

## PART VII SCIENCE AND SPLENDOR: THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

### Chapter 23 The Arts at the Court of Louis XIV

1. Late seventeenth-century France fused the baroque aesthetic with an espousal of reason, order, and clarity.
2. This culture came to be known as *neoclassical*.

#### I. Louis XIV (1638–1715) and Absolutism

1. France was the most powerful country in Europe from the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth century.
2. Under Louis XIV, France became the dominant cultural, as well as political, power.
3. Absolutism had begun with his predecessors and became a fact during his reign.
4. Louis XIV, “The Sun King,” was extolled as the center and source of all power.

#### II. Versailles

1. The monarchy of Louis XIV was a spectacle with the art and architecture of Versailles serving as the setting.
2. The transformation of the seat of power from a feudal castle to an open palace symbolized the transformation of governance from the feudal system to that of a single national ruler.
3. The palace of Versailles was begun in 1668 by Le Vau and was an extravagant enlargement of a hunting lodge belonging to Louis XIII.
4. The overwhelming feeling of Versailles is domination by order, symmetry, balance, and repetition.
5. Versailles was created in the classical vocabulary yet contradicts it by its vast scale and disregard for restraint and simplicity.

#### III. French Court Ballet and the Origins of Modern Theatrical Dancing

1. Versailles intricacy and extravagance fit the highly theatrical rituals that constituted life at court.
2. The arts of ballet, opera, tragedy, and comedy reached new heights in France during the reign of Louis the XIV.
3. The court ballet (ballet de cour) developed in the early seventeenth century.
4. Balls became popular in all the courts of Europe and nobles mastered the latest dances from Italy.
5. Louis’ title, “Sun King,” derives from his role as Apollo, the sun god, in *The Royal Ballet of Night* at the age of 15.

##### A. Development of the Comedy-Ballet

1. In 1672 Louis XIV founded a school to train professional dancers.
2. Louis’ dancing master, Pierre Beauchamps, and the court musician, Jean-Baptiste Lully, collaborated with the actor-director-playwright Molière in developing the “comedy-ballet.”
3. Molière is considered the father of modern comedy.

#### IV. French Neoclassical Drama

1. In the later part of the seventeenth century, theoreticians and practitioners of the theater reacted against the unbridled exuberance of the theater and attempted to impose universal standards on drama.
2. Basing their ideas on those of the Italian humanists and imitations of classical Greek and Roman drama, the French writers developed new rules and standards.

3. Most important to the “classical” ideal of tragedy were the three unities—time, place, and action.
4. Many of the Greek tragedies do not fit the French standards, and neither does Shakespeare.
5. French classicism nonetheless did produce two great tragedians—Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine.
6. Molière too was obliged to conform to these standards and to consider the pleasure of the king in his work.

A. Molière (1622–1673), a Genius of Comedy

1. Molière abandoned a possible career in law to pursue his passion for theater.
2. He co-founded a theater company from which he gained experience as an actor, director, and manager.
3. He was heavily influenced by the Italian *commedia dell’arte*.
4. One of Molière’s greatest comedies, written for a festival at Versailles, was *The Enchanted Island* (1664).
5. Another great work, *The Misanthrope*, concerns a man who hates the pretensions of upper-class life but is in love with a woman who accepts them fully.

V.–Marie de la Vergne de La Fayette (1634–1693) and the Origins of the Modern Novel

1. *Romances* and love poetry also enjoyed great popularity in seventeenth-century France.
2. Marie de la Vergne de La Fayette helped shape the course of modern fiction.
3. The first authors of the early modern novel were women.
4. The epistolary novel (based on letters) and other novels emphasizing feeling and sentiment flourished in England and France early in the eighteenth century.
5. Their predecessor was *The Princess of Cleves* Marie de la Vergne de La Fayette.
6. Published anonymously in 1678, this tale of female courage and moral strength was an immediate success.