



# National Identity in the Arts

## 6. Relief from Sobriety

October 25, 2022

## Relief from Sobriety

WHETHER IN THE PAINTING OF POUSSIN OR THE THEATRE OF MOLIÈRE, French arts of the 17th century display the purest classicism to be found anywhere in Europe. But against that, there is the equally French urge to soften this austerity with playfulness, theatricality, romance, and a taste for the exotic. Centered around the palace and grounds of Versailles, this highly speculative class will observe the struggle between the two forces in the 17th century, the general reaction against classicism in the 18th, and very briefly the return of the classical impulse towards the start of the 19th. *rb.*

### A. Two Views of Natural History

Way out of period, but indisputably French: a surprise visit to the Natural History Museum in Paris, and some lessons to be learned there.

**VIDEO:** *Musée d'Historie Naturelle*, paleontology collection

**VIDEO:** *Musée d'Historie Naturelle*, Grande galerie de l'évolution

**Delacroix:** *Tiger Hunt* (1854, Paris Louvre)

### B. A Solemn Splendor

The combination of austerity and elegance in seventeenth-century French classicism as seen in the architecture of Le Vau, the paintings of Poussin, or the plays of Racine.

**Le Vau, Le Nôtre, and Le Brun:** Vaux-le-Vicomte (1656–61)

**Le Vau, Le Nôtre, and Le Brun:** Versailles (1661–)

**Le Vau:** Collège des quatre nations (*Institut de France*), 1662–70

**Poussin:** *The Death of Germanicus* (1627, Minneapolis)

**Poussin:** *Et in Arcadia Ego* (1638, Louvre)

**Poussin:** *Saint John on Patmos* (1640, Chicago)

**Claude:** *Landscape w. Nymph and Shepherd Dancing* (1641, Toledo)

**VIDEO:** **Racine:** *Esther*, from Act II, scene 7

## C. Radiance and Relaxation

The softer, more playful elements of Louis XIV's world, as seen in the gardens of Versailles, the music of Lully, and in the King's own dancing.

**Le Brun:** *Bassin d'Apollon, Versailles* (1671)

**Bernini:** *Louis XIV* (1665)

**VIDEO: Gérard Corbiau:** *Le Roi Danse*, three excerpts

**VIDEO: Lully:** *Persée*, end of Act II (Opera Atelier, Toronto)

**VIDEO: Molière:** *The Miser*, excerpt (Southend-on-Sea)

**VIDEO: Molière/Lully:** *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, Turkish march

## D. Imagined Escapes

The shift, at Louis XIV's death in 1715, though beginning earlier, away from pomp and grandeur towards a more intimate art characterized by a gentle eroticism and the desire for a simpler life. We see it in the less formal parts of the Versailles gardens and in the art of Watteau, Boucher, and Fragonard.

**Cotelle:** Three views of the *Bosquets* at Versailles (c.1693)

**Watteau:** *L'embarquement pour Cythère* (1717, Louvre)

**Watteau:** *The Shepherds* (1717, Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin)

**Fragonard:** *The Swing* (1767, Wallace Collection, London)

**Fragonard:** *The Beautiful Servant* (nd, Stockholm) and other erotica

**Fragonard:** *The Visit to the Nursery* (1775, Washington NGA)

**Fragonard:** *Inspiration* (1769, Louvre)

**Boucher:** *Marie-Louise O'Murphy* (1751, Cologne)

**Boucher:** *Jupiter and Calisto* (1759, Kansas City)

**Boucher:** *Country Girl Dancing* (1765, Washington NGA)

**Boucher:** *Landscape near Beauvais* (1740)

**Mique:** the *Hameau de la Reine* at Versailles (1783)

## E. The Rococo in Music

Three French composers of the 18th century: the harpsichord music of Couperin, the operas of Rameau, and the *opéras comiques* of Grétry.

**VIDEO: Couperin:** *Les baricades mystérieuses* (1717)

Jean Rondeau (harpsichord) and Thomas Dunford (lute)

**VIDEO: Rameau:** *Les Indes galantes* (1736), excerpt (Andrej Serban)

**VIDEO: Rameau:** *Les Boréades* (1764), end of Act IV (Robert Carsen)

**VIDEO: Grétry:** *Richard Coeur de Lion*, opening (Versailles Opera)

## F. Classics with a Difference

Three winners of the *Prix de Rome* around 1800—David, Ingres, and Berlioz—and the very different views of classicism each brought back from their long sojourns in that city.

**David:** *Mme Recamier* (1800, Louvre)

**David:** *The Death of Socrates* (1787, NY Metropolitan)

**David:** *The Oath of the Horatii* (1785, Louvre)

**Ingres:** *The Envoys of Agamemnon* (1801, Paris Beaux-Arts)

**Ingres:** *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1827, Louvre)

**Ingres:** *Odalisque with Slave* (1842, Walters)

**Ingres:** *The Turkish Bath* (completed 1862, Louvre)

**VIDEO: Berlioz:** *Les Troyens*, excerpt from Act IV (Royal Opera)

## Artists, Composers, and Writers

Hector **Berlioz** (1803–69, *composer*), Gianlorenzo **Bernini** (1598–1680, *Italian sculptor and architect*), François **Boucher** (1703–70, *painter*), **Claude** Lorrain (Claude Gellée, 1604–82, *painter*), François **Couperin** (1668–1733, *composer*), Jean le Rond **d'Alembert** (1717–83, *writer*), Jacques-Louis **David** (1748–1825, *painter*), Eugène **Delacroix** (1798–1863, *painter*), Denis **Diderot** (1713–84, *writer*), Jean-Honoré **Fragonard** (1732–1806, *painter*), André **Grétry** (1741–1816, *composer*), Jean-Auguste-Dominique **Ingres** (1780–1867, *painter*), Charles **Le Brun** (1619–90, *painter*), André **Le Nôtre** (1613–1700, *landscape architect*), Louis **Le Vau** (1612–70, *architect*), Jean-Baptiste **Lully** (1632–87, *composer*), Richard **Mique** (1728–94, *architect*), **Molière** (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 1622–73, *playwright*), Nicolas **Poussin** (1594–1665, *painter*), Philippe **Quinault** (1635–88, *playwright*), Jean **Racine** (1639–99, *playwright*), Jean-Philippe **Rameau** (1683–1764, *composer*), Jean-Antoine **Watteau** (1684–1721, *painter*)

<https://brunyate.com/national-identity/>