1622–73) at the **Comédie Française**, the oldest theatrical company in the world, and you are watching a play probably first performed for the King at Versailles, and not given in Paris in the theatre that he himself founded. As it happens, I have a reconstruction of a scene from *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*—words by Molière, music by Lully—in which the gullible rich man of the title is persuaded that he is being accorded a great honor by the Turkish Sultan, though the whole thing is a spoof. Here is a scene from a biopic on Lully showing the King hugely enjoying it, even though some of the actors are clearly worried they might have gone too far.

21. Corbiau: *Le roi danse,* scene from *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*
22. Louis XIV in Paris

Louis was 44 when he moved the court to **Versailles** in 1682. He did this partly to gain a far larger space in which to produce his theatre of power, partly to make the court come to *him,* where he could keep them under control. But he did a lot of work in Paris before he left. These are just some of the projects initiated by him or in his name: the vast complex of **Les Invalides** to provide accomodation for veterans, the **Place Vendôme** originally intended to celebrate his military victories, the **Val-de-Grace** church, and the formal gardens in the grounds of the former **Tuilleries Palace**, now replaced by the Louvre. You do not need to go to Versailles to see the Sun King's traces. I put some together in a video with the opening of a *Te Deum* that Lully wrote in 1677 to celebrate the King's recovery from a life-threatening illness.

23. Lully: *Te Deum,* opening with Louis XIV buildings
24. Vicenzo Coronelli: Louis XIV's globes

Here is an out-of-the-way object from the Bibliothèque Nationale that will give you a measure of the man. Not suffering from excessive modesty, Louis commissioned a sort of time-machine from the Venetian cartographer **Vicenzo Coronelli**. It displays two 20-foot globes on rotating axes; one shows the constellations of the night sky at the moment of Louis's auspicious birth; the other shows the known world, with French possessions all over the globe. This was also a tribute to the development of Science in Louis' time, and although a century earlier, it makes a nice transition to the third of my manifestations of Light, the 18th-century **Enlightenment**.

25. Palette 3 (Diderot)
26. *Encylopédie,* title page

Denis Diderot (1713–87) was the principal editor of the ***Encyclopédie***, or *Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Trades*, begun in 1751. Although simply words and pictures on paper, it is surely the greatest monument to the French Enlightenment genius for order and classification. You might well ask what this has to do with the spirit of Paris you see today, but there is one building, off the normal tourist map, where both French order and French theatricality it comes to life.

27. Natural History Museum, exterior and poster (stills as video)
28. *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle,* Paris, and *Encyclopédie* plates

This is the **National History Museum**, off on the Left Bank, near the *Gare d'Austerltz.* It is a large 19th-century building consisting of numerous exhibition rooms opening off several floors of galleries surounding a large central hall. Like any museum of its date, these smaller rooms once used to contain rows of display cases setting out preserved specimens meticulously classified by genus and species. Most modern museums have gotten rid of these dusty displays, but not so Paris, where these glass boxes are the virtual equivalent of the *Encyclopédie* in three dimensions. There, more than anywhere else, I felt I was in direct touch with Enlightenment France. But the museum did something else. They took all the stuffed animals out of the cases and moved them down to the huge central space, arranging them into a kind of Noah's Ark procession billed in the subways as the *Grand Gallery of Evolution.* Add some *son-et-lumière* lighting and a touch of dry ice, and you get a piece of pure theatre, a total contrast to the exibition rooms all around, but an absolutely necessary one. I have put together two videos (both of which I have shown before) to make the point.

29. *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle,* Paris: sketletons and Noah's Ark
30. Palette 4 (Haussmann, Impressionism, the Camera)

I made my menu slides showing all the different aspects of Parisian Light before I started to write my script. I now find I hav no longer time for separate sections on Impressionism, the Camera, and Night Lights. So I'll postpone my treatment of Paris after dark until after the break, combine my treatment of the painter's eye and the photographer's lens, and add at least a mention of the one person who probably did more than anyone else to bring Light to Paris in the 1800s, **Baron Haussmann**.

31. One painting, four questions (Pissarro: *Avénue de l'Opéra*, 1898)

Here is a view of the *Avénue de l'Opéra* in Paris by the Impressionist **Camille Pissarro** (1830–1903); it is one a a series of similar views he did in 1898. Let's use it as a pivot, to ask four different questions.

32. Rue du Jardinet (probably 1850s)
33. Haussmann's plan

1. Pissarro couldn't have painted a view like that until there was such a view to paint. The man responsible for this, and indeed for making the visitor's experience of Paris today so much of what it is, was **Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann** (1809–91). Appointed by Napoleon III as *Prefect of the Seine* in 1853, he remained in office until 1870, carrying out the Emperor's ideas for beautifying Paris, creating large parks to the East and the West, knocking down narrow streets and near-slums, and building wide boulevards to link major landmarks, some of which he specified himself, such as the old Paris Opéra, the *Palais Garnier*, which forms the vanishing point of Pissarro's painting.

34. Avénue de l'Opéra (photo and painting)
35. Renoir, Monet, and Pissarro

2. My second point is really a question. How much does knowing the paintings of a city affect the way you see the place when you actually visit? Here is the Pissarro again with paintings of the *quais* by **Claude Monet** (1840–1926) and **Pierre-Auguste Renoir** (1841–1919). Does any of them seem more relevant to your experience than the others, and if so why? My own sense is that paintings have very much affected how I see Venice or Amsterdam, but Paris surprisingly little.

36. Monet: *Le pont de l'Europe* (1877); Pissarro: *Place Théâtre Francais in the Mist* (1898)

3. What is the subject really? Pissarro made a whole series of Paris views from upstairs windows in 1898; here is another one. But what is Pissarro's point, and how does it compare to Monet's painting of the Gare Saint-Lazare 23 years earlier? Both, I would suggest, are less about the place than the light, which Monet went farther than any of his colleagues in seeing it as a substance in its own right.

37. Monet: *Gare Saint-Lazare* (1877, Paris Orsay)
38. Daguerre: *Boulevard du Temple* (1838)

4. When I was making that slide with the six vertical strips, I put Impressionist painting ahead of photography—but actually the camera came first. **Louis Daguerre** (1787–1851) was taking pictures as early as the 1830s and one of his early shots, of the *Boulevard du Temple,* very much anticipates what Pissarro would be doing. Would anyone care to compare them? The photo is well known, so if you actually know what the point is here, please don't say just yet, but I'd love to hear from anybody else. The oddity is clear once you realize it: it is obviously full day, *but where are all the people?* Actually, there is one man you can see—but why do you only see him? The answer is that he is having his shoes polished, and is the only one standing still!

39. Lumière Brothers

Motion pictures of course came after; the aptly-named **Lumière Brothers** (Auguste and Louis) were making films as early as 1895—before Pissarro painted any of the scenes we just saw. In black and white, of course; this picture is hand-tinted. Color came into experimental films as early as 1902, but even before that, the Lumières and others were hand-tinting their monochrome stock. Here is a clip of the American dancer **Loie Fuller** in Paris performing her famous Serpentine Dance in 1896. Fuller got her effects by swirling waves of fabric all around her, which were caught by stage lighting that constantly changed color. So the film-makers were trying to reproduce a novel effect of light that would actually be seen on the stage.

40. Lumière Brothers: *Loie Fuller*
41. *Champs-Élysées* title

There is one form of Light that I have left out, which is nonetheless an essential part of Paris: ***joie de vivre***. So to end the hour on a happy note, and close the circle on some of my themes, here is a song about the most famous of the Haussmann Boulevards, the Champs-Élysées, once more sung by Calfornian **Nataly Dawn** and her group **Pomplamousse**. I have shown it before, but it's worth hearing twice. Note that this is *not* romance: one of the lines is "we didn't even have time to kiss."

42. Pomplamousse: *Aux Champs-Élysées*
43. Class title 2 (Joie de vivre!)

I recently found out, incidentally, that Paris began a program in 2015 called **Operation Paris Breathes**. So the Champs-Élysées and several of the other Haussmann Boulevards are now traffic-free.

C. City of Love

44. Section title C (Why Paris is called "The City of Love")

I devised this class to consider two nicknames for Paris: "The City of Light" and "The City of Love." The first is a metonym that Parisians invented for themselves, but the second was largely thrust upon them from outside, reaching common usage by American visitors after WW2. But Paris itself has seen the advantages of it as a selling point, and is now quite happy to present itself in that light. Look on YouTube and you will find many videos with the generic title "Paris: City of Love." Most are pretty cheesy. I don't say that the two I'll show you now are any less so—they do play on the romantic *clichés*—but they range more widely than most and, most importantly, both are produced by the **Paris Chamber of Commerce**! It is clear who their audience is, for both use English-language songs as backing tracks. Let's watch them both and compare them.

45. Video: *A Romantic Walk in Paris*
46. Video: *Make a Date with Paris!*
47. — stills from the above

What did you think? The first dresses up a pretty but more or less conventional relationship with some quite unusual settings that are not on the normal tourist route. The second uses rather more glamorous settings, but seem to imply some narrative. Even watching it several times, I can't really parse it as a whole. The most I can say is that it is a teaser for the idea of finding romance in the City of Love.

48. Frédéric Baron and Claire Kito : The Wall of Love (2000, Montmartre)

There are two settings in that first video which deserve further comment. It opens in front of **The Wall of Love**, a 2000 artwork in a small Montmartre park by artists **Frédéric Baron** and **Claire Kito** consisting of the words for "I love you" in over 300 languages. The red dots are portions of a broken heart; if you could take them off the wall, you could reassemble them, jigsaw-wise, into an intact heart.

49. Paris: Musée de la vie romantique (former home of the painter Ary Scheffer)

The second is the *Musée de la vie romantique* or "**Museum of the Romantic Life**." I did not know of it, and seeing it in this video I assumed it was merely a small-r romantic setting, a further tribute to the idea of the City of Love. Where else but in Paris? I thought. But actually is it the capital-R Romantic. The house is the former residence of the painter **Ary Scheffer**, who knew everyone**: George Sand**, **Chopin**, **Liszt**, **Dumas**, **Hugo**, everyone. So it is a memorial to the Romantic Age itself, that period in poetry, fiction, music, and theater that established Paris as indeed the Romantic Capital of the World, though not in the tourist sense implied by the videos you have just seen. The museum has an entire floor devoted to George Sand, and the poet **Alfred de Musset** (1810–57), who was very much in love with her. Not happily, unfortunately, as you can tell from this poem he wrote her. Although not specifically about Paris, I have accompanied it with Paris scenes.

50. Musset: *Rapelle-toi*
51. Gerard Menfin article

The website **Reddit** has a section called **Ask an Historian**. On it, I found an excellent article by someone who I assume is called **Gerard Menfin** (or "moi enfin"?) , answering the question: "When and Why did Paris come to be called *The City of Love*?" I put it all on the class website. It is long (about 6 pages) and meticulously sourced; you need to go to the original to see all the hyperlinks. His focus is American. He found that you do not see the phrase "City of Love" at all frequently until the 20th century, and especially after the Second World War in the promotion of movies. But the idea was there much earlier, in the fact that Paris has always presented an image of moral freedom and sexual availability to repressed white Protestant visitors. The dirty reality is that Paris was rife with prostitution. The romantic cover is the acceptance, among upper classes at least, that a gentleman could have both wife and mistress, and that they served different functions. The *locus classicus* of this in literature is *La dame aux camélias* ("The Lady of the Camellias," the 1848 novel (and later play) by **Alexandre Dumas, *fils*** (1824–95), based upon his own acquaintance with the courtesan Marie Duplessis. In this scene from a film by **Mauro Bolognini**, Dumas sees Duplessis for the first time, and imagines her in a central scene from his novel. The music you hear under the dialogue comes from **Verdi's** 1853 opera *La traviata,* which is of course the form in which Dumas' play is best known today.

52. Mauro Bolognini: *La dame aux camélias*, excerpt
53. — still from the above
54. *Le moulin rouge*

The *Moulin Rouge* opened in 1889 and is still going today. Its featured item was the **can-can**, a dance that began in the 1830s, quickly became the subject of moralizing sermons and arrests for indecency but survived, thanks in part to the music of **Jacques Offenbach** (1819–80) and the art of **Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec** (1864–1901). Like so much else in Paris, it titillates more than it actually delivers; although the dancer's movements are suggestive, not an inch of bare flesh is visible (though much more is shown in modern performances. Here is a clip from **John Huston's** 1952 film about Lautrec, *Moulin Rouge.*

55. Toulouse-Lautrec: *Jane Avril*
56. Huston: *Moulin Rouge,* can-can

Paris did not confine its parade of love to the cabarets and brothels. There was an in-between area where the promotion was more subtle, in the resataurants and cafés, even—especially—the high end ones. Here is American realist **Theodore Dreiser** (1871–1945), author of *Sister Carrie,* writing about Paris in *The Century Magazine,* October 1913. The first illustration, by Ashcan School painter **William Glackens** (1870–1938), is from the original article; the second is by the chronicler of Paris café society, **Henri Gervex** (1852–1929).

57. Dreiser 1
58. Dreiser 2
59. Apollinaire: *Alcools,* covers

There are many, many French poems about love, from virtually every century, but few of them are specifically tied to Paris. One that is, however, is *Le Pont Mirabeau* (The Mirabeau Bridge) from the 1913 collection *Alcools* by poet **Guillaume Apollinaire** (1880–1918), who was killed at the end of WW1. Like the de Musset poem from a century earlier, it is predominantly sad. Apollinaire was affected by **Cubism**, and his unpunctuated poetry does not have normal syntax, though it is still understandable. I will give it you in three forms: first the English text as translated by **Oliver Bernard**. Then Apollinaire himself reading the first two stanzas in French. Then the whole thing performed in French in a cool jazz setting from 2014 by **Louisa Bey**, with the Bernard translation once again.

60. Apollinaire: *Le Pont Mirabeau,* translation
61. Apollinaire reads *Le Pont Mirabeau*
62. Louisa Bey: *Le Pont Mirabeau*

Menfin makes the point that the real explosion of "City of Love" as a metonym for Paris came from Hollywood after the Second World War. Many Americans had been to France with the liberating armies, and were eager to go back and see the city become itself again. So I'll end with two trailers, half a century apart. **Stanley Donen's** *Funny Face* (1957), with **Audrey Heburn**, **Fred Astaire**, and **Kay Thompson**, plus some **Gershwin** () music, is pretty blatant, but not atypical. The opening of **Woody Allen's** *Midnight in Paris* (2011), before he gets into the time-travel sequences, is much more poetic,

especially with the music of **Sidney Bechet**, and makes an excellent evocation of the Parisian Spirit to end with.

63. Donen: *Funny Face,* "Bonjour, Paris"
64. Allen: *Midnight in Paris,* opening
65. Class title 3 (*Midnight in Paris*, still)