Class 6 : Relief from Sobriety

A. Two Views of Natural History

1. Section title A (Watteau: *L'embarquement pout Cythère*)

I'm taking a break from historically-focused classes right now, to offer you a view of France that is highly speculative, totally non-academic, and covers three centuries and a host of topics. Let's start way out in left field, with a visit to the **Natural History Museum in Paris**. Set in the Botanic Gardens across the river from the *Gare d'Austerlitz,* it is an old building reflecting the encyclopedic urge to catalogue everything.

2. *Musée d'Historie Naturelle*, paleontology
3. *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle*, Paris; paleontology gallery
4. *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle*, Paris, and Encyclopedia plates

Here is one of the galleries we were looking at. I would draw your attention to the display cases on both levels on both sides: not merely what is shown on top, but the rows of drawers below. When I visited the museum with my son about 20 years ago, it struck me strongly that it was two Frenchmen of the Age of Enlightenment, **Denis Diderot** (1713–84) and **Jean le Rond d'Alembert** (1717–83), who created the first *Encyclopédie* in 1751. The black-and-white plate is one of its copious illustrations. So this is one aspect of French culture: the pursuit of order, logic, and classification. But let's look now at another short video from the same museum:

5. *Musée d'Historie Naturelle, Grande galerie de l'évolution*
6. *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle*, Paris; evolution gallery

This part of the museum, called the *Grande galerie de l'évolution*, was created in 1994. It is as though they had let the animals out of their display cases, and let them rampage in a Noah's Ark procession stretching almost 100 yards down the middle of the central hall. My son and I saw it when it was new. At that time you couldn't get so close to the animals, which were picked out of the darkness by constantly changing spotlights to great theatrical effect. There was even some dry-ice fog, as the poster suggests.

7. *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle*, Paris; other views
8. Delacroix: *Tiger Hunt* (detail; 1854, Paris Louvre)

So this is another side of French culture, characterized by theatricality, whimsy, and exoticism, as though letting their hair down. Look at this giraffe looking down from a high balcony, an utterly impossible situation, but wonderfully witty. And what on earth persuaded them to put their specimens of a tiger and elephant together to make the big cat attack the howdah? It speaks more to the country's colonial past than it does to anything in natural history. Yet it is also true to the French fascination with Asia, North Africa, and the exotic, as reflected, for example, in the art of **Eugène Delacroix** (1798–1863).

9. Louis le Vau: *Château de Versailles* (1661–)

One striking element in French arts of the 17th century—whether painting, sculpture, architecture, music, or theatre—is a monumental, often austere, Classicism, deliberately recreating the arts of the ancients. This is particularly associated with the reign of **Louis XIV** from 1643 to 1715; his palace at **Versailles** is shown here. Classicism would resurface at around the time of the Revolution, and again in the Twentieth Century, but it never entirely disappeared as a factor in French thought.

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

The Sun King's death in 1715 more or less coincided with a reaction against classical austerity, as seen in this 1717 painting by **Jean-Antoine Watteau** (1684–1721), showing courting couples on an amorous visit to the mythical Isle of Venus. It is the beginning of the style we call **Rococo**, born in France but spreading all over Europe. I shall spend some time on it, but I hope to make a more general point: that the French tendency towards Classicism and Reason is always tempered by elegance, and that the reaction *against* classical sobriety—the taste for fantasy, romance, theatricality, and the exotic—is as much a French characteristic as classicism is, and equally persistent. I hope to juggle these themes in the present class: the first hour dealing with the 17th century, the second hour moving into the 18th and just touching on the 19th, starting with classicism then looking at the various kinds of reaction against it.

B. In Solemn Splendor

11. Le Vau, Le Nôtre, and Le Brun: *Vaux-le-Vicomte* (1656–61)
12. Le Vau, Le Nôtre, and Le Brun: *Versailles* (1661–)

I mentioned Versailles. But actually, Louis XIV got the idea from someone else. Beginning in 1658, his finance minister, **Nicolas Fouquet**, hired the architect **Louis Le Vau** (1612–70), the landscape architect **André Le Nôtre** (1613–1700) and the painter-decorator **Charles Le Brun** (1619–90) to create the **Château of Vaux-le-Vicomte**, combining architecture, interior design and landscape design; it should certainly make my point about elegance. When it was finished in 1661, he invited the King to a magnificent dinner, and Louis was so impressed that he immediately hired the three artists to design a total makeover of his hunting lodge at Versailles. Fouquet did not get off so well, however. The King's adviser, **Jean-Baptiste Colbert**, who wanted the finance job himself, convinced him that Fouquet's magnificence stemmed from a misappropriation of public funds. Fouquet was arrested, Colbert got the job, and Vaux-le-Vicomte was seized.

13. Louis le Vau: *Collège des quatre nations* (*Institut de France*), 1662–70

Here is another Le Vau building, the **Collège des quatre nations**, across the Seine from the Louvre in Paris, originally intended as a college of the Sorbonne. I show it as an example of the particular elegance of the French classical style, but also because it now holds the **Institut de France**, the seat of the **Académie Française** and the four other academies founded in the 17th century by Louis XIII and XIV. I

mention this because the very existence of an Academy is virtually a guarantee of the continuation of a classical style. One of the things the Academies did was to award an annual *Prix de Rome*, funding an outstanding painter, architect, or later composer, to live in Rome to study the ancients at first hand. The greatest French painter of the century, **Nicolas Poussin** (1594–1665), went to Rome in 1624, before the Prize was established. But he spent almost all the rest of his life there, and he is the prime example of the French dedication to classical models. I will show you three of his works.

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

The Death of Germanicus was commissioned by **Cardinal Francesco Barberini**, nephew of Pope Urban VIII. The subject is drawn from the *Annals* of the first-century CE Roman historian **Tacitus**. A virtuous and beloved young general, Germanicus led the Roman legions into the German portion of the empire (hence his name) but incurred the jealousy of his stepfather, the emperor Tiberius, who had him secretly poisoned. Poussin shows him soulfully bidding his family farewell and exhorting his soldiers to avenge his death. The influence of Raphael should be obvious, and also the classical features of the architecture, the muscled bodies, and the rhetorical gestures.

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

Et in Arcadia Ego shows classicism of a different kind. This time, the setting is not Roman but Greek, or at least the idealized Greek of shepherds in Arcadia. The title, "I too am in Arcadia," is a *memento mori*, reminding us that even in the supposed perfection of Arcadia, death remains a presence. It is as simple as *Germanicus* was complex. Poussin's classicism shows not merely in his subject and the treatment of the figures, but also in the exquisite balance of the composition.

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

Saint John on Patmos is even simpler. It shows Saint John writing the *Revelation* from his exile on the island of Patmos. Classical ruins are everywhere—one theme of the painting is the old world giving way to the new—studied in obvious detail, and used as geometrical elements to articulate the natural landscape. Poussin not only studied ruins in Rome; he also immortalized the landscape of the Roman *Campagna* (the area around Rome), painting it like a stage set, in clear receding planes, with theatrical "wings" on one or both sides. Lit in a characteristic limpid light, the *Campagna* became just as much a classical element as the ruins were.

17. Claude Lorrain: *Landscape with Nymph and Shepherd Dancing* (1641, Toledo OH)

I will probably come back to Poussin's near-contemporary and fellow Roman expatriate **Claude Lorrain** (Claude Gellée, 1604–82) in a later class when looking at English art. Claude painted almost exclusively landscapes, always including some small figures to give them a story that justifies them as history paintings rather than landscape *per se*. But it was he more than anyone else who gave landscape its Classical form.

18. Jean Racine (1639–99), with a scene from *Phèdre* (1677)

The acme of French Classicism in the other arts is surely the theatre of **Jean Racine** (1639–99). Racine's plays (all but one were tragedies) take subjects from Greece or Rome (and in two instances from the Bible), and adhere closely to the Aristotelean unities: they take place over a twenty-four hour span and in a single setting; they have a restricted cast of characters (generally a king, and queen, and at most five others); they contain no subplots; and they maintain an elevated tone throughout. The painting is an excerpt from one of the greatest of them, *Phèdre*; I made my own debut as a director with the British premiere of the **Robert Lowell** translation of the play. I used a scene from this (in French) in one of my opera classes, and will put it on the website. But for now, I want to show you a much less famous drama instead, the play of *Esther* that he was commissioned to write for a girls' school late in his career in 1689. This is a scene from the end of the middle act where **Esther** begs her husband, **King Ahasuerus**, to bring the villan Haman to a dinner at which she will denounce him. I have chosen it because of its amazing period style of declamation and gesture, which I find totally convincing, despite what is clearly a student performance. I have taken the titles from a 19th-century translation; it seemed appropriate.

19. Racine: *Esther*, from Act II, scene 7

I will pick up this classical thread once or twice again in later eras, since it is indeed a French national characteristic, but for now I want to stick to the reign of Louis XIV and concentrate on the more graceful elements that softened its seriousness, and the occasional outbursts of the anarchic spirit that took leave to challenge it.

C. Radiance and Relaxation

20. André le Nôtre: the gardens at Versailles
21. Le Brun: *Bassin d'Apollon* (1671)
22. Gianlorenzo Bernini: *Louis XIV* (1665)

There is no denying the magnificence of Louis XIV's view of himself but it is matched by his magnificence as a patron of the arts. And while all the work created under his aegis has an undoubted pomp, it also has an elegance that I see as very much a French quality, together with a theatricality that reflected Louis' own. You can see both pomp and elegance in the design of the park at Versailles, laid out by **Le Nôtre** on an East-West axis, with the King himself represented in **Le Brun's** fountain as Apollo, pulling the chariot of the sun out of the water to shine over his infinite dominions. The bust is by **Gianlorenzo Bernini** (1598–1680), surely the most theatrical of Italian baroque artists.

23. Boris Terral as Jean-Baptiste Lully in *Le Roi Danse* (2000)

And Louis' theatrical tastes started early. There is a magnificent 2000 film by the French director **Gérard Corbiau** called *Le Roi Danse* (The King is Dancing), about the long relationship between King Louis XIV and his court composer **Jean-Baptiste Lully** (1632–87). Lully virtually defines the musical style of the

French court, yet the irony is that he began life as a child street musician from Italy, and was thus neither French nor a courtier. But he and the adolescent king hit it off, and for the rest of his life wrote music that would flatter him, entertain him, and show off his talents as a dancer. Beginning with this number from the film, in which the young king appears as the personification of the Sun, and has all the other forces of his domain bow before him. I have played it before, but it really is magnificent: **Boris Terral** is Lully and **Benoît Magimel** the King.

24. *Le Roi Danse,* Louis as the Sun
25. Lully's *Persée* in Toronto (2014)

So heroic themes were not incompatible with the more graceful qualities of music and dance, and all Lully's operas combined both. I'm going to show a fairly substantial segment from a rather later work, *Persée* (1683). The Greek hero who slays the Gorgon Medusa and then uses her severed head to rescue the princess Andromeda from the dragon is certainly as heroic as they come. If he could have boiled Lully's vast cast down to four or five characters, you could imagine Racine treating him with appropriate seriousness. But while Lully and his librettist **Philippe Quinault** (1635–88) did not stint on magnificence, everything is wreathed in dance, which softens the effect considerably. We shall watch the Act II finale. Perseus does not get to sing in this scene, in which he is kitted out with a magic shield, sword, and helmet. With the exception of Mercury in his cloud above, the singers here are not named characters, merely "A Warrior Nymph" and "An Infernal Deity."

26. Lully: *Persée,* end of Act II
27. Molière and Racine

In the spoken theatre, although **Racine** established a position as purest master of the most elevated tragedy, he had a predecessor by about 15 years in the comic genius of **Molière** (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 1622–73). Together, they might represent the twin masks of comedy and tragedy. The French revere Racine, but they love Molière. Like Shakespeare, he was an actor, a man of the theater not of the study. He wrote for the stage, whether to please the King or the public. There is little purist about him, and yet his control of language is comparable to Racine's; the French often refer to their tongue as "the language of Molière," and the **Comédie Française**, in the theater of the old Palais Royal, as "the house of Molière." But how do I illustrate him? There are several good French performances online that show the speed and brilliance of his dialogue, but instead I shall show a scene from *The Miser* (1668) performed by a provincial British company who seem to have a feeling for the style, despite their low budget. Harpagon, the miser of the title (Molière's own role) intends to marry the young **Mariane**, not knowing at first that his son **Cléante** is actually in love with her. In this scene, Cléante tries to dissuade his father from the match, but the old man very neatly turns the tables against him. Note how, at the very end, verbal comedy is replaced by physical slapstick; Molière's genius was in combining both genres.

28. Molière: *The Miser,* excerpt
29. A scene from Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670)

Lully was friends with Molière, and wrote music for many of his plays, which were often interspersed with songs and dances. His *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* of 1670 was in fact billed as a *comédie-ballet*. The

plot concerns a *nouveau riche* merchant, **M. Jourdain**, with pretensions to join the nobility. Naturally, he won't allow his daughter to marry a middle-class nobody. So the boyfriend comes round with some of his friends wearing turbans, moustaches, and fancy robes, pretending to be the son of the Turkish Pasha. Naturally, M. Jourdain is eager to have his daughter marry into royalty, especially when he is told that he himself is to be ennobled in a special ceremony that evening! The scene is an early example of the French fascination with Eastern exoticism. I shall play two versions, both historical reconstructions: first, Lully's music with dancers alone; then the scene from the movie *Le Roi danse* where Molière and Lully present the work before the King. The first is scholarly, tight, and disciplined; the second frankly descends into mayhem—but that's the very contrast we are exploring in this class.

30. Molière/Lully: *Le bourgeois gentilhomme,* march for the ceremony of the Turks
31. — the same scene from *Le Roi danse*
32. Benoît Magimel as Louis XIV in *Le Roi Danse* (2000)

One final clip from *Le Roi danse*, which I am showing as much for its setting as anything else. Louis is now performing his Sun King dance outdoors, in one of the *bosquets* or little groves tucked among the trees at Versailles. There is new music by Lully, a full orchestra, and the court orator declaiming sonorous verse. But the king is twice the age as when we first saw him, and he no longer has the stamina of a teenager.

33. *Le Roi danse*, Louis loses his footing
34. Twilight at Versailles

The King's career as a public dancer might be over, but he is only 32 and less than halfway through his reign. But that second half would be clouded by unwise wars, economic decline, and falling morale. So it is as good a place as any to take a break before the next section of our class, which deals with the end of his reign and the start of the 18th century.

D. Imagined Escapes

35. Versailles: musical fountains
36. Versailles: gardens from the West
37. Cotelle: *La salle de bal* (1693)

That little promo video was just to wake things up. You may have noticed, however, that several of the fountains shown were in smaller, more intimate, enclosures in the Versailles grounds, they are more of the *bosquets* I mentioned earlier. Seen here in this painting, they are part of **Le Nôtre's** original design, although they were altered by various other hands over the decades right into the 18th century. The film is anachronistic about the *Salle de bal* (ballroom, or dance theatre), actually. If the king was 32, the year must be 1670, but this particular enclosure was not finished until 1685.

38. Cotelle: *Three views of the Bosquets at Versailles* (c.1693)
39. Cotelle: *Vue du bosquet du Marais avec les nymphes jouant à divers jeux*

Here are paintings of three of the *bosquets* from late in the century by the little-known **Jean Cotelle** (1642–1608), and a detail of one of them. These are not courtiers lying half naked on the lawns but, as Cotelle's title suggests, "Nymphs Playing Various Games." Still, the portrayal of these spaces as scenes of fantasy and make-believe (albeit with a classical theme), is I think a significant one, and it leads me on to art by considerably more illustrious painters in the next century.

40. Watteau: *L'embarquement pour Cythère* (1717, Louvre)
41. — the same, with details

Starting with the work I showed at the top of the class, the 1717 painting by **Jean-Antoine Watteau** (1684–1721), showing courting couples on an amorous visit to the mythical Isle of Venus. Its title is "The Embarkation *for* Cytherea," but it looks much more as though the couples are at the *end* of their stay and are now leaving; "Departure from Cytherea" might be a better title. Look at how Watteau has arranged the three couples on the right as three different stages of time: already leaving but looking back, preparing to leave, and still engaged. Putting the whole thing into the past tense—though the recent past—gives it a tenderness and even nostalgia that is part of its charm.

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

Watteau essentially invented a genre, the *fête galante,* which can best be translated, I suppose, as "romantic party." He did a number of these in his short life (he died at 37), but here is a variant. Called *The Shepherds*, it is a curious mixture. There is a naturalistic country landscape (no statues of Venus here), and the music is being played by rustic people who look real enough. But the dancers and the woman on the swing are in court clothes. It is a curious combination, known as a *fête pastorale*. The romantic escapes of the 18th-century aristocracy did not all involve imaginary visits to romantic realms; they also sought solace in an equally idealized countryside. We shall see more of this.

43. Watteau, Boucher, and Fragonard

Watteau's early death left a gap in French painting. The two artists most commonly thought of as continuing his legacy are these: **Jean-Honoré Fragonard** (1732–1806) and **François Boucher** (1703–70). I will not attempt to distinguish between them here, but will pursue two themes: how they developed the implied eroticism of Watteau, making it decidedly more explicit, and how they furthered the transition—at least in the imagination—from court to countryside.

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

Fragonard picks up the trope of the woman on the swing we saw in Watteau's *The Shepherds,* and gives it a distinctly voyeuristic twist in this picture, which shows a young lover concealed in the bushes to look up the dress of the young woman being swung by her elderly and oblivious husband! This was actually a commission from a noble patron passed on to the young Fragonard by a more established artist who did not want to waste his time on such trivia. He has now been completely forgotten; Fragonard hasn't.

45. Fragonard: three paintings in oval format

But Fragonard could be more explicit still. Here are three erotic paintings in an oval format. In the top two, the woman is alone and it is mythological Cupids who display her nakedness; the title of the one at top left says it all: *Fire to the Gunpowder*. The one at the bottom is the only one to contain an actual lover, but although there is almost no nakedness, I must say the two alternate titles disturb me in our Me Too era: *The Beautiful Servant* or *Useless Resistance*. This might be the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro*, but **Beaumarchais** and **Mozart** are a lot more honest about what it is to be on the receiving end.

46. Fragonard: *The Visit to the Nursery* (1775, Washington NGA)
47. Fragonard: *Inspiration* (1769, Louvre)

I would not have you think that Fragonard did nothing but pretty soft-porn. This picture of his in Washington celebrates middle-class values with a vengeance, and the virtuoso brushwork and color of this imaginary portrait of a poet (perhaps modelled in a mirror) are a marvel. You can see the influence of Dutch genre pieces and *tronies*, which Louis XV was avidly collecting, but this is the work of an original artist at the height of his powers.

48. Boucher: *Recumbent Girl* (Marie-Louise O'Murphy), 1751 Cologne

Another thing that Louis XV collected was mistresses, both major ones like **Madame de Pompadour**, who had their own suites at Versailles, and minor ones who were housed on a temporary basis around the estate. One such was the country girl of Irish ancestry, **Marie-Louise O'Murphy**. Boucher painted her at least three times, so this must have been more than a one-night stand. Indeed, when the affair was over, the King gave her a minor title so that she could get married. So I suppose this picture combines both my themes: the erotic and the fascination with country life.

49. Boucher: *Jupiter and Calisto* (1759, Kansas City) and *Country Girl Dancing* (1765, NGA)
50. Boucher: *Landscape near Beauvais* (1740)

Three more Bouchers to show his considerable range: a mythological piece, a straightforward study of a country girl, and a landscape. The peasant pictures seem real enough, though I imagine he has prettified the girl and sought out the picturesque in the landscape. For country life is still part of the rococo romance, an escape for the imagination rather than the actual business of mucking out the pigs! And it was in this spirit that **Marie Antoinette**, the queen of the next king, **Louis XVI**, had a perfect little farm built in the park in Versailles, complete with freshly-washed sheep, where she and her ladies could go to play shepherdesses and take tea. The architect was the unfortunate **Richard Mique** (1728–94).

51. Versailles: *Hameau de la Reine* (1783)

E. The Rococo in Music

52. Couperin, Rameau, and Grétry

Here are three French composers whose work spans the 18th century. **François Couperin** (1668–1733) and **Jean-Philippe Rameau** (1683–1764) made their names primarily as composers for the harpsichord, though Rameau began an even more illustrious career in later life as a composer of opera. Belgian-born but French naturalized **André Grétry** (1741–1816) worked almost entirely in the opera house, specializing in that peculiar French genre, the *opéra comique*, which is to say opera with spoken dialogue, though not necessarily funny. We'll start with Couperin and a piece called *Les baricades mistérieuses*, which looks like "the mysterious barricades" but may actually have something to do with wine-making. Anyway, its delicate almost seamless texture, intricate in detail but not very dramatic overall, is not unlike the surface of a painting by **Watteau**. For this performance, harpsichordist **Jean Rondeau** is joined by lutenist **Thomas Dunford**. In the middle, I have added some examples of another characteristic French medium of the rococo, **tapestries** from the Aubusson or Gobelins workshops.

53. Couperin: *Les baricades mistérieuses*
54. Other cultures in French rococo art

Two selections from operas by **Rameau**, both of which I have shown in other classes, but relevant to our discussion here. First, a very short clip from his 1736 opera, *Les Indes galantes* (The Amorous Indes), because it illustrates something that I could not show with Watteau, Fragonard, or Boucher: the continued French interest in the exotic. A little like Molière's Turks, but in a romantic rather than a comic vein, Rameau sets each act in a different continent: the Middle East, South America, or the Wild West. Here is the beginning of the peace-pipe ceremony between the Native Americans and the Europeans that ends the final act. The production is by **Andrej Serban**.

55. Rameau: *Les Indes galantes*, prelude to calumet dance
56. Rameau: Les Boréades, directed by Robert Carsen

This is a scene from Rameau's last opera, *Les Boréades*, or The Sons of Boreas. It is an allegory of the seasons. The wedding feast of the hero and heroine has been interrupted by the forces of Winter, who blanket everything in snow. In the scene I shall play, the hero's friend gives him a magic arrow, with which he can bring everybody back to life; it is in effect the enactment of Spring. I'm playing it partly because the music—scarcely more than a repeated descending scale—is so utterly beautiful, and partly because the director, **Robert Carsen**, even with a quite modern production, has the uncanny ability to channel the wistful quality of Watteau—or perhaps it was just that the figure at the beginning who looks back over his shoulder and smiles reminded me so strongly of the woman in Watteau's *Embarquement*.

57. Rameau: *Les Boréades*, end of Act IV
58. Grétry's *Richard Coeur de Lion* at Versailles

Grétry's *Richard Coeur de Lion* (1784) was a big success in the last years of the *ancien régime*, and surprisingly it remained so even after the Revolution. Perhaps this is because its historical subject, King

Richard the Lionheart and his rescue from imprisonment in France, is treated in such a down to earth way. The opening number, for example, is a chorus of country folk singing about the upcoming anniversary party of the local squire, interspersed with country dances. Or at least their the ballet equivalent; I don't suppose they are any more genuine than Boucher's paintings! Think of an earlier **Gilbert and Sullivan**, tackling an heroic subject with their lighter touch.

59. Grétry: *Richard Coeur de Lion*, opening

F. Classics with a Difference

60. Self-portraits (two each) by David and Ingres

I had intended to spend the whole of the second hour on the 19th century tracing this French conflict between classicism and its opposite, hopefully making my point that the dichotomy is truly a national characteristic rather than a consequence of the particular period. But I had more to say about the 18th century than I expected, so I am just going to give you a brief sample, concentrating on the two artists shown here: **Jacques-Louis David** (1748–1825) and **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres** (1780–1867).

61. David: *Mme Recamier* (1800) and Ingres: *Odalisque with Slave* (1842)

Compare these two pictures, one in the Louvre and very famous, the other a treasure of our own Walters. Two women lying on a sofa or bed. One is lightly clothed, the other naked. The Classical quality of David's *Mme Recamier* is clear from the *Empire* furniture, her dress, and her hairstyle; he supports it with a minimum of color; it is a sensuous picture, yet restrained. The colors and trappings of the Ingres are hardly classical at all; she has silk draperies, a lavish fan, and a hookah; her attendant is playing some Eastern instrument; the architecture is painted; there is a luscious garden in the background; she herself is anything but modest; and a black eunuch stands guard. Clearly this is a harem, not the retiring room of a society lady. And yet it too is classical in its composition, its horizontals and verticals, and orderly receding planes.

62. Jacques-Louis David: *The Death of Socrates* (1787, NY Metropolitan)
63. Poussin: *The Death of Germanicus* (1627, Minneapolis)

David won the *Prix de Rome* in 1774, and spent six years in Italy. There, he not only studied the ancients but absorbed the work of Raphael, taking a very similar learning path to that of Poussin a century and a half earlier. It is impossible to imagine him painting *The Death of Socrates* without Poussin's *Death of Germanicus* in his mind's eye.

64. Jacques-Louis David: *The Oath of the Horatii* (1785, Louvre)

By the end of the century, the more progressive thinkers had had enough of rococo frivolity. This was a time once more for stern imperatives and clear reason. David's *Oath of the Horatii*, in which the sons of Horatius take an oath to defend their country to the death, is actually a pre-revolutionary painting, but

its sentiments are those that would prevail in the years to come. Neoclassicism was not just an aesthetic movement, but a philosophical and even political one too.

65. Ingres: *The Envoys of Agamemnon* (1801) and *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1827)

Ingres also won the *Prix de Rome*, with the picture at the top, a subject taken from the *Iliad*. But he stayed in Rome for 18 years before returning to Paris, and later went back there for another seven as Director of the French Academy; he was a classicist through and through. And yet, if you look at the picture of *Oedipus and the Sphinx* that he completed on his return, his classicism is far from pure. The composition, with the rocky gorge and the Sphinx herself half hidden in the shadows, is more Romantic than anything by Poussin or David. True, the subject is classical, and the study of the nude is the bedrock of classical academic training—but the bend of Oedipus' body into those sinuous, insinuating curves is far from classical models.

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

Ingres' pursuit of the classical nude became stranger and stranger in his later career. Here he is in 1862, doubling down on his harem theme, playing it in spades. Without question, Ingres was the foremost classical painter of his age, and director of the foremost classical academy. The entire discipline of study from the nude is to understand the structure of bones and muscles beneath the surface, yet here he is, painting nude women as though bones did not exist! I find it significant the even the foremost French Classicist could not avoid the equally French urge to wallow in the exact opposite

67. Portraits of Hector Berlioz

Another winner of the *Prix de Rome* was the composer **Hector Berlioz** (1803–69). He addressed several classical subjects also, not least his vast five-act opera, *Les Troyens*, performed in a truncated version in 1863, the year after Ingres' *Bain Turc*. Even its individual numbers are too long to play complete. But this short excerpt from Act IV, the prelude to the love duet for Dido and Aeneas, should give you a sense of the luscious sensuality that suffuses this rich score.

68. Berlioz: *Les Troyens*, excerpt from Act IV

69. Title slide 3 (Ingres *Bain turc*, repeat)