

**IMPERIAL DESIRE AND CLASSICAL REVIVAL:
GUSTAVE BOULANGER'S *REHEARSAL OF "THE FLUTE PLAYER"***

by

Corina Weidinger

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History

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ABSTRACT

In *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* (1861), Gustave Boulanger made two ideologically charged claims. He promoted the Emperor Napoleon III's propagandistic identification with famous ancient emperors and affirmed that nineteenth-century French culture was the true descendent of ancient Roman culture. The painting portrayed the preparations of two plays staged in honor of the Emperor. Boulanger participated in Napoleonic flattery by prominently depicting a statue of Napoleon I as Julius Caesar. This statue visually substantiated Napoleon III's claim to be the modern personification of both Napoleon I and Augustus. A parallel Roman imperial connection was reiterated in *The Wife of Diomedes*, one of the plays represented in the painting, thereby justifying Napoleon III's autocratic policies and military conquests in Italy and beyond. On the other hand, in his reference to *The Flute Player*, whose plot centered on ancient prostitution, Boulanger transferred a ubiquitous French practice into antiquity. The painter's exquisite care to hide all signs suggesting that the action of *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* takes place in nineteenth-century France stresses the similarity between the modern French and ancient Roman civilizations. In the context of Western European countries' competing claims of a special relationship with antiquity, this Franco-Roman connection enabled the French to assert that their culture was the nineteenth-century equivalent of classical culture.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On February 14, 1860, Prince Napoleon inaugurated his newly completed Pompeian-style Parisian house with a party honoring his cousin, the Emperor Napoleon III. The event attracted the entire royal coterie, including Princess Clotilde, Prince Napoleon's wife, the British ambassador's family, and Jules Baroche, the President of the Conseil d'État.¹ *The Wife of Diomedes* and *The Flute Player*, two plays performed by actors of the Comédie-Française, were the highlight of the evening. In fact, Théophile Gautier wrote *The Wife of Diomedes* specifically for this occasion. This play shows an ancient woman awakening in nineteenth-century Paris in the Pompeian house during the two plays' rehearsal, astonished at how little things have changed over the centuries. The second play, Émile Augier's *The Flute Player*, recounts the love story between an ancient Greek courtesan and a young shepherd.²

Prince Napoleon built the Pompeian house for his mistress, the actress Rachel of the Comédie-Française.³ Because the Parisian public considered her to be the quintessential actress of antique roles, a Pompeian house would have suited her best.⁴ Sadly, she did not live to see it finished. The architect of the house, Alfred-Nicolas Normand, had already worked in Pompeii developing projects for reconstructions of ancient buildings.⁵ While the exterior and most of the interior were finished in November 1857, the house was not completed and furnished until 1860, when the artists Chauvin and Sébastien Cornu decorated it. Jean-Léon Gérôme painted three panels for it representing Homer (1858, oil on canvas, lost), the *Odyssey* (1858, oil on canvas, private collection), and the *Iliad* (1858, oil on canvas, lost).⁶ Also hanging in the Pompeian house was Gustave Boulanger's *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* and

“*The Wife of Diomedes*” (Figure 1; 1861, oil on canvas, Musée National de Versailles), a canvas depicting the rehearsals for the two plays in the atrium of Prince Napoleon’s residence, possibly on the day of the house’s inauguration or earlier.⁷

It is likely that Boulanger received this commission because of his connections with the actors at the Comédie-Française, where his wife had worked.⁸ Because the artist belonged to the Neo-Greek or *Pompéiste* group and was familiar with ancient Greece and Rome, he was a good choice for representing a house modeled on Pompeian prototypes. The Neo-Greeks, whose most famous exponent was Jean-Léon Gérôme, excelled in painting Greco-Roman scenes because of their studio training, particularly the numerous sessions of drawing after plaster casts of the Parthenon marbles and ancient vase painting.⁹

Boulanger and Gérôme, who also found inspiration in Orientalism, traveled to the Italian peninsula and the Middle East to perfect their style and search for visual motifs. As a winner of the Prix de Rome, Boulanger lived at Villa Medici from 1850 until 1856 and returned to Italy again in 1864 and 1868. He visited North Africa three times, once together with Gérôme, who had also traveled repeatedly to Italy and the Middle East. Both painters were particularly impressed by Naples and Pompeii.¹⁰

Unfortunately, information about Boulanger’s life and career is scarce. The painter had a very close personal and artistic relationship with Gérôme. Both artists lived at 27 Rue de Fleurus until Boulanger won the Prix de Rome and left for Italy.¹¹ Later in life they met regularly in the café Le père Laffitte and discussed artistic matters.¹² Because their relationship was so intimate, Gérôme’s paintings can be examined as a way to contextualize Boulanger’s little known work, *Rehearsal of “The Flute Player,”* which will be the focus of this paper.¹³

This essay will draw into sharp focus the relationship between imperialism and classicism as it appears in Boulanger's and Gérôme's works. So far, this association has remained largely unexplored, although scholars have discussed the relationship between classicism and Second Empire ideology. According to Albert Boime, Napoleon III and his arts administration supported the "official realism" of painters like the Neo-Greeks to counter the influence of less docile realist painters, such as Gustave Courbet.¹⁴ In his overview of the genres endorsed by Napoleon III's administration, Boime gives pride of place to Gérôme, whose painting *The Age of Augustus* (Figure 2; 1855, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) alludes to France's imperialist policies.¹⁵ Boime's study, however, makes no further connection between classicism and imperialism.

Marilyn Brown's article "Ingres, Gautier, and the Ideology of the Cameo Style of the Second Empire" ignores the imperialist dimension of classicism altogether. Brown coined the phrase "cameo style" to denote the neo-classical style characteristic of the Second Empire meant to praise Napoleon III. In her view, in the *Apotheosis of Napoleon* (Figure 3; 1853, fresco, destroyed), Ingres copied the composition of the Grand Cameo of France portraying the transfer of power through dynastic lines among ancient emperors. The painting was a thinly disguised version of Napoleon III's claim to be a reborn Napoleon I. Brown also analyzed Gautier's writings on art-for-art's sake and concluded that both the painter and the writer supported the Second Empire by combining aestheticism and politics.¹⁶

This essay builds upon Boime's and Brown's studies. Chapter 2 details Napoleon III's imperialist and archaeological policies that left their mark on Boulanger's and Gérôme's paintings. Chapter 3 centers on the two painters' canvases

praising Napoleon III's accomplishments, especially the expansion of France's borders into Italy. Chapter 4 examines Gérôme's paintings of contemporary Italy to suggest that his portrayals of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean peninsula emphasized their backwardness and inattention to the beauty of ancient monuments, making a French (archaeological) intervention in Italy imperative. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the analysis of the cultural imperialist implications of Boulanger's and Gérôme's classicizing works.

All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

¹ Marie-Claude Dejean de la Batie, "La Maison pompéienne du Prince Napoléon Avenue Montaigne," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 87 (1976), 131; Edgar Holt, *Plon-Plon: The Life of Prince Napoleon (1822-1891)* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), 163; Linda Safran, "A Note on Boulanger's *Répétition Générale du Joueur de Flûte*," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 6, no. 96 (November 1980), 186; Ferré, "Fête donné à l'Empereur et à l'Impératrice par son Altesse Impériale le Prince Napoléon," *L'Illustration* (25 February 1860), 115; Céleste Baroche, *Second Empire: Notes et souvenirs* (Paris: G. Crès, 1921), 141; Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), I, 516, footnote 2.

² Théophile Gautier, "La femme de Diomède," in *Théâtre, Mystère, Comédies et Ballets* (Paris: Charpentier, 1912); Émile Augier, *Théâtre complet* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1889); Baroche, *Second Empire*, 141.

³ *The Second Empire, 1852-1870: Art in France under Napoleon III* (Philadelphia: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 13; Holt, *Plon-Plon*, 118.

⁴ Holt, *Plon-Plon*, 60-1. Aware of the source of her success, Rachel surrounded herself with classical motives. She had her dining room decorated after a room from Herculaneum. (Dejean de la Batie, "La Maison pompéienne," 134).

⁵ Dejean de la Batie, "La Maison pompéienne," 128; *Pompéi: Travaux et envois des architectes français au XIXe siècle* (Paris: École nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1981), 59, 82.

⁶ Louis Dimier, *Histoire de la peinture française au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1914), 173; Gerald M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme* (London:

Sotheby's, 1986), 49. Since the house was demolished at the end of the nineteenth century, these paintings' exact location in the house remains unknown.

⁷ Marie-Noële de Gary, *La maison pompéienne du Prince Napoléon, 1856* (Paris: Musée des Arts Decoratifs, 1979), 8. This painting will be referred to as *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* in the remainder of this essay.

⁸ The painter was married to Mlle. Nathalie, who had played the role of Lais, the Greek courtesan, in 1850, when *The Flute Player* had first been staged. (Safran, "A Note," 186).

⁹ Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 12; Gerald Ackerman, "The Neo-Grecs: A Chink in the Wall of Neoclassicism," in *The French Academy: Classicism and Its Antagonists*, ed. June Hargrove (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 169-70; *Ingres and Delacroix through Degas and Puvis de Chavannes: The Figure in French Art, 1800-1870* (New York: Shepherd Gallery, 1975), 247.

¹⁰ Marie-Madeleine Aubrun, "Gustave Boulanger, peintre 'éclectique'" *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français* (1986), 169-71; Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 23, 35, 44-6, 105. I use the term "Italy" to denote the Italian peninsula. Italy as a nation state was not yet constituted at this time.

¹¹ Gérôme and Boulanger's contemporaries were well aware of this relationship. According to Jules Castagnary, "M. Gustave Boulanger tourne visiblement au Gérôme." [Jules Castagnary, *Salons, 1857-1870* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1892), 124]. For Edmond About, the two painters were so similar in style and choice of subject matter that they could be considered family relations. About also wrote: "M. G. R. Boulanger est éclos dans le même atelier que Gérôme. Il n'a pas toujours suivi la même route; son originalité fort indépendante l'a entraîné tantôt à droite, tantôt à gauche; les influences de Rome et d'un milieu académique l'ont fait dévier ça et là; mais il y a toujours une parenté visible entre ceux deux talents. Curiosité, recherche, finesse et quelquefois un grain de préciosité, amour du nouveau, passion du fini, besoin du détail exact: voilà les traits communs qui unissent ces deux artistes et maintiennent entre eux comme un air de famille." [Edmond About, *Salon de 1866* (Paris: Hachette, 1867), 268].

¹² Charles Moreau-Vauthier, *Gérôme peintre et sculpteur: l'homme et l'artiste d'après sa correspondance, ses notes: les souvenirs de ses élèves et de ses amis* (Paris: Hachette: 1906), 87; Aubrun, "Gustave Boulanger," 169-70.

¹³ *Rehearsal of the "Flute Player"* was described in contemporary Salon accounts, such as Théophile Gautier, *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861), 69 and W. Burger, "Salon de 1861," in *Salons de W. Burger, 1861 à 1868* (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1870), 26. Catalogue entries about this painting appear in *The Second Empire*, 259-60 and in Aubrun, "Gustave Boulanger," 182-3. Aubrun's work is still the only existing catalogue of Boulanger's paintings. In addition, Linda Safran identified all the figures from *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* in "A Note," 185-6.

¹⁴ Albert Boime, "The Second Empire's Official Realism," in *The European Realist Tradition*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), 31, 50-1, 86.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁶ Marilyn Brown, "Ingres, Gautier, and the Ideology of the Cameo Style of the Second Empire," *Arts Magazine* LVI/4 (December 1981), 97.

CHAPTER 2

FRENCH IMPERIALISM AT THE TIME OF GUSTAVE BOULANGER'S *REHEARSAL OF "THE FLUTE PLAYER"*

Any essay discussing imperialist implications in works of art has to explain the imperialist policies of that period as well as the artists' or patrons' potential affiliations with imperialism. Gérôme and Boulanger had a privileged relation with the arts administration and the imperial family. According to Gérôme scholar Gerald Ackerman, the painter was identified by his contemporaries with the Second Empire regime.¹ Gérôme had access to Napoleon III's and Princess Mathilde's circles, and his credentials were impressive. He taught at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, was a member of the Imperial Institute, and became a knight of the Legion of Honor in 1855 and an officer of the same order in 1867. In addition, since he designed charades and *tableaux vivants* for the Emperor's parties at Compiègne and the Tuileries Palace, his status was similar to the traditional position of court painter.² In 1869, Gérôme traveled with Empress Eugénie and a group of French artists to the opening of the Suez Canal, where he represented French authority and commercial interests, therefore officially acting as an agent of imperialism.³ Gérôme's importance at court is made evident by his painting *The Reception of the Siamese Ambassadors at Fontainebleau* (Figure 4; 1864, oil on canvas, Musée National de Versailles). This canvas portrays the visit of the Siamese ambassadors to sign a preferential commercial treaty with France. The Siamese envoys approach Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie on their knees. To make it more impressive, Gérôme represented the entire royal coterie at the event, including himself, in the scene. Unfortunately, Boulanger was not as successful as his friend in getting official commissions from the Second Empire. He did, however, receive a decoration of the Legion of Honor in 1865 and occupy an official

position in the Arts establishment, as he filled in for Gérôme at the École des Beaux-Arts when the latter was traveling.⁴

French imperialism during the Second Empire

Prince Napoleon, the man who organized the reception memorialized in *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player,"* was directly involved in France's imperialist and colonialist policies and the conservation of the Bonaparte dynasty.⁵ He had the command of one army division in the Crimea and Northern Italy, acted as Minister for Algeria and the Colonies, and was in charge of the Imperial Commission for the Universal Exhibition of 1855.⁶ During the Italian War of Independence (1859-1861), rumors even had it that Napoleon III was going to proclaim Prince Napoleon king of Tuscany.⁷

The Emperor's imperialist policies focused on the Mediterranean basin, specifically on the Italian peninsula. As Robert J.C. Young aptly states in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001), Napoleon III wanted "a greater France through which the Mediterranean flowed in the same way as the Seine flowed through France itself."⁸ In 1849, Louis-Napoléon, not yet Emperor, sent troops to Rome to protect the pope from the Italian people, who rejected the tutelage of the Catholic Church.⁹ The invasion allowed France to keep its army in a strategic position at the heart of Italy, not far from the Mediterranean.¹⁰

Even the Crimean War (1854) was related to the Emperor's Italian obsession. French troops invaded the Crimea to stop the Russians' territorial expansions at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. According to historian René Arnaud, Napoleon III aimed to reset the balance of power in Europe by allowing Prussia to extend its dominance among the German states and encouraging Austria to expand its rule into

the Danubian principalities. In exchange, Napoleon III would have liked Austria to return Lombardy to the Kingdom of Piedmont. This plot proved impossible.¹¹

In 1859, the Emperor brought France into a war against Austria to liberate Northern Italy and return it to the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia. One year earlier, in anticipation of this war, Napoleon III had arranged Prince Napoleon's marriage with the daughter of Victor-Emmanuel, King of Piedmont.¹² To expand his power even further, some historians contend that Napoleon III wanted to make his uncle Jérôme king of Tuscany, and Napoleon-Lucien Murat, king of the southern part of the Italian peninsula.¹³ Although these intentions did not materialize, Napoleon III claimed Savoy and Nice at the end of the Italian War of Independence.¹⁴ Nice's ancient Greek roots appealed to him because of his interest in ancient history.¹⁵ In addition, incorporating Savoy and Nice echoed the accomplishments of Napoleon I, who had occupied the two regions until 1815.¹⁶

France wanted this assimilation to appear to be voluntary. First, in 1859, under French direction, Nice and Savoy organized plebiscites to determine whether their inhabitants wanted to be French. To ensure a positive outcome, Napoleon III sent the senators Armand Laity to Savoy and Pierre-Marie Piétri to Nice to prepare the plebiscites in collaboration with the local authorities.¹⁷ French troops, who were retreating from the Italian War of Independence, seized both regions.¹⁸ Second, the Emperor manipulated the press. He hired Anselme Pétetin, a Savoyard immigrant, to promote the benefits of the union with France in publications such as *De l'Annexion de la Savoie à la France* and articles in *l'Opinion nationale* and *La Patrie*.¹⁹

In the 1860s, Napoleon III's actions in the Italian peninsula became increasingly contradictory. The Emperor had French troops defending the pope in

Rome while, at the same time, he upheld the Italian movement for independence and unification whose aim was to transform Rome into the capital of Italy and strip the pope of temporal power.²⁰ To sway French public opinion, Napoleon III instructed the Vicomte de Laguéronnière to address the “Roman question” and advocate the Emperor’s solution.²¹ In *L’Empereur Napoléon III et l’Italie* (1859), Laguéronnière emphasized Rome’s significance and Italy’s importance for Napoleon III. Italy represented civilization, argued the Vicomte: “on this elite land the immortal principles and glorious examples that formed men and peoples were born. Italy is more than a sister to other nations, it is a mother.”²² In its subtle metaphor of familial relations, this passage emphasizes France’s connection with Italy and firmly sets the roots of French civilization there.

Between 1850 and 1870, France’s imperialist pursuits moved beyond Europe. In the 1850s, the French continued to populate the remotest parts of Algeria.²³ In the 1860s, Napoleon III intervened in Syria to protect the Christian Maronites from the Muslim Druses, and in Mexico to install Maximilian I as Emperor. French interests also expanded to Morocco, Cambodia, New Guinea, Dahomey (present-day Benin), Cochinchina (present-day Indonesia), and Siam (present-day Thailand).²⁴

Imperialist undertones in the decoration of the Pompeian House

Napoleon III’s ambition to be seen as heir to an ancient Roman imperial tradition informs the decoration of Prince Napoleon’s Pompeian house. The interior, dominated by statues of Bonaparte family members modeled on busts of ancient Roman rulers, had a double purpose—to emphasize the idea of imperial succession and to honor the Bonaparte dynasty by identifying it with ancient dynasties. These sculptures attracted the attention of contemporary visitors, as shown by an article in

L'Illustration published in January 1858, in which Alfred Busquet called them “Roman figures” or ancient *lares* and compared the bust of Charles Bonaparte to Lucius Verus.²⁵ For Gautier, the most impressive bust was that of Napoleon I, whom he likened to an ancient god, “an Olympian or a divine Caesar.”²⁶

Prince Napoleon built the Pompeian house mainly as a place to entertain his friends.²⁷ Visitors commented on its theatrical quality, recommending that it be used for dramatic performances. Hippolyte Rigault suggested: “Here one should only perform ancient fêtes. Suetonius, Tacitus, Juvenal, Statius, Martial, those illustrious painters of Roman life, will give precious ideas for characters, costumes and decorations.” According to Rigault, only ancient costumes looked appropriate in the house.²⁸ Rigault’s words were heeded, as shown by Prince Napoleon’s decision to inaugurate the house with a party featuring the plays *The Wife of Diomedes* and *The Flute Player*.

Napoleon III’s archaeological policies

The Pompeian house and the theatrical repertoire chosen for its inaugural festivities indicate Prince Napoleon’s interest in antiquity. His interests, in fact, took on concrete archaeological form. In 1859, he developed plans to excavate Egyptian ancient monuments but, as his presence was needed in Paris, the archaeologist Auguste Mariette replaced him. Mariette brought back ancient artifacts, which made their way into Prince Napoleon’s collection, along with mosaics from Pompeii, bronzes from Greece, and Napoleonic imperial objects, such as eagles and cannonballs from the Crimean war.²⁹ In appropriating ancient relics and war memorabilia, Prince Napoleon’s private space combined antiquity and imperialism.

Moreover, the history, architecture and archaeology of ancient Rome fascinated Napoleon III. He assigned general Charles Verchère de Reffye, one of his *officiers d'ordonnance*, to make plaster casts after Trajan's column.³⁰ In 1852, the British magazine *Builder* revealed the Emperor's interest in ancient architecture. An English visitor trying to borrow J. I. Hittorff's *L'Architecture polychrome chez les Grecs* (1851) from the Bibliothèque Nationale was told that Napoleon III had borrowed the book.³¹ The Emperor's expertise in ancient history culminated with the publishing of a two-volume work, *Histoire de Jules César*, in 1865 and 1866.

In his effort to establish links between ancient Rome and the modern French imperial state under his sovereignty, Napoleon III was eager to uncover Roman history in France. He initiated archaeological excavations in the forest of Compiègne, Mont Beuvray (Bibracte) in Bourgogne, Gergovie, where the ancient Gallic leader Vercingetorix defeated the Roman army, and Puy d'Issolud, the ancient site of Uxellodunum and the last Gallic city to resist Caesar. The excavations at Alésia, where Caesar defeated Vercingetorix, received center stage.³² Carried out between 1861 and 1865, they led to the discovery of traces of Roman movements of troops, which provided the Emperor with new evidence for discussing the battle in an original manner in his book on Caesar.³³

Napoleon III invested time and money in archaeological digs.³⁴ In a contemporary illustration (Figure 5) of his visit to Alésia in 1861, he stands among archaeologists and local officials looking down at a trench. This trip ended on the heights of Mont-Auxois, from where Napoleon III admired the ongoing works.³⁵ In both the illustration and the story of Napoleon III on the mountain, the Emperor appears in the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" position, a trope defined by Marie-Louise

Pratt in connection with British explorers on the African continent, who described their feelings in terms indicative of European supremacy in front of the panorama of a recently discovered lake.³⁶ Quite similarly, the nineteenth-century illustration and the textual account of the visit on the mountain portray Napoleon III as the person in charge of unearthing the history and antiquity of ancient Gaul and Rome from a position of superiority.

Napoleon III also ensured the conservation of archaeological sites and ancient objects. Under royal supervision, the first local archaeological museum in France opened in Alise-Sainte-Reine, the nineteenth-century name of the ancient Alésia.³⁷ In addition, inspired by the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum of Mainz, Napoleon III founded the Gallo-Roman Museum in 1862, which became the Musée des Antiquités Nationales at the Château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye five years later.³⁸ Because it comprised Celtic and Gallo-Roman antiquities and a room dedicated to Alésia, this museum declared the exceptional position of the Gauls in the history of the Roman Empire.³⁹

Napoleon III's interest in Roman history and archaeology was related to his imperialist intra-continental policies, especially those aimed at Italian territories. As a result of this involvement in Roman history, it is not surprising that Boulanger's and Gérôme's canvases incorporated messages quite similar to the official aims of the Emperor, as the next chapters will show.

¹ Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 84.

² For evidence that the painter designed charades for the Emperor see Mme. Gérôme in a letter to M. Monier, cited in Monnier, *L'Histoire de Vesoul*, II, 380; quoted in Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 84.

³ Ackerman, “The Neo-Grecs,” 84; Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 51; Hélène Lafont-Couturier, *Gérôme* (Paris: Herscher, 1998), 43. Albert Boime has suggested that Gérôme had official responsibilities in his trips to the Middle East (Boime, “The Second Empire’s Official Realism,” 85). Although Boime did not give any source for this information, he wondered: “Can it be merely a coincidence that Gérôme, who made five visits to the Near East during the period of the Second Empire, is always present during the critical events of French involvement? He traveled down the Danube in 1854 ostensibly to record ethnic types for his *Age of Augustus* (itself an homage to the French Emperor and his colonializing aspirations); he makes his first visit to Egypt in 1856 during delicate developments in the negotiations for the Suez project; travels through the Syrian desert in 1861 during the period of the French expedition to repel the Druses; and his fifth trip is this official participation in the state delegation attending the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869” (Ibid., 85). Although it is quite possible that Gérôme had official reasons for his travels in the Middle East, more archival research is necessary to establish these assertions with certitude. So far, Gérôme’s only documented official intervention in the Middle East is his participation in the Suez Canal. Another event suggesting official investiture comes from a book by Paul Lenoir, one of Gérôme’s students who accompanied him on the 1868 trip to the Middle East. Lenoir noted that for a part of the journey the French travelers received dromedaries from the viceroy of Egypt because Gérôme was a member of the group. This shows the high respect in which Gérôme was held in Egypt, either as a painter or perhaps in a semi-official quality. See Paul Lenoir, *The Fayoum, or Artists in Egypt* (London: Henry S. King, 1873), 187.

⁴ Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 84; *Ingres and Delacroix*, 248.

⁵ See Prince Napoleon’s comment on the eve of the Crimean war: “It’s all very well for you in England. If things go wrong, you’ll just change your government. It’s a different matter for us. It’s the dynasty that will fall.” (Holt, *Plon-Plon*, 85) Also, when the Piedmontese Prime Minister Cavour reproached the French for signing an armistice with Austria allowing it to keep Venice instead of pursuing the Austrians outside of Venetia, Prince Napoleon angrily retorted: “Do you really think that we would lose France and our dynasty for you?” (Ibid., 154).

⁶ René Arnaud, *The Second Republic and Napoleon III*, trans. E.F. Buckley (1923-38; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1967), 258; Holt, *Plon-Plon*, 80-3, 115, 125, 148; Boime, “The Second Empire’s Official Realism,” 36.

⁷ Paul Guichonnet, *Histoire de l’annexion de la Savoie à la France* (Roanne: Editions Horvath, 1982), 78.

⁸ Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 30.

⁹ Although he did not have the prerogative to take such a decision single-handedly, Louis-Napoléon fervently believed in it. One of his surviving letters, addressed to Oudinot, the general in charge of the French army in Rome, shows his belief in the righteousness of the French invasion. In this letter, he expresses surprise and disappointment at the Italians, who had taken arms to defend themselves against the French aggressor. The letter reads as follows: “Mon cher général, la nouvelle télégraphique qui annonce la résistance imprévue que vous avez rencontrée sous les murs de Rome m’a vivement peiné. J’espérais, vous le savez, que les habitants de Rome, ouvrant les yeux à l’évidence, recevraient avec empressement une armée qui venait accomplir chez eux une mission bienveillante et désintéressée. Il en a été autrement; nos soldats ont été reçus en ennemis; notre honneur militaire est engagé; je ne souffrirai pas qu’il reçoive aucune atteinte.” [Emile Bourgeois and E. Clermont, *Rome et Napoleon III, 1849-1870* (Paris: Librairies Armand Colin, 1907), 58, 82].

¹⁰ Lynn M. Case, *Franco-Italian Relations, 1860-1865: The Roman Question and the Convention of September* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932), 5.

¹¹ Arnaud, *Second Republic*, 97.

¹² Holt, *Plon-Plon*, 127-8; Guichonnet, *Histoire de l’annexion*, 86.

¹³ Allain Rouiller, *Nice demain l’indépendance!* (Nice: France Europe Editions, 2003), 104. Other scholars see Prince Napoleon as the intended ruler of Tuscany. See footnote 7.

¹⁴ Napoleon III had signed a secret treaty with Cavour on July 20-22, 1858, to ensure that France received Savoy at the end of the war. On January 24, 1859, Napoleon III and Cavour signed a second secret treaty agreeing to cede Nice to France. On March 14, 1860, the leaders of the two countries signed a new pact incorporating both regions into France. See Rouiller, *Nice*, 41; Arnaud, *Second Republic*, 205-9; Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), 96.

¹⁵ For the Greek roots of Nice see Rouiller, *Nice*, 154. For more detailed information on Napoleon III’s fascination with ancient ruins see the latter part of this chapter.

¹⁶ Lynn M. Case, *French Opinion on War and Diplomacy during the Second Empire* (1954; repr. New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 118. Savoy had been part of France during Napoleon I's rule until 1815 when it was given back to Sardinia.

¹⁷ Guichonnet, *Histoire de l'annexion*, 81, 141-3, 155, 226; Rouiller, *Nice*, 143, 154. The opposition to the annexation decried the lack of correctness of the plebiscites. (Guichonnet, *Histoire de l'annexion*, 330). In Nice, before the opening of the urns, a French representative declared that the vote was positive. (Rouiller, *Nice*, 82, 207). Rouiller researched the conditions of the legal passing of Nice from Sardinia to France and noted that the treaties between Victor Emmanuel and his minister Cavour on one side and Napoleon III on the other side were illegal, because Sardinia did not have the right to cede Nice. (Ibid., 143).

¹⁸ Stuart Woolf, *A History of Italy, 1700-1860: The Social Constraints of Political Change* (London: Methuen and Co Ltd, 1979), 457; Case, *French Opinion*, 121; Guichonnet, *Histoire de l'annexion*, 203, 237; Rouiller, *Nice*, 143.

¹⁹ Guichonnet, *Histoire de l'annexion*, 81, 141-3, 155, 226; Rouiller, *Nice*, 143, 154.

²⁰ Arnaud, *Second Republic*, 212.

²¹ Case, *French Opinion*, 60.

²² "C'est sur cette terre d'élite que sont nés les principes immortels et les glorieux exemples qui ont formé des hommes et des peuples. L'Italie est plus qu'une sœur pour les autres nations, c'est une mère." [Louis Etienne Arthur vicomte de Laguéronnière, *L'Empereur Napoleon III et l'Italie* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1859), 3-4].

²³ Aldrich, *Greater France*, 27.

²⁴ Aldrich, *Greater France*, 32, 39, 40, 51, 57, 77, 79; Albert Boime, "Gérôme and the Bourgeois Artist's Burden," *Arts Magazine* 57 (January 1983), 68.

²⁵ Alfred Busquet, "Hotel pompéien de S.A.I. Le Prince Napoléon, à l'avenue Montaigne, aux Champs-Élysées," *L'Illustration* (2 January 1858), 10. Busquet also asserted: "Ce style fier et solide convient tout à fait à une famille qui tire ses origines d'elle-même, et joint à travers les siècles la tradition française à la tradition romaine." (Ibid., 8).

²⁶ Gautier, "Une Maison de Pompei, avenue Montaigne," *L'Artiste* II (29 November 1857), 194.

²⁷ The prince had a bedroom in the Pompeian house, where he rarely slept. His home was the Palais-Royal. According to Holt, the Pompeian house “was a good setting for parties and plays or for long evenings of literary and artistic argument with friends like Arsène Houssaye and Théophile Gautier.” (Holt, *Plon-Plon*, 118-9) The house was also a place where the Prince could meet his mistresses or, rather, display them in public. For example, an incident most thoroughly enjoyed by the Prince’s male friends present at the event was the arrival of one of his mistresses, Sylvanie Arnould-Plessy, at the Pompeian house while his newer mistress, Anna Deslions, was bathing naked in the *impluvium*. (Ibid., 123)

²⁸ “On n’y devra donner que des fêtes antiques. Suétone, Tacite, Juvenal, Stace, Martial, ces peintres illustres de la vie romaine, fourniront des indications précieuses de personnages, de costumes et de décorations.” [Hippolyte Rigault, *Conversations littéraires et morales* (Paris: Charpentier, 1859), 81-3].

²⁹ C. Ferri Pisani, “Bronzes égyptiens tirés de la collection du Prince Napoléon,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 1 (1 March 1859), 270-284.

³⁰ Frédéric Masson, “Notes et Fragments Inédits de J-L. Gérôme,” *Les Arts* (1904), 26; *Vercingétorix et Alésia: Saint-Gemain-en-Laye*, Musée des antiquités nationales, 29 mars-18 juillet 1994 (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994), 242.

³¹ An Architect, “An Epistolary Chat from Paris,” *Builder* (London), X (June 1852), 380; quoted in David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1958), 25. Also quoted in David P. Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labours of Baron Haussmann* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 192.

³² *La sculpture française au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 10 avril-28 juillet 1986), 374; Joël Le Gall, *Alésia: archéologie et histoire* (Paris: Fayard, 1963), 71; *Vercingétorix et Alésia*, 192, 238, 242, 346.

³³ Napoleon III, *Histoire de Jules César* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1866), II, 317, note 1; Le Gall, *Alésia*, 58.

³⁴ Le Gall, *Alésia*, 58.

³⁵ Ibid., 62-3.

³⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge Press, 1992), 201-3.

³⁷ *Vercingétorix et Alésia*, 241.

³⁸ Le Gall, *Alésia*, 57.

³⁹ Le Gall, *Alésia*, 56, 58; *Vercingétorix et Alésia*, 11.

CHAPTER 3

PAINTINGS OF ROMAN EMPERORS AND THE POLITICS OF FRENCH IMPERIALISM

To curry favor with the regime, Gérôme and Boulanger promoted Second Empire expansionist policies in their paintings of ancient Roman rulers. This chapter will first analyze the ways in which *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* exalts Napoleon III's military victories in the Crimea and the Italian peninsula and will then examine other canvases with the same political message.

First, a description of the painting is in order. *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* portrays the Pompeian house's atrium as seen from one of the corners adjacent to the dining-room wall when looking towards the library. From this angle Boulanger could include all the characters participating in the rehearsal, as well as the two playwrights, Émile Augier and Théophile Gautier, depicted in the center of the canvas. Augier, the author of *The Flute Player*, sits close to the picture plane, while Gautier stands in the background, his upright figure almost dividing the canvas in half. Two actresses from the Comédie-Française accompany the authors. Marie Favart leans against a column in the background, listening to Gautier's instructions on how she should act in *The Wife of Diomedes*. Madeleine Brohan stands in the right foreground striking an antique pose. She rehearses the role of Lais in *The Flute Player* with the actor Edmond Geoffroy, the man reclining on the sofa, in front of Augier, who follows their lines on a papyrus roll. The two men standing on the left are François Got and Joseph Samson, actors at the Comédie-Française.¹ Their position at a distance from the main scene, peeking at the rehearsals, and unacknowledged by any of the other characters, suggests their similarity to the painting's viewers.

Boulanger skillfully selected the viewpoint to emphasize Eugène Guillaume's full-size statue of Napoleon Bonaparte in ancient garb, portrayed as a Caesar on the left, installed in the atrium especially for the inaugural performance.² In depicting it, Boulanger connected Prince Napoleon, the owner of the house, and his cousin Napoleon III, a guest at the party, with Napoleon Bonaparte. The statue's toga and laurel wreath identified Napoleon I's descendants not only with him, but also with famous ancient emperors such as Caesar and Augustus. In addition, the Roman-like bust of one of Prince Napoleon's female ancestors in the center background rounds off ideas of dynastic succession and ancient roots.

Boulanger stressed the imperial presence in the painting by emphasizing the lifelike quality and the height of Napoleon I's statue. For example, the strong light from the *compluvium* bathes it in a shade of yellow much like the color of Gautier's toga. In addition, Gautier tilts his head to look up at the statue rather than looking down at Marie Favart, his companion. The actress' role in this tête-à-tête is additionally diminished by her stooping figure and passive attitude, suggesting that Gautier converses with the statue. The pictorial similarities between sculpture and Gautier, such as the lighting and their togas and laurel wreaths, seem to enliven the former. The sculpture's lifelike quality is made evident by a comparison between *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* and an earlier sketch, in which Boulanger represented the writer physically closer to the actress and clearly looking at her (Figure 6).

The painter made an emblematic allusion to France's African possessions by portraying a black woman in the role of a slave on the other side of the *impluvium* facing the statue. Because she is absent in the sketch, she was probably not present at

the rehearsals and was added at a later stage by the artist. The black woman offers a sacrifice to Napoleon I. The representation of her worship, which elevates Bonaparte to the rank of deity, is Boulanger's subtle means to promise Napoleon I's successors the same honors at their death.

Boulanger deliberately chose his viewpoint to highlight two thin horizontally oriented frescoes whose subject matter echoes the themes of the plays rehearsed in the painting. On the right side of the canvas, cut off by its edge, is a representation of a bacchanal corresponding to the topic of *The Flute Player*. In the center of the canvas, towards the top of the wall, is a depiction of the sack of Troy alluding to the theme of victory in war present in *The Wife of Diomedes*.

This play has a key role in clarifying the painting's meaning, as it memorializes the same inaugural party to which the canvas refers and supports Second Empire imperialist policies. In the play, Arria, a Pompeian woman and Diomedes' wife, who died during the eruption of Vesuvius, awakens in Prince Napoleon's Pompeian house during the rehearsal of the two plays. "Pompeii still lives," exclaims Arria, realizing that nothing has changed in her two thousand years of sleep. Upon noticing the statue of Napoleon I, she wonders whether it represents Mars, Apollo or Jupiter. Its large forehead, a sign of "immense wisdom," and its eyes resembling those of an unknown god astound her. Had the person represented in the statue lived in antiquity, Arria remarks, Homer would have loved him more than Achilles, and Aeschylus more than his Titan.³ Finally, in having Arria identify the statue and connect Napoleon III and Augustus, Gautier, the main advocate of the idea that art should have no connection with politics, breaks his own principles:⁴

Mais un éclair soudain brille à mes yeux surpris,
Le réel m'apparaît sous un angle plus juste:

Le marbre était César,—le vivant est Auguste!—
Ta villa, Diomède, a dans ses murs étroits
Napoléon premier et Napoléon trois!⁵

The subsequent verses push the metaphor even further. Arria sees Victories fly back from Crimea and Italy, an allusion to the two wars in which France participated under Napoleon III. Not surprisingly, both the poem and *Rehearsal of “The Flute Player”* make ancient Roman imperial allegories appropriate for a French context.

Connecting Napoleon III’s reign to ancient Rome

Gautier and Boulanger were just two of the many artists who linked Napoleon III, Napoleon I, and ancient emperors to praise the Second Empire’s expansion. In the wooden panel *Napoleon III* (Figure 7; 1865, enamel on wooden panel, National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest), Claudius Popelin stresses the Emperor’s resemblance with famous kings from French history by placing his bust among those of Charlemagne, Napoleon Bonaparte, Clovis, and Hugh Capet. In addition, Napoleon III wears a Roman military general’s armor, which also confers the aura of a victorious conqueror. The box above the image of the Emperor bears Latin inscriptions listing the countries or regions in which Second Empire France had military pursuits or commercial interests: “Africa,” “Italia,” “Coxinsina,” “Russia,” “Syria,” and “Mexicum.” The prominent display of the caption “Ex Utroque Caesar,” which translates “From all sides Caesar,” in the panel below the figure of Napoleon III, explicitly connects him with Caesar and suggests the expansiveness of his power in all corners of the world. In addition, in the bottom plaque, Popelin includes the title of Napoleon III’s book about Caesar, “Vita J. Caesaris,” as one of the Emperor’s most important deeds. The inscriptions “Italia” in the top inset and “Magenta” and

“Solferino” in the box at the bottom memorialize Napoleon III’s supposedly valiant behavior on the Italian battlefield.

The medal *The Emperor Napoleon III* (Figure 8; 1860-70, struck bronze, Musée du Louvre, Paris) also supports the idea that the Second Empire employed Roman motifs to promote its imperialist policies. Its engraver, Eugène-André Oudiné, portrays Napoleon III crowned with laurel wreaths in the profile view typical of Roman emperors. The Paris Mint issued this medal as the reverse of medals with different obverses to commemorate the annexation of Savoy and Nice and the inauguration of the Suez Canal.⁶

Boulangier also praised, even prophesized, Napoleon III’s imperialist policies in Italy. Awarded a second-class medal at the Salon of 1857, the painting *Caesar Arriving at Rubicon* (Figure 9; 1857, oil on canvas, Amiens, Musée de Picardie) visually allegorizes Napoleon III’s desire to cross the Italian border by evoking Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon.⁷ Caesar crossed the Rubicon, the river separating the Roman province of Cisalpine Gaul from Rome, to seize power, transforming Rome into an empire and himself into its sole ruler.⁸ According to Suetonius, the undecided Caesar on the Rubicon’s shore found motivation upon seeing a man crossing the river while blowing a bugle.⁹ This man sits with his flute on the left of Boulangier’s painting, while an imposing Caesar looks thoughtfully across the river, accompanied by one soldier. This relationship between Caesar and Napoleon III becomes compelling in light of the physical similarity between Caesar’s large forehead and hairstyle and those of Napoleon I as depicted in Ingres’s *Napoleon I on His Imperial Throne* (Figure 10; 1806, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris). Furthermore, because “Rubicon” is the name of the operation through which Napoleon III took

power, the canvas specifically refers to the 1851 *coup d'état*, therefore eulogizing the Second Empire.¹⁰ Contemporary critics understood the painter's intentions quite clearly. For example, after the removal of Napoleon III from power, Marius Chaumelin criticized the timing of Boulanger's depiction of Caesar because it concurred with the publication of Napoleon III's book on the same subject.¹¹

But the painting most overtly referring to France's imperial ambitions was Gérôme's *The Age of Augustus*. In this large work (twenty-three feet in height and thirty-six feet in width), commissioned by the arts administration for the 1855 Universal Exhibition, Gérôme illustrated a fragment from Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History* (1681), referring to Augustus's absolute power over conquered peoples and his victories in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Like Bossuet's passage, the painting juxtaposes Roman imperial peace and the coming of Christ.¹²

Gérôme painted Augustus sitting on a throne surrounded by Roman senators, poets and artists, and dominating the entire canvas. The allegorical figure in a red *peplum* next to the emperor personifies Rome. The dead bodies lying at Augustus's feet are those of Marc Anthony, Cleopatra and Caesar. At the base of the pyramidal composition, a large crowd, representing the regions conquered by the empire, venerates Augustus. Gautier, who wrote at length about this painting in *Les Beaux-Arts en Europe* (1855), identified Chinese, Indians, Egyptians, Greeks, Gauls, Arabs, and Jews in the crowd of defeated nations. On the left, Roman soldiers drag naked women, allegorical figures of the defeated provinces.¹³ Some of the conquered people kneel in the same pose as the Siamese ambassadors paying homage to Napoleon III in a later painting by Gérôme. Sheltered by an angel's wings from the tumultuous crowd,

a scene of nativity unfolds at the bottom of the canvas. The racial hierarchy is striking, as the white Romans occupy the top of the canvas while the representatives of other races are relegated to the bottom.

A comparison between Augustus's pose and Napoleon Bonaparte's pose in Ingres's *Napoleon I on His Imperial Throne* reveals that Gérôme modeled Augustus on Napoleon. In so doing, he stressed the similarity between the two emperors and, ultimately, between Augustus and Napoleon III. In addition, the Napoleonic eagle resting on the pedestal supporting the throne in *The Age of Augustus* evokes the imperial eagle stretching its wings in the design of the carpet in Ingres's portrait.¹⁴

The grandiloquence of Gérôme's representation of Napoleon III as a modern Augustus matched the Emperor's overstated opinions of himself in his own writings about Caesar. While reviewing *Histoire de Jules César*, Emile Zola criticized its author for praising Caesar's decision to transform Rome from a Republic into an Empire. To Zola, this book was nothing less than the Emperor's justification of his own coup.¹⁵ In a true Republican vein, the novelist condemned Napoleon III's view of Caesar as "a Messiah who was to regenerate Rome."¹⁶ This comment is not surprising considering Gérôme's association between Augustus and Christ in *The Age of Augustus*.

Gérôme's painting drew laudatory remarks from Gautier, who once again ignored his dictum that art should not pander to imperial tastes. The critic considered the clear blue sky an indication of the peace and happiness brought in the world by Augustus' policies. According to him, Augustus's majestic and god-like appearance exuded both virility and intelligence.¹⁷

Despite this painting's clearly pro-Napoleonic message, critics hostile to the Second Empire interpreted it according to their own interests. Because it was not safe to criticize Napoleon III directly, Maxime du Camp and Charles Baudelaire, who recognized Augustus for Napoleon III, took the opportunity of criticizing the regime in a veiled manner. Baudelaire complained that the composition was not grand enough; in addition, a great ruler should have been depicted in a more dignified manner. In a virulent critique, the poet named Gérôme's Augustus "a self-appointed Caesar, this butcher, this obese wine merchant, who would rather, as is suggested by his satisfied and provoking pose, aspire to the role of the director of the journal of the potbellied and the satisfied."¹⁸

For Du Camp, Christ's birth at the moment when Augustus held absolute power was not only the apogee of the Roman Empire but also the beginning of its end. Du Camp considered the senators next to Augustus corrupt and treacherous and decried the attitude of the subjects bowing to him. In his view, the dead bodies of Caesar, Anthony and Cleopatra symbolized the end of glory, beauty, carnal love, and patriotism.¹⁹

In spite of this condemnation, *The Age of Augustus* did not intend to disparage the government. The painting was officially commissioned to represent the French state and painting at the 1855 Universal Exhibition. The arts administration appreciated it since it rewarded Gérôme with a large sum of money, the Legion of Honor, and a second-class medal.²⁰ Moreover, its message suited Napoleon III's interests. In representing ancient poets and artists around Augustus as well as conquered peoples, the painting reinforced Napoleon III's beliefs that France was a modern Rome in its cultural prominence and he was a victorious emperor.

Although a present-day observer may interpret the lifeless Caesar as an allusion to Napoleon III's demise, it actually refers to the death of Napoleon I. Caesar's death by treason echoed Bonaparte's death on an island far from France. Moreover, Gautier's *The Wife of Diomedes*, where Bonaparte is identified as a modern Caesar and Napoleon III as a modern Augustus confirms this analogy. The juxtaposition of the dead Caesar and the victorious Augustus suggests dynastic continuity in spite of assassination attempts, plots and betrayals.

Gérôme revisited the topic of the dead leader in his canvas *The Death of Caesar* (Figure 11; 1867, oil on canvas, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore), painted only one year after *Histoire de Jules César* was published. In this book, Napoleon III voiced his anxiety at being dethroned or assassinated and bemoaned those not able to appreciate enlightened rulers.²¹ The painting visualizes Napoleon III's unease about imperial demise. Gérôme carefully staged his composition to produce compassion in the viewers; he succeeded, according to contemporary critics.²² To suggest how unjust the murder had been, the painter portrayed the great ruler in a pitiable state, lying on the floor in a corner and deserted by all companions. The emptiness of the large hall amplifies the devastation felt at the death of the great head of state. As expected, Napoleon III appreciated this painting and rewarded Gérôme with a Medal of Honor and an appointment as an officer of the Legion of Honor.²³

Promoting commercial imperialism

Gérôme also encouraged Second Empire commercial imperialism, another important side of French foreign policy, as seen in a frieze reproduced on a Sèvres vase offered by France to Prince Albert at the Universal Exhibition of 1855 (Figure 12).²⁴ The same composition was exhibited at the Salon of 1853 in canvas form

(Figure 13; 1852, oil on canvas, Musée de Sèvres, Sèvres). In the center, Gérôme portrays the symbolic personifications of three concepts associated with commerce—Harmony, Abundance and Justice. On either side, groups of allegorical figures embodying the commercial activities of various nations bring forth their characteristic industrial goods. The frieze was modeled on Paul Delaroche's *Hémicycle* at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris of 1837-41 (Figure 14).²⁵ While in his apotheosis of the arts, Delaroche painted Ictinus, Apelles and Phidias in the center, surrounded by groups of artists from antiquity to the time of Louis XIV, Gérôme focused his composition on the idols of commerce, around which he represented countries hierarchically. Symbols painted above the allegorical figures identify each nation. The first group on the right represents France and Belgium, suggesting the two countries' close ties and Napoleon III's ambitions to incorporate the latter.²⁶ The delegates of Austria and Prussia, Spain and Portugal, and Turkey line up farther from the center. First from the left is England, France's main trade competitor, followed by Russia, the United States, and China.

Gérôme depicted France and England incorporating the products and the inhabitants of their colonies, thereby suggesting that Western European countries' industrial and artistic progress justified the appropriation of colonial resources. For example, because men in Arabic costume and Indian people are relegated to the end of the French and British queues, the structure of each national group expresses racial prejudice. The last person in the British group is an almost naked darker-skinned man shown from behind. In his review of the painting, Gautier contemptuously identifies him, "the tattooed savage of Polynesia hides half nude, ashamed of only bringing forth raw products."²⁷ He emphasizes the differences between both the manufactured and

finely crafted objects brought forth by the French and British people, and the raw materials carried by the colonized, which, in his view, reflect their producers' inferiority.²⁸

The European powers' sophisticated merchandise indicates their artisans' superior talent. According to Gautier, England is represented by men working with iron, India by its cashmere, and France by "a group of artists holding precious bronzes, inlaid caskets, splendid fabrics, all its intelligent labor, in which thought is valued more than matter."²⁹ The critic furthermore highlights France's cultural and artistic superiority. He names the French laborer "almost an artist," and characterizes the English worker as a powerful man, the Muslim as fatalist, and the Chinese as sardonic.³⁰

In including a painter in the French group, recognizable by his easel and brush, Gérôme also states the superiority of French painting over that of other countries. Moreover, this figure's Roman clothing suggests that painting allows France to claim a special connection with antiquity. Chapter 5 will tease out this relationship. In the meantime, chapter 4 will establish that Gérôme portrayed Italians as *pifferari*, thereby anticipating the French annexation of Italian provinces.

¹ For the identification of the characters in the painting see Safran, "A Note," 186.

² Two articles from 1857 mention a bust on the pedestal. All surviving photographs from this period show the podium topped with a small bronze statue of a faun. (Aubrun, "Gustave Boulanger," 183; Busquet, "Hotel pompéien," 10; Gautier, "Une Maison de Pompei," 194; Dejean de la Batie, "La Maison pompéienne," 129).

³ Gautier, "La femme de Diomède," 220-2.

⁴ For a study of Gautier's involvement in politics and the connections between his aestheticism and ideology, see Brown, "Ingres," 94-99.

⁵ Gautier, “La femme de Diomède,” 222. In English translation: “But a sudden gleam shines in front of my surprised eyes,/ The real appeared to me from a truer angle:/ The marble was Caesar—the living is Augustus!—/ Your villa, Diomedes, has inside its tight walls/Napoleon I and Napoleon III!”

⁶ *Second Empire*, 236.

⁷ For information about the honors received by this canvas see *Ingres and Delacroix*, 248.

⁸ Philip Thody, *French Caesarism from Napoleon I to Charles de Gaulle* (Basinstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 12.

⁹ As seen in Louis Avray, *Exposition des Beaux-Arts: Salon de 1857* (Paris: l’Europe artiste, 1857), 33-4.

¹⁰ For details on the name of the coup see S.C. Burchell, *Imperial Masquerade: The Paris of Napoleon III* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 31; Thody, *French Caesarism*, 12, 51.

¹¹ “À cela près, nul ne s’est montré plus préoccupé que lui de sacrifier au goût du jour; sous prétexte de retracer des scènes antiques, il a voulu peindre des actualités; en même temps que l’Empereur des Français, il a commenté les *Commentaires* du dominateur des Gaules (*César passant le Rubicon, César marchant en tête de la 10e légion*); en même temps que le Prince Napoléon, il a fait de l’archéologie pompéienne (*Répétition du joueur de flûte... dans la maison de l’avenue Montaigne*); en même temps que M. Gérôme, l’auteur de la Phryné, il a habillé et déshabillé des hétaires du quartier Bréda (*La Cella frigidaria, La Promenade sur la voie des tombeaux*, etc.)” [Marius Chaumelin, *L’art contemporain; avec une introduction par W. Burger* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1873), 391].

¹² Théophile Gautier, *Les Beaux-Arts en Europe* (Paris: Michel Levy Frères, 1855-6), I, 218; Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 42; Boime, “Gérôme,” 69.

¹³ Gautier, *Les Beaux-Arts*, I, 220-224.

¹⁴ Albert Boime asserted that Gérôme glorified the Second Empire by comparing it with the age of Augustus and praised the “imperialistic designs of the new regime.” (Boime, “The Second Empire’s Official Realism,” 86; Boime, “Gérôme,” 69). The eagle was also an imperial symbol in ancient Rome.

¹⁵ Émile Zola, “Histoire de Jules César,” in *My Hatreds*, trans. Palomba Pavese-Yashinsky (Lewinston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 162-3.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Gautier, *Les Beaux-Arts*, I, 220.

¹⁸ “. . . ce soi-disant César, ce boucher, ce marchand de vins obèse, qui tout au plus pourrait, comme le suggère sa pose satisfaite et provocante, aspirer au rôle de directeur du journal des Ventrus et des satisfaits.” [Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques* (1868; rpt. Lausanne: Editions de l’Oeil, 1956), 342].

¹⁹ Maxime du Camp, *Les Beaux-Arts à l’exposition universelle de 1855* (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1855), 177-183.

²⁰ *Ingres and Delacroix*, 248.

²¹ Napoleon III, *Jules César*, vi.

²² Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1859: Lettres à M. le Directeur de la ‘Revue Française,’” in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), II, 641; Louis Jourdan, *Les Peintres Françaises: Salon de 1859* (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1859), 35-6.

²³ Lafont-Couturier, *Gérôme*, 43.

²⁴ Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 41.

²⁵ Idem.

²⁶ After the Austrian-Prussian war of 1866, following in the steps of his uncle Napoleon I, the Emperor may have fruitlessly attempted to convince Otto von Bismarck that in exchange for having stayed neutral, France should receive Belgium and Luxembourg. [Thody, *French Caesarism*, 61].

²⁷ Théophile Gautier, “Salon de 1855,” *La Presse* (24 June 1855).

²⁸ Idem.

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Idem.

CHAPTER 4

STEREOTYPING NINETEENTH-CENTURY ITALIANS: GÉRÔME'S *PIFFERARI*

Today Gérôme is known as the main nineteenth-century French painter of Orientalist canvases that intimate and further imperialist ideology.¹ According to art historian Linda Nochlin, his works portray a backward Orient in need of French civilization.² The artist also hints at the French desire to get involved in Egypt prior to the opening of the Suez Canal in his canvas *Bonaparte at Cairo* (Figure 15; 1867-8, oil on canvas, Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument). Here Gérôme portrays Napoleon I on horseback on top of a hill, surveying the conquered city at his feet. The Emperor appears in the typical “monarch-of-all-I-survey” pose. Since Napoleon III identified with his uncle Napoleon I, *Bonaparte at Cairo* can be seen as an allusion to Napoleon III’s desire for French economic benefit from the Suez enterprise.

The comparison between Gérôme’s great number of paintings of contemporary life in the Middle East and his few canvases of Italian nineteenth-century life reveals his limited interest in the latter. The painter’s canvases of nineteenth-century Italy and Italians, however, promote imperialist concerns so far overlooked by scholars. Because Boulanger’s works on this theme are lost, art historians have not discussed them either.³ For this reason this chapter will evaluate only Gérôme’s paintings of Italy and its inhabitants.

Because they are devoid of Italians, focus on picturesque ancient and Renaissance monuments, and emphasize timelessness, Gérôme’s few Italian landscapes, such as *View of Paestum* (Figure 16; 1852, oil on canvas, unknown location) and *The Forum at Night* (Figure 17; c. 1842-3, oil on canvas, Musée Saint-Denis, Reims) have unmistakable ideological undertones. In *The Forum at Night*, the

lack of people suggests that the ancient Forum now lies abandoned. The juxtaposition of the yoke with two buffaloes in the foreground and the majestic Roman temple in the background emphasizes the contrast between Rome's glorious past and its supposedly ignominious present. In addition, Gérôme depicts important classical buildings in a precarious condition. For example, in *View of Paestum* the magnificent temple forms the backdrop for a scene of buffaloes bathing in a puddle. One could argue that the buffaloes act as alternates to the Italians themselves. In these two landscapes, Gérôme alludes to the Western—presumably French—necessity to become involved in Italy to safeguard ancient monuments. In contrast with the French concern for archaeological exploration, the artist's depiction of neglected edifices stresses the Italians' inability to preserve their classical past.

Some of Gérôme's nineteenth-century Italians take the appearance of ancient Romans. The uncertainty in the title of *Portrait of a Roman Woman* or *The Italian Woman* (Figure 18; 1843, oil on canvas, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio) suggests that the period to which this woman belongs cannot be determined. The woman's simple tunic, with a clasp on each shoulder, and her hair parted down the middle, braided at the back of her head, and decorated with a vine wreath, further complicate the temporal identification. Two more paintings with the same title—*Head of a Peasant of the Roman Campagna* (Figure 19; c.1843-5, oil on canvas, private collection and Figure 20; c.1843-5, oil on canvas, Musée Magnin, Dijon)—present identical challenges. It is hard to determine whether the men in these sketches wear ancient clothes or contemporary outfits. The painter's intentional conflation is not surprising since Italy was not the only location where Gérôme looked at modern inhabitants to get inspiration for painting their ancient forbears. As art critic Charles

Timbal notes, Gérôme once traveled to Eastern Europe and Russia because he “hoped to see on the visages of the descendants of Arminius and Attila some of the features of their ancestors.”⁴

Gérôme sought visual clues for his canvases of Rome not only in Italy, but also in the Middle East. He was one of many French travelers who considered Oriental men similar to the ancient Greeks and Romans. During a trip to the Arabian peninsula, he and his fellow travelers gave the name Agamemnon to an Arab thief, whose physical characteristics, dress, and courage were evocative of the great Homeric hero.⁵ Gérôme also depicted Caesar in *The Death of Caesar* with the darker skin of an Oriental, a feature that enraged his critics. Baudelaire complained that this Caesar could be mistaken for a Maghrebin. For Jules Castagnary, the ancient ruler looked like a mulatto, while in Gautier’s view, the skin color gave Caesar the appearance of a “Kabyle, resemblance augmented by the white draperies, which could easily be taken for a bournous.”⁶

Gérôme chose the *pifferari* as the theme that conveyed the essence of modern Italy in his two *Pifferaro* (Figure 21; 1854, oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes and Figure 22; 1855, oil on canvas, private collection, Paris), *Italian Playing a Doodlesack* (Figure 23; 1855, oil on canvas, unknown location), and three *Pifferari* (Figure 24; 1857, oil on canvas, Stanford Museum, Figure 25; 1859, oil on canvas, private collection and Figure 26; 1870, oil on canvas, private collection, Bethesda, Maryland). In these paintings, some *pifferari* sit or stand facing the picture plane, in almost full view. When several *pifferari* come together, they are shown serenading in front of houses or street altars dedicated to the Virgin Mary. While today these canvases may seem relatively unimportant, they were quite valued at the time of their

making. *Italian Playing a Doodlesack* was shown in the 1855 Universal Exhibition together with a companion piece, *An Italian Girl Playing a Mandolin* (Figure 27; 1855, oil on canvas, unknown location), while the 1857 *Pifferari* was exhibited at the Salon.⁷

Pifferari were Italian itinerant musicians who traveled on foot not only all over the Italian peninsula but also as far as Paris and London. In France, they were some of the poorest immigrants.⁸ Not always able to live off their performances, many *pifferari* ended up on the streets or working the hardest jobs with the lowest pay. If we agree with Albert Boime's opinion that *pifferari* maintained in their simple ways something reminiscent of ancient life, then Gérôme's interest in them can be seen as an attempt to recover the essence of their ancestors.⁹

These canvases of street musicians are ethnographic studies in the manner of Gérôme's paintings of Middle-Eastern men, such as *Bashi-Bazouk and His Dog* (Figure 28; 1865, oil on canvas, unknown location). In his works representing Orientals and Italians, Gérôme emphasizes colorful clothes and picturesque details. While some of the canvases of *pifferari* (Figure 21) have an indistinct background, others are characterized by timeless settings (Figures 23, 24). In painting *pifferari* in settings and clothes that cannot be securely dated, Gérôme suggests that modern Italians lag behind their French contemporaries and are therefore as much in need of being civilized as their Oriental counterparts.

Emphasizing the picturesque is not the only strategy typical of Orientalist painting that Gérôme employs in these canvases. His *pifferari* also have strong attributes of virility, strengthened by the phallic symbolism implied by their musical instruments. In *Pifferaro*, for example, a long oboe is positioned between the

pifferaro's legs (Figure 22). In addition, when the *pifferari*'s faces can be discerned under the large brims of their hats, their facial expressions are downright coarse. Furthermore, in *Italian Playing a Doodlesack*, Gérôme emphasized the financial desperation behind the *pifferaro*'s activity by portraying the man standing behind an empty saucer awaiting a few coins.

Gérôme's stereotypical representations of *pifferari* suggest that the painter saw contemporary Italians as primitive natives. He kept returning to the subject of Italian street musicians, but never extended his thematic repertoire with Italian intellectuals or urban figures. The interest in painting the poorest category of Italians denotes Gérôme's contempt for the *pifferari*, and, by extension, for modern Italians in general. The next chapter will show that this view of nineteenth-century Italians was important for the French because it helped them wrest the claim for classical culture from those on whose territory it was best represented.

¹ Boime, "Gérôme," 68-70.

² Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 35-51.

³ In the only existing catalogue of Boulanger's oeuvre, Aubrun lists many works for which she does not provide illustrations because their location is unknown. Among these are several drawings of Italy: *Souvenir d'Italie*, *Castel D'Asso*, *Vue de Pesto*, *Vue d'Amalfi*, *Vue de Langhizzo*, and several drawings of Pompeii. (Aubrun, "Gustave Boulanger," 223).

⁴ "Le peintre espérait revoir sur le visage des descendants d'Arminius et d'Attila, quelques-uns des traits de leurs pères . . ." [Charles Timbal, "Les Artistes Contemporains: Gérôme," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 2 (1876), 230].

⁵ Fanny Field Herring, "Gérôme," *The Century Magazine* 37, no. 4 (February 1889), 497. The same story also appears in Lenoir, *The Fayoum*, 277. Nineteenth-century men in general considered the Orient similar to ancient Rome. Eugène Delacroix is famous for having compared Middle-Eastern men with the ancients

during his visit to Morocco in 1832: “Imagine, my friend . . . lying in the sun, walking in the streets, mending old shoes, consuls, Catons, Brutuses, who do not even lack the scornful air that the masters of the world must have had . . . Antiquity has nothing more beautiful.” [Letter to Pierret, 29 February 1832, published in *Correspondence*, I, 178; quoted in *Journal de Eugène Delacroix* (Paris: Plon, 1893), I, 183-4].

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques*, 343; Jules Castagnary, “Salon de 1859,” in *Salons*, 96; Théophile Gautier, “Feuilleton du 23 avril 1859,” in *Exposition de 1859: Text établi pour la première fois d’après les feuilletons du ‘Moniteur Universel’ et annoté par Wolfgang Drost and Ulrike Henniges* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992), 11.

⁷ Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 196, 200.

⁸ John E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Paris, London, and New York* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 18, 42, 44, 64, 66.

⁹ Albert Boime, *Thomas Couture and the Eclectic Vision* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 380.

CHAPTER 5

FRENCH CULTURAL IMPERIALISM IN PAINTINGS OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN ANTIQUITY

Gérôme's and Boulanger's paintings of everyday life in antiquity affirm not only an overt political, but also a more discreet cultural imperialism, characteristic of French identity in general. This chapter examines the two painters' works of ancient prostitution and suggests that they reflect the nineteenth-century French desire for foreign territories and cultural prominence. In these paintings, the naked women's bodies act as metaphors of conquered or desired territories. In addition, this chapter pays particular attention to the projection of nineteenth-century racial and imperialist concepts onto the time of Greco-Roman antiquity, as it appears in Gérôme's and Boulanger's paintings.

To justify foreign invasion and the *mission civilisatrice*, Napoleon III and his administration wanted France to be the world cultural leader. According to Albert Boime, the organizers of the 1855 Universal Exhibition aspired to "cultural hegemony."¹ In his opening speech, Prince Napoleon connected "the spectacle at home with the stunning victories of the French abroad in the Crimea."² The prince's words suggest that culture and industrial progress were as important as military intervention at least in terms of imperialism. Prince Napoleon also "emphasized the benefits of industrial expansion and the promotion of culture in emancipating society from savagery and drudgery."³ If the promotion of French culture and industry had such positive effects, then imperial expansion could be vindicated as an extension of privileges in way of life and attitude to less developed countries.

Cultural imperialism in *Rehearsal of “The Flute Player”*

Rehearsal of “The Flute Player” uses the foreground to portray the rehearsal of Augier’s *The Flute Player* (1850), a play so licentious that it had been censored at the Comédie-Française. At the center of the play is a shepherd who sells himself as a slave to spend eight days with the famous Greek courtesan Lais. Too proud to endure slavery, he plans to kill himself on the eighth day. When Lais finds out, she falls in love with him and spends her entire fortune to buy him.⁴ According to the journal of Mme. Jules Baroche, who was present at the inauguration of the Pompeian house, the female audience was embarrassed by the openly sexual allusions of *The Flute Player*.⁵

Portraying this play allowed Boulanger to transpose prostitution, a characteristic of French society ubiquitous in the nineteenth century, into antiquity,⁶ thereby stressing the similarity between the two periods and their cultures as well as France’s imperialist claim that it was the inheritor and continuator of the ancient classical past. Boulanger achieved this analogy by eliminating all possible signs of modern Paris from his Pompeian setting. He chose to locate the performance of *The Flute Player* in the atrium, the most antique-looking part of the house, and not in the house’s *salle des spectacles* or in any of the other rooms in the Pompeian house, which were decorated with modern furniture betraying the period of their making, as seen in a contemporary photograph of the library (Figure 29). Boulanger gave pride of place to the *impluvium* and the columns supporting the roof, the quintessential architectural elements of a Roman *domus*. And while photographs of the atrium also show lamps hanging from the edge of the *compluvium* and nineteenth-century furniture (Figure 30), he avoided depicting them.

Moreover, the setting and the figures’ stances, clothing, and accessories were carefully chosen and portrayed to complement the antique atmosphere of the scene.

For that purpose, even the authors dressed for the part. They put on togas, laurel wreaths, and held papyrus rolls. Augier's gesture of following the rehearsal on a papyrus roll is a performance in itself. The rolls are most probably theater props, as real papyrus is not opened and read the way Augier does it.⁷ Their inclusion highlights the degree of minutiae involved in performing for the painting.

A comparison between *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* and Boulanger's *Theatrical Rehearsal in the Home of the Ancient Roman Poet* (Figure 31; 1855, oil on canvas, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg), painted before the completion of the Pompeian house, adds further evidence that the painter regarded his culture as an echo of ancient culture.⁸ In the latter painting, Boulanger created a virtual reconstruction of the House of the Tragic Poet from Pompeii. On the left, an actress in ancient garb recites her role in front of three men. On the right, a fourth man lounges reading a papyrus. A black woman walks towards the opposite side of the atrium.

There are many visual and thematic correspondences between *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* and *Theatrical Rehearsal*, even if the action in one painting takes place in the nineteenth century and the other in antiquity. In their performance, the real nineteenth-century actors and playwrights mirror the rehearsal of the generic figures in the earlier canvas. Augier wears the same type of sandals as the imaginary ancient playwright and holds a papyrus in an identical way. Both paintings present an architectural space defined by tall columns and a rectangular opening in the roof. In *Theatrical Rehearsal*, the painter reconstituted a house found in Pompeii and brought it back to life; in *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* he represented a real but modern setting imbued with the feel of ancient Pompeii.

Boulanger gave the actress a prominent role in *Theatrical Rehearsal*, although, as Gautier noted, the cast of ancient plays never included women. Gautier, however, did not condemn the painter for his anachronism: “The actress is all modern, but he [Boulanger] could not resist the pleasure of introducing a feminine character in this pretty archaeological restoration; he has done well.”⁹ Since in nineteenth-century theater women played prominent antique roles, Boulanger’s decision to depict an actress in antiquity suggests that he found inspiration in the present and that even in this painting Boulanger conflated ancient Rome and nineteenth-century Paris.¹⁰

Imperialist allusion and the representation of prostitution in antiquity

Women dominate Gérôme’s and Boulanger’s paintings of ancient prostitution. These works present the same make-believe world that Augier fashioned in *The Flute Player*. The same is true of Gérôme’s painting *Greek Interior* (Figure 32; 1850, oil on canvas, unknown location), whose space was immediately identified as a brothel by critics of the time.¹¹ The painter pandered to royal tastes in his subject matter, because Prince Napoleon acquired the work and displayed it in his Pompeian house, while Napoleon III bought an earlier sketch.¹²

In *Greek Interior*, four women in various poses but similar state of undress display themselves in an ancient brothel. In the middle ground, two men are about to select a prostitute, while in the background another prostitute and her client disappear behind a curtain. Among the women in the foreground, the one lying on the sofa is the most dressed; yet even she has one shoulder and her torso alluringly revealed. She might be in the process of removing the rest of her clothes. If this is the case, she will be following the woman standing in the center of the composition, who is taking off her last piece of drapery.

Gérôme's skill in recreating the ancient brothel impressed Gautier, who, returning from Italy, enthusiastically discovered a painting recreating Pompeii "in living state, with their [of its decoration] shine and purity intact. Never has restoration or rather resurrection been more complete."¹³ His words suggest that Parisians fascinated with ancient Pompeii no longer had to travel to Italy to marvel at its ruins, but could experience ancient Rome right in the heart of Paris.

The painting highlighted nineteenth-century racial hierarchies. For example, the white-skinned women either stand or lie down on couches, while the darker-skinned woman lies on the floor. In addition, her position on a large lion skin emphasizes her connection to both nature and a more primitive, animal, and exotic world. She has a more passive attitude than her colleagues, in a state of complete forgetfulness. In contrast, the woman on the sofa rises to look at the visitors, the one behind her gazes at the viewers, and the erect woman stretches.

In his review of the painting, Gautier responded to Gérôme's racial hierarchy when he called the darker-skinned woman:

... a great brunette, Arabic or Syrian, tawny like a new bronze, whose arms and legs are loaded with barbaric jewelry that one can still find in black French Africa. She has just awakened and her body floats indecisively between pose and abandon. White drapery, sprinkled with some decorations of that Egyptian green that one can see in the hieroglyphs and the amulets of Isis throws into light the sallow nuances of her skin; more brute than the others; she is not interested in the arrival of the visitor, and in her passivity she worries less about being chosen or rejected. Flowers that she has not tried to hold together, sit indolently next to her.¹⁴

Gautier compared the darker-skinned ancient woman to an inhabitant of the French colonies, clearly an inferior role. Her inclusion in the painting suggests that Gérôme considered ancient and Oriental women analogous. It was the distance in either place or time that gave acceptability to a subject otherwise offensive to a Salon audience,

since the French believed that sexual license was considered an acceptable part of life in these regions or time periods.¹⁵

In general, Gérôme's and Boulanger's paintings of Roman or Greek women can be seen as the flip side of their canvases of Oriental slaves and prostitutes. Gérôme painted slave markets both in antiquity and the Middle East. His *Slave Market* (Figure 33; 1857, oil on canvas, Dr. and Mrs. Byron Butler, Phoenix, Arizona) and *Slave Market* (Figure 34; 1866, oil on canvas, Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts) show the same group of people in antiquity and in the Orient. Only the background and clothing differ. His *Slave Sale at Rome* (Fig. 35; 1884, oil on canvas, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg) portrays an analogous scene. Moreover, Gérôme and Boulanger depicted similar bathing rituals in both an Oriental setting, such as the former's *Moorish Bath* (Figure 36; n.d., oil on canvas, Palace of the Legion of Honour, San Francisco, California), and in Pompeii, such as the latter's *Tepidarium* (Figure 37; n.d., oil on canvas, unknown location). In both paintings, black women wash or wipe the white women's passive bodies.

According to Anne McClintock, a scholar specialized in postcolonial literature, conquered lands are generally represented either in a feminized fashion or as female figures inviting the possession of the European male.¹⁶ Along this line of interpretation, the darker-skinned woman in *Greek Interior* can be seen as a metaphor for the overseas Algerian colonies and the other naked women as allegories of Italian territories. Even if the brothel is Greek, the implicit fusion between Greek and Roman civilizations allows for such a merged reading.¹⁷ A comparison with Gérôme's depiction of a naked woman pulled by her hair in *The Age of Augustus*, which was an allegorical representation of the provinces conquered by the Roman emperor,

forcefully supports the idea that the women in Gérôme's and Boulanger's Neo-Greek paintings, sexually appealing, inviting, and submissive, act as personifications of desired lands.

The same can be said of Gérôme's other canvases of women taking off their clothes. Moments of "dramatic *dévoilement*" recur in *Phryne in front of the Aeropagus* (Figure 38; 1861, oil on canvas, Kunsthalle, Hamburg) and *King Candaules* (Figure 39; 1859, oil on canvas, Museo de Arte, Ponce, Puerto Rico).¹⁸ Gérôme depicted Phryne during her trial for treason at the exact moment when her lawyer and lover unveiled her in front of the judges. Amazed by her corporeal beauty, the members of the Aeropagus considered that it was a reflection of her mind's beauty and spared her life.¹⁹

In Gautier's *King Candaules*, inspired by Herodotus's *The Histories*, Candaules, the ruler of Lydia, is the husband of Nyssia, a beautiful woman passionate for the privacy of her body. Wanting to have someone share his joy of watching the queen, the king asks his friend Gyges to come in at night and peek at her as she undresses to get into bed. Unfortunately, Nyssia sees Gyges. In revenge, she has Gyges kill the inconsiderate husband and take his throne.²⁰ Gérôme depicted Nyssia at the precise moment when she is about to throw off her last clothes.

"Unveiling" is a trope of imperialism, as sociologist Meyda Yegenoglu has shown about Middle-Eastern women, now applied to the ancient times as envisioned by Gérôme.²¹ According to Yegenoglu, European male visitors to Algeria were obsessed with removing the veils of indigenous women because in so doing they felt they could conquer "Algeria, the land, and people themselves."²² Using this line of interpretation, Gérôme's effort to pictorially uncover the bodies of ancient Greco-

Roman women in front of the viewers' eyes becomes a metaphor for the French desire to make all aspects of these women's culture accessible, familiar, and controllable. In other words, female nudity operates as a stimulus for the male French audience to claim the ancient culture as its own and rescue it from Italian neglect.

¹ Boime, "Second Empire's Official Realism," 33.

² *Ibid.*, 43.

³ *Idem.*

⁴ Augier, "Le Joueur de Flûte," I, 397-450; Baroche, *Second Empire*, 141.

⁵ Baroche, *Second Empire*, 141.

⁶ Brown, "Ingres," 98. During the Second Empire, the number of unregistered prostitutes had grown to such extent that even the word "clandestine" applied to this practice lost meaning. [Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 128, 205, 247]. As T. J. Clark noted, in the 1860s, people dreaded "that the equivalence of Paris and prostitution might be too complete." [T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1984; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 104].

⁷ A papyrus roll held the way Augier does it would probably break. In addition, on papyrus rolls the text was organized in columns; the rolls were opened and read on their horizontal axis.

⁸ The same message results from the program printed for the representations in Prince Napoleon's Pompeian house, which "announced the reopening of the theatre of Pompeii after having been closed eighteen centuries for repairs." See Safran, "A Note," 185; quoting Baroche, *Second Empire*, 141. Gautier made the same statement when he wrote that "past and present, Paris and Pompeii" were "irreconcilable only in appearance." (Gautier, *Abécédaire*, 69). In addition, as Marilyn Brown asserted, the many details that Gautier included in his description of *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* enabled viewers to see that the past and the present could become one. (Brown, "Ingres," 98).

⁹ “L’actrice est toute moderne; mais il n’a pas su résister au plaisir d’introduire un personnage féminin dans sa jolie restauration archéologique; il a bien fait.” [Gautier, “Salon de 1857,” *L’Artiste* (28 June 1857)].

¹⁰ Albert Boime has already noted the relationship between painting and nineteenth-century productions at the Théâtre Français. Painters went to the theater to see how ancient costumes were worn while set designers inspired themselves from paintings. [Albert Boime, “We Don’t Want to Set the World on Fire, We just Want to Start a Flame in Your Heart,” in *Art Pompier: Anti-Impressionism* (Hempstead, N.Y.: Hofstra University, 1974), n.p.].

¹¹ For nineteenth-century reactions to this painting and its identification as a brothel see Gautier, “Salon de 1850-1”; Moreau-Vauthier, *Gérôme*, 96; Timbal, “Les Artistes Contemporains,” 228-9.

¹² Masson, “Gérôme,” 185; Lafont-Couturier, *Gérôme*, 19; Moreau-Vauthier, *Gérôme*, 96; Jean-Léon *Gérôme 1824-1904: Peintre, sculpteur et graveur: Ses oeuvres conservés dans les collections françaises publiques et privées* (Vesoul: Ville de Vesoul, 1981), 41.

¹³ “. . . nous les avons retrouvés dans le tableau de M. Gérôme, mais à l’état vivant, avec leur éclat neuf et leur pureté intacte. Jamais restauration ou plutôt résurrection ne fut plus complète.” (Gautier, “Salon de 1850-1”).

¹⁴ “. . . une grande brune, Arabe ou Syrienne, fauve comme un bronze neuf, et dont les bras et les jambes sont chargés de bijoux barbares qu’on retrouverait encore dans noire Afrique française. Elle vient de se réveiller, et son corps flotte indécis entre la pose et l’abandon. Une draperie blanche, relevée de quelques agréments de ce vert égyptien qu’on voit sur les hiéroglyphes et les amulettes d’Isis, fait valoir les nuances olivâtres de sa peau; plus brute que ses compagnes; elle ne s’est point émue de la venue du visiteur, et sa passivité s’inquiète peu du choix ou de rejet. Des fleurs qu’elle n’a pas essayé de réunir, gisent indolemment à côté d’elle.” (Idem).

¹⁵ Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 137.

¹⁶ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 23-60.

¹⁷ In the article about his visit to the Pompeian house in December 1857, Hippolyte Rigault saw the decorative Pompeian style as both Greek and Roman. (Rigault, *Conversations littéraires*, 81-3). Gautier also observed that upon entering

the house he expected an Athenian to approach at any moment and address him in ancient Greek. (Gautier, “Une Maison de Pompei, 193).

¹⁸ Donald Scott Watson, *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904): A Study of a Mid Nineteenth-Century French Academic Artist* (B.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1975), 30.

¹⁹ Ackerman, *Gérôme*, 54.

²⁰ Bruce H. Evans, Gerald M. Ackerman and Richard Ettinghausen, *Jean-Léon Gérôme, 1824-1904* (Dayton, Ohio: Dayton Art Institute, 1972), 42.

²¹ Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Toward a Feminist reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39-40.

²² Idem.

CHAPTER 6

PRECIOUS OBJECTS, PRECIOUS BODIES: GAUTIER'S AESTHETICS AND IMPERIALISM

Prostitution emblematically alludes to an even larger issue characteristic of the nineteenth century, the advent and all-pervasive influence of a commercialized society and culture. Aspects of commercialization recur in Gérôme's and Boulanger's canvases, offering the two painters avenues to explore the female body in conjunction with the sale of objects. Boulanger's *A Jewelry Merchant in Pompeii* (Figure 40; 1868, oil on canvas, unknown location) and *Statuettes Merchant* (Figure 41; 1868, oil on canvas, unknown location) portray ancient women shopping for small-scale statuettes, similar to French bibelots. In these paintings, the theme of shopping turns viewers into voyeurs. The naked, sensual female flesh entices male viewers just as much as the products lure the female buyers. In *Statuettes Merchant* the saleswoman has her back bared, while in *Jewelry Merchant* the dress of the seated woman reveals her thigh. Women are simultaneously consumers and consumed, in a manner similar to the women seduced by goods in Émile Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883).

Female consumerism was a ubiquitous nineteenth-century characteristic. In 1852, Aristide Boucicaut took advantage of this trend when he inaugurated the Bon Marché. In 1855 the Magasin du Louvre opened, in 1865 Le Printemps, and in 1869 La Samaritaine. These stores offered cheap merchandise at a set price, tempting female customers to go inside and look around even without buying. Both jewelry, an important item of a woman's toilette, and bibelots, in great demand for decorating bourgeois interiors, were associated with French women and their shopping practices.¹

Gérôme's and Boulanger's paintings of commercialization of either objects or women promoted Second Empire values. Selling and getting rich were at the core of

this period's mentality.² The two painters' emphasis on women, bibelots, jewelry, and art objects reflects the Second Empire involvement in the sensuousness and aesthetic pleasure of material possessions.

The same paintings, however, gain a different significance in light of Gautier's writings on aesthetics. For Gautier, idea and form are indissoluble, and perfect, intangible beauty becomes materialized in the exterior form of objects: "a beautiful form is a beautiful idea, for how could there be such a thing as a form that expressed nothing?"³ The writer adopted Second Empire materialism but transformed the obsession with sensuousness and the exploration of pleasures into a new art aesthetic.⁴ In Gautier's view, "the self is transcended through contemplation of exterior form, and mental absorption in it."⁵ Ideal beauty is to be found especially in ancient Greece. According to Michael Clifford Spencer, "On the aesthetic plane, Gautier's ideal is pure, formal and classical, or, translated into realizable terms, a statue of a beautiful woman."⁶ Put another way, Gautier considered Gérôme's and Boulanger's paintings art objects that transcended reality as well as facilitated travel in time and space.⁷

According to Gautier, labor is a marker of aesthetic value. In the aesthetic manifesto *L'Art*, from *Émaux et camées* (1852), he advocates a form of art that would be the result of labor, either in verse, or in "marble, onyx, enamel." Sculptors should work against the resistance of their medium, "Fight with the Carrara/With the heavy hammer," labor with clay, and free figures from agate. Painters should turn their backs on facile mediums such as watercolor and should "fix color" using pottery techniques. Busts and coins are eternal and transcendental, as they survive the decay and disappearance of entire cities.⁸

Gérôme's and Boulanger's over-finished works match the poet's concern for belaboring. Contemporaries frequently commented on the two painters' working methods. For example, Zola compared Gérôme's exquisite finish to enamel or porcelain.⁹ In Théophile Thoré's view, "M. Gérôme seems to have the eyes of a jeweler rather than those of a painter."¹⁰ The enamel-like finish transformed the paintings into art objects and brought them in line with Gautier's aesthetic theory. Gautier himself compared Gérôme and Boulanger to miniaturists and to "engravers of fine stones who can put a bacchanal in the setting of a ring."¹¹

The laboriousness of Gérôme's and Boulanger's technique resulted from their preoccupation with archaeological truth. In fact, Gérôme asked for architects' suggestions to ensure the accuracy of the ancient buildings in his paintings. In a letter from 1858, Gérôme inquired the architect Bourgerel for advice on how to recreate a Greek interior for his painting *King Candaules*.¹² In 1843, on his visit to Naples, he was impressed with gladiatorial weapons and corsets and wanted to know more about them. In his own words: "I researched everything that had the features of a gladiator: mosaics, paintings, small sculptures, the tomb of Scorus."¹³ In addition, when Verchère de Reffye went to Rome to acquire molds of the column of Trajan for Napoleon III, Gérôme asked him to make a detour through Naples and make plaster casts of gladiatorial weapons and shields for his own use.¹⁴

Gérôme's and Boulanger's canvases of ancient Rome were suffused with details. In *King Candaules*, for example, Gérôme painted the pattern of each floor tile and each intricate arabesque adorning the ceiling. He even decorated the chair in the center of the canvas with painted feminine figures. This attention to detail is characteristic of all his works. Gautier wrote about *Greek Interior*: "All the small

details of ornament amaze through their perfect taste, their exquisite choice and their precision of touch: the lamp, the Etruscan vases, the pedestal table, the floor are marvels.”¹⁵

This meticulous reproduction reflected the period’s materialistic pursuits. According to Roland Barthes, even in realist literature details have an aesthetic function, the equivalent of *hypotyposis* in ancient rhetoric. This type of narrative describes objects not in a purely factual style, but in such way as to transform them into objects of desire and arouse appreciation in the readers.¹⁶ The detailed recreation of ceramics, furniture, carpets, hangings, and other decorative objects achieved by Gérôme in these paintings instills in viewers the wish to possess them, and through these details the culture they symbolically stand for. Not surprisingly, art historian Donald Scott Watson has already connected Gérôme’s Neo-Greek paintings to the nineteenth-century male practice of collecting. The painter himself was an avid collector, and his quests for collectibles is undoubtedly reflected in his paintings.¹⁷ In addition, in his portrayal of antique objects and women’s voluptuous bodies, the paintings of ancient women either removing their clothes or buying knick-knacks themselves become precious objects to be coveted.

These canvases captivated male viewers according to Émile Zola. He remarked that, in their Neo-Greek works, Gérôme and Boulanger “borrow scenes and individuals from our society because they noticed that there is a class of amateurs who finds particular pleasure in recognizing themselves, their costumes and their manners in paintings.”¹⁸ Zola’s comment suggests that the two painters’ works answered the French society’s wish to find similarities between French and ancient habits.

The exquisitely detailed objects depicted in Gérôme's and Boulanger's paintings also act as markers of realism. For Frédéric Masson, Gérôme's canvases are so highly finished that they look like photographs of Greek and Roman scenes.¹⁹ Masson uses the trope of photography to suggest that Gérôme's purpose was to make his works look "realistic." The canvases of ancient Roman prostitution and consumerism also produce what Roland Barthes called the "reality effect," defined as the use of insignificant details in a realist novel.²⁰ Details with no structural function create the illusion that the represented scene is authentic thereby eliciting viewer involvement in the action shown.²¹ In addition, Linda Nochlin has explained how this extreme illusionism was especially characteristic of Orientalist paintings, such as Gérôme's, inviting Western imperialist yearnings of immediate involvement.²² Her argument can be extended to canvases of ancient Rome. The abundance of details makes the viewers believe that the scenes did take place just as in the painting and ancient Roman buildings looked just like Gérôme portrayed them.

The majority of Gérôme's and Boulanger's images of antiquity are also what Michael Fried called "absorptive" in his discussion of the eighteenth-century painters' practice of presenting figures absorbed in their own thoughts or actions, and ignoring the spectator.²³ For example, in *Theatrical Rehearsal* (Figure 31) not one of the figures interacts with the viewers of the painting. One actor is immersed in reading, the other three men pay attention to the woman's performance, and the actress is absorbed in her own play. In *Slave Sale at Rome* (Figure 35), the man at the desk concentrates on writing while his companion stares off in space. The same state of absorption is true of all the female slaves, the figures in the background, and the auctioneer. Furthermore, the painting's viewers are given an imaginary position on a

staircase on the left, incorporated into the mass of male bidders. A male viewer would find himself in the crowd and enjoy the spectacle of the undressed woman without worrying about being seen. Absorption intensifies the “reality effect” and gives the audience the impression that it could enter the scene as if happening right in front of it.

The idea that Gérôme’s canvases of antiquity incorporate visual strategies intended to generate a “reality effect” receives support from Claudine Mitchell’s analysis of Gautier’s own strategy of art criticism. The “phenomenon of make-believe” that Mitchell defines in her article also contributed to the success of Neo-Greek paintings. According to Mitchell, Gautier describes the paintings not as two-dimensional canvases, but as actual events taking place right in front of his eyes. In his vivid accounts, Gautier narrates the events on canvas in the present tense. He avoids references to the painting’s formal devices that could betray that he discusses a representation.²⁴

Gérôme’s and Boulanger’s preference for abundant details in their canvases of ancient Rome has the same imperialist undertone that characterizes their Orientalist paintings. For Alan Fleig, the Europeans’ act of photographing all possible aspects of life, people, and objects in the Middle East reveals their wish to control and “colonize everything, capitalize everything, accumulate everything.”²⁵ An example is a photograph of a street from Cairo from the Universal Exhibition of 1889 (Figure 42), populated by real Egyptians going about their business and allowing Europeans access and consummation of their everyday lives. If the recreations of Middle-Eastern everyday spaces make evident the French longing for land and resources in these areas, the paintings of everyday life in antiquity denote the nineteenth-century French desire to appropriate both the culture and the land of ancient Rome.

¹ Rémy G. Saisselin, *The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 198), 33-4, 39-40, 66-8. According to Patricia Mainardi, department stores and the Salon displayed their merchandise or art works following similar principles. See Mainardi, *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 109, 144.

² Burchell, *Imperial Masquerade*, 18.

³ Théophile Gautier, *L'Artiste* (14 December 1856); quoted in Robert Snell, *Théophile Gautier: A Romantic Critic of the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 49; Michael Clifford Spencer, *The Art Criticism of Théophile Gautier* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1969), 11-12.

⁴ On the Second Empire importance of (sexual) pleasure see Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 205, 247; Eric C. Hansen, *Disaffection and Decadence, A Crisis in French Intellectual Thought 1848-1898* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), ix.

⁵ Snell, *Théophile Gautier*, 6.

⁶ Clifford Spencer, *Théophile Gautier*, 11-12.

⁷ Gautier, "Salon de 1850-1."

⁸ Théophile Gautier, "L'Art," in *Émaux et camées* (1872; repr. Lille: Librairie Giard, 1947), 130-2.

⁹ Emile Zola, "Exposition universelle 1878: L'école française de peinture à l'Exposition de 1878," in *Salons* (Paris: Minard, 1959), 206.

¹⁰ W. Burger, "Salon de 1865," in *Salons de W. Burger*, II, 175; quoted in Claudine Mitchell, "Belly Dancing into History," *Art History* 10 (December 1987), 522.

¹¹ ". . . les graveurs de pierres fines qui mettent une bacchanale dans un chaton de bague." (Gautier, *Les Beaux-Arts*, II, 35).

¹² Ackerman, "The Neo-Grecs," 168; quoting an undated letter from Gérôme which was published in summarized form in *Peintres et sculpteurs*, Sales catalogue no. 3823, Maison Charavay (Paris, n.d.), 45.

¹³ Moreau-Vauthier, *Gérôme*, 65.

¹⁴ Masson, “Notes et Fragments,” 26. For the amount of money spent on this operation see J. Alden Weir’s letter of August 30, 1874, in Dorothy Weir Young, *The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 47.

¹⁵ “Tous les petits détails d’ornement étonnent par leur goût parfait, leur choix exquis, et leur précision de touche: la lampe, les vases étrusques, le guéridon, le pavé sont des merveilles.” (Gautier, “Salon de 1850-1”).

¹⁶ Roland Barthes. “The Reality Effect” in *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. (1984; repr. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 145-6.

¹⁷ Watson, *Gérôme*, 42.

¹⁸ “Ils n’empruntent des scènes et des individus à notre société que parce qu’ils ont remarqué qu’il existe toute une classe d’amateurs qui trouvent un plaisir tout particulier à se reconnaître, eux, leurs costumes et leurs moeurs, dans les tableaux.” [Zola, “Salon de 1875: Une exposition de tableaux à Paris,” in *Le bon combat: de Courbet aux Impressionnistes* (Paris: Hermann, 1974), 161].

¹⁹ Frédéric Masson, “Jean-Léon Gérôme: peintre de l’Orient,” *Le Figaro Illustré* 12, no 136 (July 1901), 8; quoted in Watson, *Gérôme*, 114.

²⁰ Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” 141.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 142, 146, 148.

²² Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient,” 38.

²³ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 94.

²⁴ Claudine Mitchell, “What is to be done with the Salonnières?” *Oxford Art Journal* 10, no 1 (1987), 108.

²⁵ Alan Fleig, *Rêves de papier: La photographie orientaliste, 1860-1914* (Neuchâtel: Ides et Calendes, 1997), 11.

CHAPTER 7

Rehearsal of "The Flute Player" can only be understood in the context of Second Empire imperialism and preoccupation with archaeology. Napoleon III found in the thorough research of ancient Roman history a way to validate his imperialist ambitions, especially those manifested in his military control of Rome and the annexation of Nice and Savoy. On the one hand, *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player"* pays homage to Napoleon III and his leadership in equating him with a Caesar or Augustus and in representing the rehearsal of *The Wife of Diomedes*, a play flattering Napoleon III on account of his victories in Italy and the Crimea. On the other hand, the painting portrays Paris as the nineteenth-century locus of ancient Roman culture through a revival of classicism in architecture, clothes and *mores*. Boulanger gave place of honor to the rehearsal of *The Flute Player*, a play centered on ancient prostitution, and went to great lengths to ensure that the nineteenth-century setting looked antique. Moreover, to assert the strong connections between modern France and ancient Rome, Boulanger and Gérôme focused their Neo-Greek canvases on prostitution and consumerism. The naked and passive women in their paintings stood both for the territories that the French conquered or exploited through commercial treaties and for these territories' culture. The deliberation and formal devices employed in these works—clearly focused finish, emphasis on details and archaeological correctness, the absorption of the figures, interest in all the particulars of the everyday life of ancient Romans—integrated the viewers in the picture and made them feel empowered by being French in an era of resurrected antique grandeur.

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