

Children, Images by Artists And Social Realities

- Presentation
- Objectives
- Before and after the visit
- The visit: list of artworks
- Bibliography

Presentation

Children have been represented in painting since the earliest Antiquity. By the Middle-Ages, religious painting had assured that the image of the Christ-child had reached even the remotest hamlets. Early portraiture, depicting kings and men of power, began to immortalise the features of the sons of princes and young kings; the Master of Moulins' painting of *Charles Orlean, dauphin de France* (1494) for example, dates from a little more than a century after the first royal portrait. Later, the works of genre painters, such as Bruegel, Georges de La Tour and Le Nain, include picturesque representations of young children, often alongside adults, but occasionally the sole subject, as in paintings by Murillo.

During recent times, the social status of the European child has undergone a dramatic transformation. For a long time, children were considered more as the embodiment of the continuing lineage rather than as nascent personalities in their own right. Their place remained marginal within the family circle, all the more so as the high rate of infant mortality put a strain on affectionate relationships. According to Philippe Ariès's classic thesis, whilst the Middle-Ages ignored the specificity of children, considering them socially and psychologically as reduced sized adults, the modern period progressively discovered the specificity of childhood and the particular care it deserved. Jean-Jacques Rousseau ("Let childhood mature in children") represents the culmination of this development. Related to these changing perceptions of childhood, the bourgeois value of "family", tended to supplant the aristocratic notion of "lineage". Nevertheless, at the end of the 18th century, those old conceptions which left very little room for sentimentality, and even less for its expression, were still evoked in numerous childhood recollections: Mirabeau, the Prince de Ligne, Talleyrand, Chateaubriand... and Stendhal was able to write of his father: "He did not love me as an individual but as the son who was to continue his family". The social and cultural development, slow and fluctuating, naturally took different forms at different times and to different degrees, depending on the place and the environment. And yet eventually, it took hold. By the late 19th century children had been definitively placed at the centre of the family. It could be said that, the transition had been made between Montaigne's "I lost two infants, not without contrariety, but without excessive grief" to Victor Hugo's "When a child appears, the family circle / Applauds with loud joy its gentle and shining gaze". So, do the artworks exhibited at the Musée d'Orsay reflect this upheaval? Of course one should not expect to find them giving an uncomplicated linear historical demonstration: the paintings, produced by artists, a particular sector of the population, for a limited public (amateurs, collectors, visitors of the Salons...) often refer to culturally constructed and definite images of

children rather than giving an immediate vision of the thinking and practices of the times. As such, they are all the more interesting and looking at them helps us to understand an era that has become remote. There are numerous paintings and sculptures representing children in the museum collections. Indeed, there are few aspects of 19th century life that completely escape visual representation so that, long before Mac Luhan, Baudelaire was able to write "Our century celebrates the cult of images". But the artists' tendency to moralise, to present exemplary lessons to their contemporaries, has perhaps led them to favour timeless representations of childhood rather than social realities. This should not prevent today's visitors from forming a rounded picture of childhood in the 19th century by reconstructing the elements, implicit or otherwise, whether these be material living conditions or the image of childhood which society chose to present. With this in mind, during this proposed visit we concentrate on the searching, rather than the finding, within the main trends characterising 19th century childhood: affirmation of the supremacy of private and family life, mass schooling (at least for boys) of working-class children, the gap between "the two nations"; poor youth and bourgeois youth, the recognition of the specific nature of the world of childhood, and the attitude towards childhood of sentimentality fused with melancholy.

1. The supremacy of private life

A child is first and foremost the child of the family. Although in 1820, George IV suffered difficulties due to the public nature of a dispute within the royal couple, Great Britain was the first country to promote the values of family happiness. The image of the happy family united around Queen Victoria (1819-1857-1901) and Prince Albert (1819-1861) was a break from the "Old Regime" model of sovereigns surrounded by mistresses or favourites: the popularity of the monarchic institution increased greatly as a result. In France, the "citizen" monarchies of Louis-Philippe and Napoleon III tried to follow the same model. Thus, the wide popularisation of Carpeaux's sculpture of *The Imperial Prince With His Dog Néro* served the imperial propaganda, although the work's intrinsic qualities assured that it remained very popular after 1870 as the *Child With Dog*. In *His Excellecy Eugène Rougon*, Zola has a good provincial bourgeois woman say in all frankness of the imperial couple: "They seem to be good (...) admirable people (...) they are like two heads on the same pillow". Family respectability was de rigueur and children were its best guarantee. Family life allowed the development of a particular sociability, organised in and around the home with opulent and comfortable furniture, often marked by a taste for collections and knickknacks, and the meals, taken ceremoniously, as its main ingredients. Being served at table was the discriminating sign which indicated ones

membership of the bourgeoisie. The latter had at its disposal a complete set of other distinctive behaviours, such as the provision of tea or goûter for the younger ones.

Children benefited from the climate of affection and tenderness described as the ideal of family intimacy. Despite Flaubert's mockery of modern teaching methods in his *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, the use of "tu" instead of "vous" became more current, strapping and corporal punishment became less so, and children's bedrooms, although still rare, made their appearance. The State encouraged these developments, setting the example, at least in the enunciation of principles. As early as 1854, beating children was forbidden in state schools, a prohibition forcefully repeated in Jules Ferry's directives and it seems that this opposition to corporal punishment often constituted a notable difference between state and private schools. The laws of 1889 and 1898 are interventions within the family itself to protect children from maltreatment. The ideal of family happiness spread and extended to all social backgrounds. At the beginning of the 20th century, the revolutionary trade union C.G.T. demanded the eight-hour working day for the sake of the workers' families and their right to happiness and leisure, symbolised by the image of parents finally available to help in the education of their children. As the historian Edward Shorter put it, "The nest has become the norm".

2. A schooled childhood

The major school laws of the 19th century provided for the universal schooling of children, at least for boys, while in bourgeois and aristocratic circles the figure of "the tutor" faded away. This development also corresponded to the State's increasing dominance to the detriment of paternal rights, something which was not always desired or accepted. In the name of the family and personal liberty, Catholics and conservatives denounced the hold of the State. Falloux, promoter of Church rights, accused the Universities of offering "more instruction than education". Revolutionary trade unionism at the beginning of the century, also suspicious of the State, likewise opposed the State's monopoly as far as schooling was concerned. Conversely, Republican politics were soon identified with "education" as a cause which was believed to be the best weapon against social miseries. "To open a school is to shut a prison"; Victor Hugo's motto well illustrates the intentions of the 19th century inheritors of the Enlightenment, from Guizot to Ferry. The school laws of 1880-1882 crowned the great work initiated by Condorcet, Lakanal and the Conventionnels, and continued by Guizot and Duruy. Illiteracy receded: from 50% of the male population in 1850 to 4% in 1910, according to statistics established during conscription. For boys at least, Jules Ferry's creed, the ability to read, write and count had become a reality: the broadest gap remaining within 19th century social reality, and certainly later, is that which separates girls from boys...

3. A divided youth

Yet schools were not wholly effective in their role as social melting pot. There was a sharp contrast between the lycées of the bourgeoisie and the state primary schools, with their cours complémentaires, the prerogative of the working class. Very early on, working class children would be introduced into the world of work as apprentices or juniors. Only rarely did they wait for the official school leaving age (15 in 1882) especially if they were girls. Laws were passed to prohibit child labour: under 8 years of age in 1841, 10 in 1874, 15 in 1892. It is precisely on this matter, invoking the defence of the interests of the nation, that the first social laws are passed which stood as the first breach in the dogma of the complete liberty of labour contracts. It was thus to control the implementation of the law on child labour that the Inspection du Travail (the labour inspectorate) was created in 1874. It later went on to regulate labour in other social categories: for example, in 1900, the length of the working day was limited to 10 hours for women and children. The State intervened to develop assistance (act of 1904): social policy and national consciousness began to merge. Feeling the Germans to be rivals, France became obsessed with the fight against the fall in the birth rate and the psychological enfeeblement of the “race”. This led to the institution in 1909 of maternity leave of a monthly duration, with guaranteed reemployment. Medical progress emphasises vaccinations for all, improved hygiene and the emergence of paediatrics with the development of infant care, as illustrated by Doctor Variot. These measures, linked to economic growth and social improvements, had positive results: the infant mortality rate decreased from 35‰ in 1800 to 19‰ in 1910. However, although the fate of working-class children tended to improve as a whole, one should not forget that there is often long a gap between the creation of new legislation and its day to day implementation nor that, at the end of the “Belle Epoque” the conditions of working-class life were still tragic and intolerable.

Objectives

The circuit is designed to help pupils understand not only the changing perception of childhood in history, but also the diversity in the treatment of a single theme by different authors and artistic movements. It illuminates the complex relationships between the pictorial means used by the painter and the social and cultural signification of the resulting artwork. It is relevant to history (third, fifth and final years), literature, visual arts, economics and social studies curricula. It helps pupils to acquire a vocabulary specific to the description and study of works of art. Also, the closeness of the subject to the pupils themselves should help them to appreciate the diversity of modes of expression and give them a sense of social development.

Before and after the visit

The preparation for the visit will obviously depend on the subject taught, the class and the level of the pupils. Yet, a few basic recommendations are always worth taking into account. It is essential to provide a few historical landmarks for the period covered by the Musée d’Orsay. This means reminding them of the basic political periods: the Second Republic, the Second Empire, the Third Republic and also covering a few aspects of social history: the literacy rate, access to education, child labour, and the main legislative measures taken between 1850 and 1914. The follow-up to the visit may be an opportunity to tackle those themes barely or not touched on by the Musée d’Orsay collections. Series of slides, available from the Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique, include various documents on children at work or at school which make an interesting comparison with the Orsay artworks. Visits to the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, the Musée de l’Assistance Publique or the Musée de l’Éducation (Rouen) enable a comparison between artistic representations and ethnographic documents on the same subject. Literature provides us with a rich body of relevant work. The first major novel to feature a child-hero was Charles Dickens’ *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* 1838, and depending on the pupils’ age and interests suggestions for study include; Hector Malot (*Sans Famille*), the Comtesse de Ségur (*Les Petites filles modèles*, 1858, the first novel with young girls as heroines), George Sand (*La Petite Fadette*), Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*), Balzac (*Pierrette*), Jules Vallès (*L’Enfant*), Jules Renard (*Poil de carotte*), Colette (*Claudine à l’école*) etc. Official portraits of princes and kings do not acknowledge the specificity of youth: the portrayal of young Louis XIII and Louis XV do not differ from their representations in maturity nor from that of the elderly Louis XVI. Compare with Chardin (1699-1779), Greuze (1725-1805), Reynolds (1723-1792), Goya (1746-1828) who confirm the ascendancy of the modern perception of childhood, for example; Greuze’s *Return of the Prodigal Son* at the Louvre or the *Little Blond Boy in an Open Shirt*, at the Musée Cognac-Jay. During its development, modern painting generally distanced itself from concern over representation, through examples of figurative painting are still to be found (Picasso). Visual representation was to be expressed through other forms of artistic media: from its earliest days cinema was to comment on the importance of the place occupied by children in family life with *Le déjeuner de Bébé*, by the Lumière brothers. Works by, among others, Chaplin (*The Kid*), Comencini (*Incompreso*), Losey (*The Boy With Green Hair*), Pialat (*L’Enfance nue*), etc., are also relevant. Finally, it is worth making a comparison between the images presented at the exhibition with the multitude of images of children in today’s society (advertising, media...) and their various meanings.

The visit: list of artworks

N.B.: This list of artworks, indicative only, is intended solely to help in organising unguided visits.

- Alexandre Antigna : *L'Éclair (Lightning)*, 1848
- Isidore Pils : *La Mort d'une sœur de charité (The Death of a Sister of Charity)*, 1850
- Alexandre Antigna : *La Fête-Dieu (La Fête-Dieu ; Corpus-Christi)*, 1855
- Gustave Courbet : *L'Atelier du peintre. Allégorie réelle déterminant une phase de sept années de ma vie artistique et morale (The Painter's Studio. A Real-life Allegory which Determined a Seven Year Phase in my Artistic and Moral Life)*, 1855
- Jules Cavalier : *Cornélie, mère des Gracques (Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi)* sculpture, 1855-1861
- Edgar Degas : *La Famille Bellelli (The Bellelli Family)* 1858-1867
- Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux : *Le Prince impérial et son chien Néro (The Imperial Prince with his Dog, Néro)*, sculpture, 1865
- Édouard Manet : *Le Fijre (The Piper)*, 1866
- Edgar Degas : *La Classe de danse (The Dancing Class)*, 1872
- Claude Monet : *Le Déjeuner (Lunch)*, 1875
- Claude Monet : *Un Coin d'appartement (A Corner of the Flat)*, 1875
- Antonio Mancini : *Pauvre écolier (The Poor Schoolboy)*, 1876
- Edgar Degas : *Petite Danseuse de 14 ans (The Little Dancer)*, sculpture, 1879-1881
- Auguste Renoir : *Fernand Halphen, enfant (Fernand Halphen as a Child)*, 1880
- Jean-Joseph Weerts : *Mort de Joseph Bara (Joseph Bara's Death)*, 1885
- Marie Bashkirtseff : *Un Meeting (A Meeting)*, 1884
- Eugène Carrière : *Intimité (Intimacy)*, 1889
- Vincent Van Gogh : *Deux fillettes (Two Young Girls)*, 1890
- Auguste Renoir : *Jeunes Filles au piano (Girls Playing the Piano)*, 1892
- Édouard Vuillard : *Jardins publics (Public Gardens)*, 1894
- Pierre Bonnard : *L'Enfant au pâté de sable (Child With Sandpie)* , circa 1894
- Léon Frédéric : *Les Âges de l'ouvrier (The Ages of the Worker)*, 1895-189
- Maurice Denis : *La Famille Mellerio (The Mellerio Family)*, 1897
- Félix Vallotton : *Le Ballon (The Ball)*, 1899
- Félix Vallotton : *Le Dîner, effet de lampe (Dinner, The Lamp Effect)*, 1899
- Pierre Bonnard : *L'Après-midi bourgeoise de la famille Terrasse (The Terrasse Family's Bourgeois Afternoon)*, 1900

Bibliography

- Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale*, Paris, Seuil, "L'univers historique", 1973
- Edward Shorter, *Naissance de la famille moderne*, Paris, Seuil, "Univers historique", 1977, reed. by "Points", 1981
- Philippe Ariès et Georges Duby (editor), *Histoire de la vie privée*, tome 4, *De la Révolution à la Grande Guerre*, edited by Michelle Perrot, Paris, Seuil, "L'univers historique", 1987
- François Caradec, *Histoire de la littérature enfantine en France*, Albin Michel, 1977
- Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe, *Un monde autre, l'enfance, de ses représentations à son mythe*, Payot, 1971
- Antoine Prost, *L'Enseignement en France 1800-1967*, Paris, A. Colin, "U", 1968
- Maurice Crubellier, *L'Enfance et la jeunesse dans la société française 1800-1950*, Paris, A. Colin, "U", 1970
- Jacques Ozouf, *Nous, les maîtres d'écoles, autobiographies d'instituteurs de la Belle Époque*, Paris, Gallimard, "Archives", reed. Folio, 1995
- Françoise Mayeur, *L'Éducation des filles en France au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Hachette, 1979
- Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Les Amours paysannes : amour et sexualité dans les campagnes de l'ancienne France (XVI^e-XIX^e siècles)*, Paris, Gallimard, "Archives", 1975, rééd. Folio 1995
- François Jacquet-Francillon, *Naissances de l'école du peuple, 1815-1870*, Paris, Ed. de l'Atelier, 1995
- INRP - Musée national de l'Éducation, *L'éducation des jeunes filles il y a cent ans*, Rouen, 1985
- Vincent Viet, *Les Voltigeurs de la République. L'inspection du travail jusqu'en 1914*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 1994, 2 volumes
- Colette Cosnier, *Marie Bashkirtseff un portrait sans retouches*, Pierre Horay, 1985
- Rodolphe Rapetti, "Léon Frédéric et Les âges de l'ouvrier", *Revue du Louvre*, 2, 1990
- Claire Barbillon, "Images de l'enfant : mythe et réalité", *revue Quarante-huit/Quatorze*, n°2, 1990
- Chantal Georgel, *L'Enfant*, Carnet Parcours du Musée d'Orsay, n°16, RMN, 1989
- Chantal Georgel, *L'Enfant et l'image au XIX^e siècle*, Les Dossiers du Musée d'Orsay, n°24, RMN, 1988
- Nicole Savy, *Les Petites filles modernes*, Les Dossiers du Musée d'Orsay, n°33, RMN, 1989
- Ségolène Le Men, *Livres d'enfant, livres d'images*, Les Dossiers du Musée d'Orsay, n°35, RMN, 1989

For young readers

- Eska Kayser and Jacqueline Marquet, *Un Tableau, un enfant, un peintre, une histoire*, Paris, Fleurus, 1988

Children, Images by Artists And Social Realities

• The visit: the artworks

N.B. Artworks are presented in the order of the museum's suggested circuit

Tradition: Hero's childhood, unhappy childhood

1. Jules Cavelier (1814-1894):
Cornélie, mère des Gracques (*Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi*), 1855-1861
Location: ground floor, central aisle

This group sculpted in marble portrays Cornelia (c. 189 BC- c. 110 BC) and her two sons, Tiberius (162 BC-155BC) and Caius (154 BC-121 BC) and is typical of the neo-classical taste fashionable in the 1840s and 1850s. Although a sculpture in the round, which can be viewed from any angle, its rigid symmetry imposes a frontal view on the viewer. Agrarian reformers, defenders of people and democracy, gloriously dead for their ideals, the Gracchi were very popular amongst the 19th century well-read, liberal youth, who commonly saw them as models to imitate. They usually knew of such heroes through the intermediary of Plutarch's Lives (circa 50-125 AD). Presented at the 1855 (plaster model) and 1861 (marble) Exhibitions, Cavelier's group informs us of the political and moral values popular under the Second Empire. Napoleon III wanted to assume the revolutionary heritage of 1789 and claimed responsibility for defending the interests of the people. The sculptor, a member of the Institute, taught by David d'Angers and Delaroche, is an official artist, capable of interpreting and expressing such a wish. Cornelia as the image of civic virtue and embodiment of the Law, is not without similarity to "Marianne" (personified figure of the French Republic), at least the "wise Mariannes" of the conservative or moderate Republic. The sculpture also intends to portray three personalities and in this respect, it is indeed an imaginary portrait. Cornelia seems to be wording the phrase, familiar to all frequenters of 19th century Salons, when she presents her sons in response to the fashion-conscious Roman ladies, with the words: "Here are my jewels". The elder son, dressed in a toga, is more thoughtful, whilst the younger is full of energy, conforming both to the respective roles traditionally reserved for elder and younger brothers and to Plutarch's account of the two Tribunes.

2. Alexandre Antigna (1817-1878): *L'Éclair* (*Lightning*), 1848
Location: ground floor, Seine gallery

In what is a typical subject for Antigna, a poor family, the father absent, are huddled up in their garret, under the shadow of a crucifix which is today barely visible. They look out at a thunder storm, the lighting being rendered by a strange orangey glow, as if anxiously awaiting its possible consequences. The atmosphere in *L'Éclair* is still derived from romantic drama, but it also constitutes a popular genre scene revealing urban

misery. The expression of emotions hark back to historical painting whereas, in the rendition of the lodgings, we see an attention to realism which is more modern. The painting also evokes the obsession of the elite of the time with social issues. The deep economic crisis that hit Europe in 1846-1847 not only brought back food shortages to France and famine in Ireland but it also led to the revolutionary wave; "the Spring-time of the Masses". The emergence of realism in art was happening in parallel to the vigorous political challenge to monarchical Europe which had been set in motion by the Vienna Congress (1815). See also:

- Alexandre Antigna (1817-1878): *Fête-Dieu* (*Fête-Dieu, Corpus-Christi*) 1855
- Isidore Pils (1815-1875): *La Mort d'une sœur de charité* (*Death of a Sister of Charity*), 1850
- Charles Degeorge (1837-1888): *La Jeunesse d'Aristote* (*Aristotle's Youth*), 1875

3. Édouard Manet (1832-1883): *Le Fijre* (*The Piper*), 1866
Location: ground floor, gallery 14

The Piper, represented full-length, on a flat surface, without a ground line, in full light, defined a revolutionary aesthetic. It is the reason why, whilst one of Epinal's works and a playing card were accepted, this piece was refused by the Jury of the Salon of 1866, and it is also the reason for its vigorous defence by Zola: "I do not believe it possible to get a more powerful effect with less straightforward means. Mr Manet's temperament is a sharp one, carrying the day. (...) His whole personality leads him to see in the form in terms of simple and energetic patches and flashes." A social analysis on such an artwork is not very easy. The model could have been a child reared by the Imperial Guard of the barracks of La Pépinière, although the face is reminiscent of that of the artist's regular model; Victorine Meurent (*Olympia, Déjeuner Sur l'herbe...*). Certainly, many children were reared by the army in the 19th century, but it is not particularly helpful for study purposes to consider the painting from this angle. It is perhaps better to note the impression of solitude emanating from this motherless child, reinforced by the absence of background and it is worth comparing this painting with other representations of children in the works of Goya, Velázquez, Titian, Murillo.

Bourgeois childhood and private life

4. Edgar Degas (1854-1917): *La famille Bellelli* (*The Bellelli Family*), 1860-1867
Location: ground floor, gallery 15

Between the ages of 22 and 26, Edgar Degas completed his training in Italy, where some of his family lived. Here we see his paternal aunt, Laure, with her husband the Baron Bellelli (1812-1864)



1



2



3



4

1. Jules Cavelier : *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1855-1861
2. Alexandre Antigna : *L'Éclair*, 1848
3. Édouard Manet : *Le Fijre*, 1866
4. Edgar Degas : *La Famille Bellelli*, 1860-1867

and her two daughters Giulia and Giovanna. The Baron was an Italian patriot, banned from Naples, living in exile in Florence. The Baroness was mourning her father, Hilaire, who had just died and whose portrait is represented in the framed line drawing next to his daughter's face. In 1860, the two little girls, Giovanna and Giulia, were 7 and 10 years old; their cousin described them as follows: "The elder is really a young beauty; the younger is witty as a demon and good as an angel". The mother is extremely dignified and emanates a rather severe authority which contrasts with the father who is almost eclipsed. This family portrait evokes those of the Flemish masters, of Van Dyck in particular. It also offers a modern image of family ennui, of a world closed on itself, with strained relationships in a somewhat oppressive atmosphere.

5. Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827-1875): *Le Prince impérial et son chien Néro* (*The Imperial Prince With His Dog Néro*), 1865
Location: ground floor, central alley

This sculpture in the round represents the imperial prince, Eugène Louis Napoléon, the only child of Napoleon III and the empress Eugénie. Through this image, the imperial regime intended to stress its dynastic continuity whilst popularising the image of the heir to the throne. By the 19th century, following the lead of Victoria in Great-Britain and Louis-Philippe in France, the monarchy was expected to embody the exemplary family. Carpeaux's talent gives the work a splendour and it is particularly effective. Whereas the children of kings and young princes were traditionally represented replete with all the attributes of their (future) might, here, the fact the young prince is a child is asserted instead of being denied. His clothes are elegant, but plain, similar to those of any bourgeois child. Only the boldness of his gaze and his bearing indicate he is destined to reign. Carpeaux shows a touch of genius in replacing the usual sculptural crutch of a tree trunk or hunting weapon with a dog, the dog embodying the classic image of devotion to its master, and also implying a mutual tenderness. The intimacy of the work is further reinforced by our being told the dog's name; Néro, and the inscription on his collar with his master's address, "Aux Tuileries". Being such effective propaganda, this sculpture was reproduced in diverse formats and a variety of materials: bronze, plaster, marble, and even silver-plated bronze (Ny Carlsberg collection, Copenhagen). It is worth remembering that in the nineteenth century, sculptors did not carve their own stone: whilst Carpeaux modelled the work, it was his assistant, Bernaërts, who carved the actual marble. After 1871, the sculpture remained very popular, but was emptied of any political meaning: it was to be commercialised with the new (and anonymous) title *L'enfant au chien* (*Child With Dog*).

6. Eugène Carrière (1849-1906): *Intimité* (*Intimacy*), 1889
Location: upper level, gallery 29

Eugène Carrière pursued the portrait tradition, whereas his "impressionist" colleagues of the same period tended to dissolve figures in the light of the landscape. Carrière was often considered as a painter tainted with a certain mundane preciousness. Yet the art critic Roger Marx appreciated him and underlined the social aspect of his work, comparing it that of Michelet, Ibsen and Maeterlinck. According to Octave Mirbeau, Carrière was "The tragic poet of maternal tenderness and terror" (*Le Figaro*, May 6, 1892), who liked to represent children surrounded by an anxious family. Although the 19th century was certainly a century of progress, particularly in the fields of medicine and public health, as illustrated by the emblematic figure of Louis Pasteur, it remained nonetheless a period when premature death was a frequent occurrence and in which many epidemics took their toll. Infant mortality, still considerable by today's standards, slowly receded, from what had been one in three children to one in five by 1900. This is the underlying data behind the atmosphere in Carrière's paintings: Mirbeau found in them the frequent presence of "death like a thief always hovering over everything". At the same time, society had finally accorded the death of a child with same importance as that of an adult: in 1850, there was no longer a difference in the churches' mourning toll for children or adults and parents began to wear mourning clothes for dead infants.

7. Claude Monet (1840-1926): *Un coin d'appartement* (*A Corner of the Flat*), 1876
Location: upper level, gallery 32

Certainly aesthetic principles rather than ideological considerations explain the negative reactions of the critics of the time towards this painting: "[a] horrid vision of human vanity losing itself in dementia" Albert Wolff wrote wholeheartedly in *Le Figaro*. For a long time, the reproduction of this painting illustrated *Remembrance of Things Past* by Marcel Proust in the classical textbook directed by Lagarde and Michard. Here Monet stages an alternative, melancholy vision of bourgeois childhood. The child is captured in an indolent attitude, facing the spectator, just to one side of the median line which bisects the painting into symmetrical parts. The child is not visible at the first glance and seems to dissolve in the décor, a phenomena which also can be seen in *Le Déjeuner* (*Lunch*); the painting hanging to the right of this one. The taste for trinkets and overabundance of interior decoration (curtains, plants, etc.), are typical of fin de siècle bourgeois' interiors. Just at the time when the family unit was prevailing over the public sphere, its hold was also starting to be contested; a few years later André Gide would write: "Families, I hate you! Closed shutters, shut doors, jealous possessions of happiness" (*Les Nourritures terrestres*, 1897).



5



6



7

8. Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919): *Jeunes Filles au piano* (*Girls Playing the Piano*), 1892
Location: upper floor, gallery 35

Renoir's painting was commissioned for the Musée du Luxembourg, museum of living artists, by the director of Fine Arts, Henry Roujon, following the intervention of his friend Stéphane Mallarmé. The artist painted six versions, five paintings and a pastel, and let the representatives of the State choose one.

Girls Playing the Piano is set in the same world as Monet's, but with a more rosy and optimistic outlook. Perhaps it is because the representation of young girls sits uncomfortably with dramatic images, tensions and violence, that these young girls seem to live in a world of harmony that emanates well being and intimacy. Renoir was particularly fond of such peaceful atmospheres, but this piano lesson also reminds us of the crucial place given to "accomplishments" in the education of bourgeois girls of the era. The schooling of girls dragged way behind that of boys. Victor Duruy, a liberal minister of Napoleon III (1865-1869)

opened the first secondary schools for girls, which led to him being violently attacked in the Catholic and conservative press, just as later happened to the Republican Camille Sée, who created upper secondary schools for girls and the École Normale Supérieure in Sèvres for teacher training (1881). Yet the quality of Renoir's work goes beyond the mere representation of a protected social milieu. Renoir was in total accord with the amiable and peaceful atmosphere he projected through his work: "To me, a painting must be a likeable, joyous and pretty thing: yes, pretty. There are enough annoying things in life not to create yet others" (quoted by Albert André, *Renoir*, Crès, 1919), a point of view elaborated by the critic Albert Aurier: "Renoir's prettiness (...) becomes prodigiously interesting, first by its very excess, and also because it is, in some way, a philosophical prettiness, a symbolic prettiness of his artist's soul, of his ideas, of his universal understanding...".

See also:

- Édouard Vuillard (1868-1940): *Claude Bernheim de Villiers*, 1906

Working-class childhood, school and work

9. Marie Bashkirtseff (1860-1884): *Un Meeting* (*A Meeting*), 1884
Location: middle level, gallery 55

This painting received a wide popular acclaim when it was exhibited at the 1884 Salon. The choice of subject; a group of "urchins" attending a demonstration, is a return to the genre scene. The type of fencing and graffiti indicate that it is set in a working-class area. The children embody the Paris urchin type, long symbolised by Gavroche, and a theme that was later to be somewhat over-

played in popular culture in the innumerable images of "Poulbots". Over-sentimentality is avoided here thanks to the palette; grey, beige, blue, pink and by the attention to ethnological realism: the separation of the sexes, the mysteries revealed by the older to the younger ones, the children themselves; spindle-limbed and pale, wearing old clogs, cunning-looking. The polemicist Drumont, already famous for his violent anti-Semitic campaigns, denounced this love for the ugly, the banal and vulgar to be found in the suburbs: "those subjects who speak so little to the soul and the mind, who let nothing remain of the poetry of childhood".

For all that, it should not be forgotten that these street children go to school. Jules Ferry's laws saw the successful realisation of an development, initiated by Guizot during the July Monarchy. See also:

- Antonio Mancini (1852-1930): *Le Pauvre écolier* (*The Poor Schoolboy*), 1876 (ground floor, gallery 56)

10. Léon Frédéric (1856-1940): *Les Âges de l'ouvrier* (*The Ages of the Worker*), 1895-189
Location: middle level, gallery 59

This representation of popular and crowded streets in Brussels by one of the masters of Belgian symbolism announces the era of the masses, as much longed for by the defenders of the proletariat, as it was dreaded by those, such as the sociologist Gustave Lebon, who saw it as the coming of mob-rule. Either way it expresses the main aspects of social anxiety of the nineteenth century.

There is no bright future for this human mass: the painting presents a sky lit by a feeble glow and a background occupied by buildings evoking the unavoidable working-class destiny: the law courts at the far end of the right hand panel, the St. Gilles prison in the left. The central panel holds the St. Pierre hospital and to the right, the only consolation in the form of the church of Saint-Michel-et-Gudule, relocated by the artist. The triptych is a form well suited to a religious ambience, something which has been reinforced in numerous details: the right-hand panel, portraying only men, evokes the raising of (or a descent from) the Cross, whilst the left-hand panel, women only, contains repeated representations of Mary with the child. The characters have a contemplative attitude, but the realism of the faces contrasts with the complexity in the rendering of the clothes. The world of children, abandoned to the street, seems fated to perdition: gambling accompanies misery (the card-players are in rags). Nevertheless, the despair is not total. The children in the foreground, well-fed and well-clothed, in the shade of the loving couple, may embody a brighter future. Could this be the fruit of social and political struggles? In the background, red flags circle a burial procession: perhaps victims of the 1893 riots for universal suffrage?

The spirit of social protest and political democracy



8



9



10

does not contradict the expression of religious fervour, particularly in Belgium. This painting was made shortly after the publication of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) by Pope Léon XIII which founded social Christianity and which was to allow the renewal of the Belgian catholic party. Frédéric's somewhat mystical symbolism remains nevertheless relatively far from the social realism of the painter and sculptor Constantin Meunier (1851-1905).

This work provides another opportunity to highlight the slow social "progress" of the Belle Époque, with the social discourse being proclaimed by trade unionism and the social movements, but having also been taken on board by the public authorities, before and after the creation of the Ministry of Work (1906).

Childhood Acknowledged

11. Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947): *L'Enfant au pâté de sable* (*Child with Sandpie*), 1894
Location: middle level, gallery 70

Bonnard was nicknamed by his friends "le nabi japonard". The Japanese influence is evident in the chosen format; the panel of a folding screen, in the conscious sobriety of the colours, in the rendering of the child's clothes in a check pattern, the flecked surfaces, and in the superimposition of elements within a space which is folded in upon itself and without depth.

The child has his back turned to the viewer: he is in his own world, the value of which is implicitly recognised in that it is he who constitutes the subject of the painting. The child no longer needs a family or anecdotal pretence in order to feature on the canvas. Here too is the suggestion that, to a certain degree, his world will remain forever foreign to us, that it is never quite accessible. This is the realisation of that evolution anticipated in Victor Hugo's *L'Art d'être grand-père*: when he says that in contemplating a child, one finds "a deep peace made of stars".

See also:

- Pierre Bonnard: *L'Après-midi bourgeoise de la famille Terrasse* (*The Bourgeois Afternoon of the Terrasse Family*), 1900

- Édouard Vuillard (1868-1940): *Jardins publics* (*Public Gardens*), 1894

These panels commissioned for the town house of Alexandre Natanson, director of *La Revue blanche*, bring to life the atmosphere of the public gardens in the capital, peopled by children accompanied by their maids or nannies, as they can be found in Proust's novel *Du côté de chez Swann* (*Swann's way*).

- Félix Vallotton (1865-1925): *Le Dîner, effet de lampe* (*Dinner, The Lamp Effect*), 1899

The child is at the family meal table on his own (perhaps suggesting the fall in the French birth rate in the first half of the 20th century which resulted in numerous one child families ...) and in full light, emphasising his central position in the family unit.

12. Félix Vallotton (1865-1925): *Le Ballon* (*The Ball*), 1899

Location: middle level, gallery 71

With Vallotton, the child also escapes from the world of adults. While the two female silhouettes continue their promenade, the child is running towards his ball, close to the menacing shadow of the trees. Whereas Bonnard's painting seems to be bathed in a serene and happy atmosphere, here, in a landscape devoid of sky or exits, the feeling of anxiety is overwhelming. It is tempting to mention the interest in child psychology in late 19th century France and to point out the coincidence in the dates of Vallotton's painting and the publication of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. With the 20th century a completely new vision of the world of childhood would begin to emerge.



11



12