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**“*LA FEMME MODÈLE*” FROM THE FIRST COMMUNICANT TO THE  
AFFECTIONATE MOTHER: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN PAINTING AND  
MORAL DISCOURSE UNDER THE EARLY THIRD REPUBLIC (1870-1900)**

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## DECLARATION

I have composed this thesis. The work is my own and has not been submitted for another degree or professional qualification. Where other people's work has been used, this has been acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements.

Maria Anesti

## ABSTRACT

This PhD dissertation seeks to define the configuration and evolution of French women's moral identity and social status, through works of art created during the first thirty years of the Third Republic (1870-1900). More specifically, my thesis investigates the artistic perception and visual recording of "traditional" female roles and analyses the socio-historical factors which contributed to the construction of the ideal woman. I focus on the representation of young girls' education and First Communion and study the portrayal of maternity which was perceived both as a personal role and a republican ideal. Furthermore, I consider the institutions of marriage and family through portraits and scenes of everyday life. The woman's relations to the Catholic Church within a secular state, as well as the notions of chastity and patriotism, are thoroughly explored. In my dissertation I prioritised nineteenth century texts, where French doctors, demographers and statesmen from different ideological backgrounds give moral guidelines concerning hygiene, breastfeeding and childcare, or analyse phenomena such as the birth rate decline. The writings of these authors who communicated major social anxieties served as an evaluative platform; more specifically, I ventured to see how French painters and illustrators participated to the most important debates of their time. Therefore, the criterion for the choice of images was not artistic excellence, but their engagement with the moral and social issues I decided to consider. Since in my thesis pictures are treated within a socio-historical context, I was challenged to achieve a balance between the visual and theoretical material, making them inter-relate effectively. Finally, my time-frame covers the three first decades of the French Third Republic and observes the succession of different governments. I investigate to what extent certain social attitudes which were developed during this period of thirty years shifted, and try to find out whether these alterations are conveyed in painting.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

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For any errors and inadequacies of this thesis the responsibility is mine.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Declaration.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of contents.....	v

INTRODUCTION.....	1
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### FIRST CHAPTER

From the “Knees of the Church” into the Arms of the Republic: Reforming Girl’s Education in Late Nineteenth Century France.

1. Introduction.....	14
2. Towards a Secular School.....	15
3. Women’s Education: the Importance of the <i>Mère Éducatrice</i> .....	17
4. The Great Debate: the Republican School and the Catholic Reaction.....	20
5. Structuring Girls’ Morality: Religious Instruction.....	27
6. Republican Education and the Emancipation of Women: Aspects of the <i>Loi Sée</i> .....	35
7. Art and Propaganda: Representing the Republican School.....	39
8. Education and Patriotism.....	50

### SECOND CHAPTER

Representing Girls’ First Communion: a Catholic Rite in Anticlerical Times.

1. Introduction and Historical Background.....	53
2. First Communion as a Rite of Passage.....	57
3. The Communicant Girl as Symbol of Purity.....	64
4. The Woman’s Allegiance to the Church: Catholicism as Doctrine and Ideology.....	70
5. First Communion as a Modern Spectacle: <i>La Communion à l’Église de la Trinité</i> .....	76
6. First Communion as a Caricature: Toulouse Lautrec’s <i>Jour de Première Communion</i> .....	79
7. <i>Parce Domine</i> : The Communicant in Allegorical Painting.....	81
8. First Communion and the Republicans: Catholicism as a Force of Moral Control.....	86

## THIRD CHAPTER

### Images of Marriage under the Third Republic

1. Introduction.....	92
2. The Horror of Celibacy: The Spinster.....	94
3. Ignorance for the Sake of Purity: The Chastity Discourse.....	98
4. “ <i>Mariage d’Amour</i> ” or “ <i>Mariage de Convenance</i> ”: Bourgeois and the Love of Money.....	112
5. Adultery: The Plague, its Roots and its Treatment.....	117
6. Mariage Civil: Tradition and Novelty.....	123
7. Conclusion: the Model Wife.....	128

## FOURTH CHAPTER

### Towards National Regeneration: Policies for Mothers and Infants.

1. Depopulation as Source of Anxiety.....	133
2. Charity for Children and Mothers in Third Republic France	
2.1 Scientists rally: the pioneers of a social reformation.....	137
2.2 The republican state becomes a paternal aegis: doctors’ contribution.....	140
3. Moral Questions and Social Regulation	
3.1 <i>La fille mère</i> .....	146
3.2 <i>La mère ouvrière</i> .....	147
4. Cult of the Healthy Body: Hygiene and Regeneration	
4.1 To form a healthy nation: efforts in a state-level.....	154
4.2 The baby’s bath: domestic hygiene and intimacy.....	158
5. Bourgeois Mothers and the Wet-Nursing Question.....	161
6. The Nursing Woman as Eternal Mother.....	172
7. Conclusion.....	184

## FIFTH CHAPTER

### “*La famille modèle*” in the Early Third Republic

1. Introduction.....	187
2. The Bourgeois Family Ideal: Republican versus Catholic Position.....	189
3. Family and Propaganda Decoration of the <i>Mairies</i> .....	200
4. Among the Humble the Peasant Family as a Model.....	208
5. The Affectionate Father The Transformation of the Patriarch.....	215
6. A Bourgeois Family Insight.....	224
7. Conclusion.....	231

CONCLUSION.....	234
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	239
CATALOGUE OF IMAGES.....	254

Preliminaries:

SNBA = Salon Nationale des Beaux Arts

SAF = Salon des Artistes Français



## INTRODUCTION.

The main focus of this dissertation is the fluid concept of female morality and its evolution during the early Third Republic (1870-1900), a thirty-year period which saw radical political and social changes in France. The notions of chastity, piety, conjugal devotion, fertility and maternal duty that emerge from paintings are analysed in the light of texts by commentators who engaged with moral issues.<sup>1</sup> French patriotism and nationalism in the years after the country's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War are also recurrent themes of this thesis. The perception and propagation of the particular concepts is explored, and the way patriotism affected educational and family ideals is investigated. The dissertation follows the turbulent relationship of the Catholic Church with the republican regime, from the hostility of the 1880s until the attempts for reconciliation during the 1890s. The writings of this era's moral and spiritual authorities provided me with the necessary historical and theoretical context in order to consider major social anxieties linked to depopulation and moral decadence.

The relationship of women with the Catholic religion during this era constitutes a key subject, extensively discussed throughout the thesis.<sup>2</sup> The image of the French female, *bourgeois* or peasant, as a faithful daughter of the Church arises from many case studies. Their powerful bonds with Catholicism were forged during the course of the previous centuries, through education received either at home or in congregational schools; although all women were not devout, most of them were practicing their faith. I have tried to trace the aspects of women's piety in paintings which record crucial moments of their lives and find out the way their devotion structured their moral identity.

The first chapter deals with the role of the mother as her children's educator, analyses its moral dimension through the texts of priests and secularists and explores its visual representation. The public, secular school established in the 1880s is considered as a fundamental political decision taken by the French state, which ventured to proclaim itself an

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<sup>1</sup> In the thesis I use the term "moralists" in order to describe this category of authors.

<sup>2</sup> Key works for this subject: Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789-1914* (London and N.York 1989), Isabelle Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches. L'Éducation des jeunes filles au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, (Paris 1985), Sarah Curtis, *Educating the Faithful. Religion, Schooling and Society in 19<sup>th</sup> century France* (Dekalb, Illinois 2000).

independent secular spiritual authority.<sup>3</sup> Propaganda paintings portraying the new school are discussed in this context. The radical republicans attempted an educational reform mainly in order to wipe out women's devoutness and remove the children from the influence of nuns, who were responsible for female education. Judith Stone maintained that in anticlerical rhetoric the *bonnes soeurs* exemplified the perversely anti-natural character of the Church and presented a threatening counter-model for women. Someone who had taken vows of celibacy was considered incapable of preparing good republican mothers.<sup>4</sup> However, the people who espoused this idea formed a minority in French society; the dissertation demonstrates that a woman's piety was a quality that most men received very well. More specifically, in 1867 Ernest Legouvé (1806-1902) posited that: "*Les pères les plus affermis dans leur scepticisme auraient horreur de voir leur fille incroyante. Ils sentent que la piété n'est un si charmant ornement pour la jeune fille, que parce que il sera un jour la plus sûre consolation et le plus ferme soutien de la femme.*"<sup>5</sup> I argue that the Catholic *milieu* into which the majority of males were brought up played an important role in shaping their rather positive attitude towards churchgoing women. Analysing the subject of religious tolerance I was obliged to look at how the faith penetrated French families, mainly through the maternal influence. Furthermore, I consider the indignation caused by the secularisation of the school and the abolishment of catechism, as this emerges from the writings of priests and Catholic authors. The shock and resentment for the changes, which were perceived as an attack against the Church, derived from the fear that the absence of religious instruction from girls' schooling could have terrible moral consequences. Thus, most fathers decided to send their daughters to congregational schools. Nineteenth-century Catholic moralists believed that the docile, compliant nature of the woman rendered her more attached to religion, to the point that it would be aberrant to reject it; their ideological opponents shared their opinion. This conviction interweaves with the fact that there are, to my knowledge, no images where female piety is straightforwardly the object of negative judgment or mockery.

The second chapter considers the first communicant as the manifestation of a moral ideal and the ceremony as a rite of passage from childhood to adolescence. I explore the social

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire III, Les Frances: De l'archive à l'emblème* (Paris 1992). See also E. Delcroix, *Instruction morale et civique* (Paris 1896).

<sup>4</sup> Judith Stone, 'Anticlericals and Bonnes Soeurs: The Rhetoric of the 1901 Law of Associations', *French Historical Studies*, 23 (2000), p.106, 126.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Legouvé, *Les Pères et les enfants au XIX siècle* (Paris 1867-1869), p.80.

significance of this ecclesiastical rite, investigating the reasons for which it flourished during a period of anticlericalism and tolerated by certain outspoken opponents of the Church. The analysis of these issues requires me to answer why works representing an apparently pious subject like the First Communion would be bought by the secular State? Why would a republican artist be interested in painting such a theme? Taking into account the fact that the portrayed *communiantes* are almost invariably female, it was required to address the subject of solidarity that was supposed to bind French women with Catholicism, rendering them the clergy's traditional allies. The female attachment to the Church is discussed again through society's preoccupation with chastity, a virtue which was thought to contain the woman's moral integrity and thus was fervently promoted by both Catholics and republicans. This raises a question: is the first communicant an eloquent symbol of virginity?

The third chapter examines paintings representing aspects of married couples' lives and investigates the social importance of wedlock in French society during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Through texts and imagery I explore the concept of marriage as the necessary precondition to become happy, create a legitimate family and thus accomplish a fundamental duty towards the nation. I inspect issues concerning the significance of money and social status as these emerge from portraits of bourgeois couples. Is it right to argue that marriages of convenience constituted the rule and love matches were exceptional among the upper strata? This chapter focuses on the need to regulate female sexuality through marriage, analyses the concept of the ideal spouse and explores how the fear of adultery and the way women's chastity was understood also determined the positive stance of men towards their daughters' and wife's piety. The stigmatisation of spinsterhood by republicans and the ideas of Catholics on wedlock and celibacy are also discussed. Finally, images which render the wedding ceremony as a civil contract and social institution sanctioned by the Third Republic are juxtaposed with works depicting marriage as an intimate experience which is marked by the emotions of private individuals and involves religious rituals and customs.

The fourth chapter focuses on childhood and maternity. It refers to demographers' and doctors' texts on the depopulation problem, which was attributed both to the selfishness of French people who refused to procreate and to the indifference of mothers who abandoned their children to negligent wet-nurses. It explores how the fear of depopulation influenced the view of maternity and played a major role in the improvement of children's social position. At

the same time, measures taken by the republican governments and the action of benevolent organisations like the *Société Protectrice de l'Enfance*, affirmed the need for happy and healthy babies. I argue that this exigency formed the widely advocated bourgeois model of the fecund and domesticated mother: the feminist scholar Joan Scott also suggested that the increasing emphasis on the female art of childrearing had become a mark of the middle class family vision.<sup>6</sup> The chapter explores the similarities of the Catholic and the republican positions on the mother-and-child relationship during the Third Republic, as well as scientific discoveries which established the indispensability of hygiene. This in turn acquired a moral dimension and comprised a part of the political agenda; the idea of cleanliness constitutes a main theme in the fourth part of the dissertation. The medical progress in obstetrics and pediatrics brought radical changes in modern childcare, while the measures taken by the French state for abandoned children and single mothers transformed society. In the context of these great changes, I select and analyse some of the numerous images related to newly founded institutions like the crèches, hospitals and “*goûtes de lait*”, arguing that the secular state was transformed into a paternal aegis under which all citizens could find protection. This thesis considers texts of physicians who encouraged maternal breastfeeding, a natural practice invested with metaphysical qualities, among the upper and the lower strata.<sup>7</sup> Doctors who supported this cause came from both Catholic and anticlerical backgrounds; in this particular matter the two ideological opponents seem to rally. The *Société Protectrice de l'Enfance*, an organisation which was founded by Dr Alexandre Mayer in 1865 and advocated maternal breastfeeding for the greater benefit of the child, anticipated the campaign launched by the anticlerical Third Republic to dissuade women from confiding their child to a wet nurse.<sup>8</sup> The devout Dr Emile Chauffard was one of the physicians who joined Mayer in his crusade. Can we find any echoes of the attempt to regulate the wet nursing business in works of art? Did the attitude of bourgeois women towards this matter change, and is this alteration conveyed through painting?

In the last part of the thesis, I deal with representations of families from different social strata, investigate the evolution of roles within them and focus on the rendering of

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<sup>6</sup>Debra Keats and Joan W. Scott, *Going public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere* (Illinois 2005), p.229.

<sup>7</sup> A good example of this literature is André – Théodore Brochard, *De l'allaitement maternel au point de vue de la mère, de l'enfant, de la société*, (Paris 1868).

<sup>8</sup>George D. Sussman, *Selling Mothers' Milk: The Wet-Nursing Business in France 1715–1914* (Urbana, 1982), p.122.

family bonds. I consider the *foyer* as a place of moral order and emotional safety, and address the reasons due to which the French State persistently sought to promulgate the importance of family unity and continuity via procreation. The conviction that the fecundity of a married couple constitutes a sign of moral health and an expression of patriotism is explored. This chapter ventures to answer how painters entered into the social debate concerning the necessity of refashioning and fortifying family life. Through the analysis of paintings and illustrations, I address issues concerning the changing paternal role during the Third Republic, as well as how such changes might be defined on the evidence of visual imagery. The anticlerical moralists' attempt to redesign the family institution without questioning its patriarchal structure is investigated. This chapter also focuses on the ideal promoted by the regime, according to which, a family bonded by loving relationships, comprised both the model for democratic citizenship and an analogue of the State.<sup>9</sup>

Questions of social class which interweave with fundamental moral issues like the maternal responsibility of the female workers are also raised in the thesis. The deeply rooted fear that the undisciplined members of urban working strata generated moral disarray is investigated. More specifically, these matters are considered in the context of fraternity which was the motto of the secular Third Republic. The ideal of solidarity emerges from the widespread conviction that the *bourgeoisie* as a leading stratum was expected to set a model for the lower strata, therefore middle-class ladies were called to educate economically disadvantaged women.

The great number of books on female morality and etiquette testify that these issues were predominant in French society. Their authors, regardless of their credos and ideology, appear convinced that every aspect of maternal behaviour should be controlled for the common good.<sup>10</sup> The country's future was deemed to depend on women's ability to conform to certain rules: be docile, kind, render the life of their husbands pleasant and behave as responsible mothers. The convictions of moralists are reflected in the legislation enacted by representatives of the state, who wanted to take control over family life and regulate maternal behaviour.

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<sup>9</sup>Greg Thomas, *Impressionist Children: Childhood, Family and Modern Identity in French Art* (New Haven and London 2010), p. xxi, 159.

<sup>10</sup>Friedrich-August von Ammon, *Le Livre d'or de la jeune femme, son rôle et ses devoirs comme mère de famille, soins à donner à la première enfance*, (Paris 1891), Arsène Dumont, *Dépopulation et civilisation*, (Paris 1890).

Bonnie Smith's book provides a sharp and extensive analysis of the domesticated woman. Increasingly emphasised after the 1870s, the specific model of womanhood determined the way middle-class ladies organised their everyday lives.<sup>11</sup> Smith shows that this lifestyle was not structured by male tyrants who forced it upon their wives; on the contrary, women, in the spiritual context of their piety, decisively contributed in its fashioning and development. The article of Rachel Fuchs on Paul Strauss and the politics of motherhood and that of Georges Sussman on the wet-nursing business crisis in the nineteenth century France were extremely instructive, providing a penetrating analysis of primary material on depopulation, maternal and professional breastfeeding and their moral dimension.<sup>12</sup> On the subject of female devotion, the works of James McMillan were very useful in showing that Catholicism was not characterised by uniformity, but encompassed different tendencies. Mona Ozouf's books shed light on pivotal aspects of the cultural conflict which commenced between the Church and the secular state after the establishment of the *école laïque*. Paul Seeley's article of 1998 on the relationship of French men with Catholicism, carefully evaluated the reasons why religion should not be perceived as a matter which concerned exclusively the female gender.<sup>13</sup> Besides, the laymen who exalted the role of the priests and acclaimed women's devotion were men. The work of Ralph Gibson thoroughly unfolded the historical significance and evolving role of the Catholic Church in the French society.<sup>14</sup> Gibson investigated the anti-intellectual, sentimental form that Catholicism took after the mid-nineteenth century. Finally, the books of Sarah Curtis, and Isabelle Bricard, were very edifying, because they offered a detailed description of the teaching method and the moral rules which structured girls' education. Both Curtis and Bricard impart the reader a profound analysis of the data which were found scattered in nineteenth-century books concerning young women's schooling and religious indoctrination.

The studies of nineteenth-century authors like Jacques Bertillon and Paul Strauss on depopulation, showed how the republicans' overwhelming anxiety due to the stagnant natality rates interweaves with ideas of patriotism and national grandeur. The reluctance of the French

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<sup>11</sup> Bonnie Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton, New Jersey 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Fuchs, Mary Lynn Stewart, Elinor Accampo (eds.), *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914*, (Baltimore 1995), Georges Sussman, 'The wet-nursing business in nineteenth-century France', *French Historical Studies*, no.2, vol.9, Autumn 1975, p. 304-328.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Seeley, 'O Sainte Mere: liberalism and the socialisation of Catholic men in nineteenth-century France', *Journal of Modern History*, no 4., vol.70, December 1998 pp. 862-891.

<sup>14</sup>Gibson, *A Social History*, p.19.

people to have babies was castigated also by pious men such as André Bayard.<sup>15</sup> The novels of the devout royalist Comtesse de Ségur, and most particularly *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (1859) were of great interest; by remaining a very popular reading for girls until the twentieth century, they confirmed that Catholicism provided a valid moral model long after the establishment of the Third Republic. To show a different viewpoint, a journal launched by the republican, freemason educator Jean Macé in 1871 was considered; the didactic stories it contained made obvious that, quite early, secularists were eager to promote ideals that would not depend on religious beliefs.<sup>16</sup> However, the strong similarities between the principles propagated by Ségur and the female behavioural model advocated by her ideological opponent affirm that the conquest of moral autonomy was not evident for the clergy's enemies; the republican moral code borrowed fundamental elements from the Catholic one.

The moralising topics I investigated rendered the opportunist republican Jules Simon's articles and essays particularly useful. This illustrious man is frequently cited because he expressed more fully the mentality and fears of the leading bourgeois stratum. The revered politician and social philosopher who served as Prime Minister of France, preoccupied with ethical matters, voiced the profound anxiety that society was undergoing a severe moral crisis. More particularly, one of his articles conveys the almost unanimously accepted idea that only marriage gave respectability and merit to a woman.<sup>17</sup> The *Revue de famille* he launched in 1888 affirmed how obsessive the political leadership and the upper middle strata had become with the regeneration of family life and how they employed the notion of patriotism in order to impose their values. There is an analogy between the benevolently patronising style of his writings and the fact that the French state was transformed into a paternal aegis, something which is extensively discussed in the chapter dealing with maternity and childhood policies. One cannot deny the link between the pompous, paternalistic tone of moralists and the attempt of the State to become a source of spiritual guidance in the place of the clergy.

This dissertation covers the first thirty years of the Third Republic from 1870 until 1900. As its title suggests, it ventures to demonstrate that there was a dialogue between artistic creation and moral discourse; in my thesis, the works of painters are as vital as the

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Bertillon, *Le Problème de la dépopulation*, (Paris, 1897), Paul Strauss, *Dépopulation et puériculture*, Paris 1901, André Bayard, *La Peur de l'enfant*, Paris 1907.

<sup>16</sup> *Magazine d'éducation et de récréation*, vol.1-2, (1871-1872).

<sup>17</sup> Jules Simon, 'Le choix d'un état', *Revue de famille*, nouv. sér, vol.6, 1 August 1890, pp. 193-201.

words of doctors, priests, men of letters and politicians. Obviously, the professional identity of authors who address their readers with the authority of spiritual guides, reveals the nature of the most fundamental problems which troubled French society. Moralists wrote and painters created in a given social context; they were all members of French society, preoccupied with the same problems and confronted with similar challenges. I have considered this historical and artistic material from a different perspective and examined how they intersect; it was not always easy to preserve the balance between theory and art-works. Each chapter starts with a theoretical section, in order to introduce the reader to the problems set by authors of moral manuals and books on etiquette. Most of these writers were not sheltered intellectuals who produced their theories while living isolated from society, but educated persons who actively participated in public life. Their texts provide modern historians with crucial evidence concerning the mentality of a period which was marked by the triumph of bourgeois culture. Family patterns and significant political decisions taken at that time – for example the legislation concerning children’s welfare - correspond to the anxieties and ideals conveyed through the writings analysed. Anxieties which were not experienced individually but communicated and transmitted, gave shape to the moral values officially endorsed by the French state.

The dissertation does not attempt to argue that painters’ work formed a direct response to the ideas communicated by different authors. The illustrations cited constitute examples of the social types and arguments under investigation, not the depictions of moral precepts contained in the multitude of manuals published during that last decades of the nineteenth century. Paintings are constructions, even when they refer to an aspect of social reality; they could be instructive, but rarely in the straightforward way of a sermon written by a physician, a representative of the Church, a philosopher or a statesman.

This thesis considers the progress of women’s lives, from early childhood and adolescence to youth and maturity. Therefore, its structure gives the impression of a cyclical movement; as it was designated, major themes like procreation, conjugal duty, maternity, the notions of female chastity and piety and the pivotal position of the child in the family recur in nearly every chapter. In my attempt to show the breadth and the complexity of the tendencies on different matters, I tried to discover voices from a wide range of public opinion. Thus, examining the texts of more than two or three Catholic authors on the same theme, it becomes evident that certain priests could be more liberal than their conservative colleagues; equally,



in the case of republicans, while many had strong anticlerical sentiments, others displayed tolerance towards religion, or even practiced the Catholic faith. To what extent was the tension manifest in their theoretical discord analogous to the tensions experienced in everyday life?

The early Third Republic established a secular state to the great dismay of the Church; priests believed that the impious regime usurped vitally important roles and critical tasks which were confided to them by God. The clergy used to be the only moral authority and provider of charity; along with the members of monastic orders they educated the French youth, looked after and comforted poor women, orphans and infirm children. The feeling that their prestige and *raison d'être* were threatened, generated their reaction. On the other hand, radical politicians who defended the necessity of secularisation, championed the idea that there were of “two Frances”: one comprising educated republican males who believed in science and reason and kept their eyes fixed on the future, and another, made up of women and priests, plunged in superstition and attached to the past. Aiming to find out whether such a distinction is clear and concrete, juxtaposition became an indispensable methodological tool. Republicans' beliefs and ideas conveyed in the moral discourse are compared with those of priests and laymen who communicated Catholic teachings. The occasional overlap of their theses on matters such as the female conjugal role and maternal duty is seriously taken into account. For instance, the selfish woman, who finds pleasure in social gatherings instead of staying at home, was castigated by both sides. Republicans reaffirm the Church's standard positions; the opportunist Jules Simon and the radicals Arsène Dumont and Georges de Dubor insisted on the benefits of domesticity, maternity and procreation, which were thought to encompass the only legitimate vocation for a woman. During this period certain secular and Catholic values did not compete but coalesce; this coincidence of opinions should not be regarded as irrelevant to the often ambiguous messages paintings appear to communicate.

A significant number of the paintings analysed in the dissertation were reproduced in journals which sold hundreds of thousands of issues and thus, were seen by a public larger than that of the Paris Salon, where most of them were exhibited. Some of these works attracted the attention of the audience and were enthusiastically received by art critics; an image's popularity comprises an infallible sign that it corresponded to certain exigencies and satisfied the expectations of specific groups of people. However, these paintings were ignored, or marginally discussed by twentieth century scholars. Moreover, their present

whereabouts and dimensions are unknown, while those who created them have fallen into oblivion. My criterion for the choice of images was not artistic excellence or innovation; I looked at them in terms of subject matter. It must be kept in mind that a large number of painters chose the theme for the sake of the narrative and not in order to make a big ideological statement; therefore, it is rare to be able to label a work of art as Catholic or anticlerical. I was concerned to demonstrate the pictures' engagement with the social and moral discourse and define the needs that lead to their creation. Instead of forming an impediment, the mediocrity of certain works of art facilitated my task which was to propose a new way of interpreting the meaning, or understanding the utility of visual culture products.

The limited length of thesis obliged me to make certain choices: I consider paintings and journal illustrations, but not sculptural works. I deal with images which were bought by the French state, keeping in mind that the themes and styles of painting remained a political concern for successive regimes, whose representatives believed in the noble, educational role of art. Thus, the official report on the Exhibition of 1878 recommended that the present government, like that of the First Republic, had to consider art as an especially powerful way towards national education and industrial prosperity. According to the report, the taste of the public should be developed and refined, and art had to be put into the service of democracy.<sup>18</sup> The regime would appreciate and buy paintings which were regarded as didactic and influential; both subject matter and style had to be instructive. My focus on naturalist painters, who were favoured by the republicans, is linked to my decision to inspect the way governments used artistic creation in order to serve their interests by diffusing certain messages. It was fundamental to take into consideration the purpose for which a work of art was created. A painting commissioned in order to decorate a *Mairie* would stay permanently in the building and have a fixed audience composed of those who visited it; the continuity of its message was reassured, although with the passage of time and the change of historical context, its impact would not be the same. A work of art destined to be exhibited at the annual Salon, would be bought by an individual or, more often, return to the artist's studio; unless the State purchased it and put it in a museum, its public life was very short. Journal illustrations had an effect on many people but only for a short time; in contrast with a novel, a magazine was edited only once, it was read and put aside.

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<sup>18</sup> Peter McPhee, *A Social History of France, 1789-1914*, (New York 2004 (1992)), p.241.

The fact that, with very few exceptions, the impressionists who belong to the nineteenth-century canon are absent from this dissertation might raise questions with the reader. Apart from Édouard Manet, who systematically participated in the annual Salon and refused the title of impressionist, the members of this small group exhibited their works independently. Their paintings, closely scrutinised by prominent scholars and academics during the last fifty years, were seen by a relatively limited number of people at the time of their creation. I preferred to explore areas of art which had not attracted other researchers' interest, aspiring to bring something new to the academic debate. It is also imperative to explain that the type of images I have selected and analysed is directly related to the questions I ventured to answer. As Greg Thomas confirmed in his recently published book, the impressionists “disregarded institutional mechanisms of modern bourgeois childcare”; indeed, Manet, Degas and Monet never represented schools, *crèches*, orphanages, hospitals or pediatricians on which my thesis focuses. Actually, the *monstres sacrés* of the nineteenth century avant-garde dealt with the private life and leisure of urban bourgeois families. They never depicted sick or working-class children; they portrayed healthy and contented boys and girls, who nearly always belong to the comfortable middle classes.<sup>19</sup> I attempted to explore the life of the suffering and economically disadvantaged within the French bourgeois social and moral system, along with the middle-class maternal and family model. I was genuinely interested in the mechanisms activated by the secular State, in order to assist abandoned children and unmarried mothers confronted with various adversities. Moreover, my decision to investigate female piety, which constituted a major subject of the moralist discourse in the early Third Republic and the visual imagery of which has been very little studied, prevented me from discussing impressionist paintings which are devoid of any religious undertones.

Very diverse material from different disciplines has been used, in order to see the various ways important problems were discussed across a wide panorama of social and cultural experience. Novels were particularly useful because they brought me to realise the gap between painting and literature. Authors would openly deal with themes about which painters were either completely silent or very subtle, like spinsterhood, adultery and sex. Books unveil the relationship of women with religion and their reaction towards their own moral transgression; in *Bel Ami* (1885) Guy de Maupassant provided the reader with the portrait of a repentant adulteress. The same author, in another work titled *Une Vie* (1883) gave

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas, *Impressionist Children*, p. xix, xxiii.

a fascinating, vivid and detailed description of the emotional distress that his young heroine felt during her wedding night, while in Bagniet's painting *La Prière de la mariée* (Fig.33), the anxiety of the genuflected, praying bride, only permits us to make assumptions concerning her frustration. The consequences of bourgeois girls' lack of information on matters of sexuality, and the need to abolish prejudices which identified female purity with ignorance, were delicate matters openly raised and discussed by nineteenth-century feminists, novelists and moralists, but only faintly suggested in painting. Therefore, the work of Alfred Stevens showing a young woman taking a bath in her chemise is indicative of upper class girls' prudish upbringing (Fig.35); nevertheless, the real nature of moral instruction that females received emerges from the testimonies of people like Théophile Gautier, whose daughter was brought up in a convent, or of the author Marie d'Agoult, who spent her adolescence in a congregational school. Conservative and liberal magazines were also valuable in my research, because their illustrations, which articulated fundamental ideas about family, maternity, education and marriage, were available to millions of people in the provinces. Furthermore, images contained in journals and *revues* were often accompanied by texts that also generated social and moral values; pictures and texts worked together. On the contrary, Salon paintings could be less influential because they addressed a smaller public, comprised mainly of Parisians, or foreign visitors. The number of people who were able to see a work is fundamental because, as it has been argued, the Third Republic aspired to transmit secular ideals to as many people as possible and show that it was a national regime which embraced all citizens. In its turn, the Catholic Church also made use of journals, wanting to affirm that it was at the same time, a universal and national institution.

Finally, although this dissertation focuses on the lives of girls and young women, it contains few references to feminist literature. Griselda Pollock is cited only once, although her books were thoroughly studied. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb are mentioned when the works of Morisot and Renoir are discussed. I did not omit established feminists' texts because I questioned their valuable contribution to the interpretation of nineteenth century art works. My choice of literature is related to the obscure artists I decided to study. Feminist art historians dealt with canonical painters but left out the naturalists and unknown illustrators whose work is discussed in this dissertation. Furthermore, my research concentrates on maternal duty, childhood policy, family patterns and girls' schooling seen from the perspective of nineteenth-century writers. I focus on the dialogue between politics, social

ideals, moral guidelines and paintings which were occasionally created for propaganda purposes. I did not venture to refute, or understate the indubitable fact that women were discriminated against by being deprived of basic rights such as a vote, or an education equivalent to the one that men had access to. Besides, the females' social situation is evident in many of the texts quoted in the thesis. I tried to understand and demonstrate how women embraced domesticity and how they were expected to confront it, but not to assess how restricted their life appears to our modern eyes.

## FIRST CHAPTER

### **From the “Knees of the Church” into the Arms of the Republic: Reforming Girls’ Education in Late Nineteenth Century France.**

#### **1. Introduction.**

The 1880s was a period of educational reform: catechism was abolished from public schools and the secular instruction for girls was established. Within twenty years, those radical changes were absorbed by the French society. The republican regime, tried to infiltrate them into the national *mentalité* by various means, one of which was the commissioning of paintings which represented school subjects. This chapter investigates how works of art were used in order to promote republican ideology and convince the citizens of the superiority and moral necessity of the *école laïque*. This new institution also fascinated artists who worked independently; many images treating the theme of children’s education were not commissioned by the State. A major question this part of the thesis attempts to answer is whether a modern historian studying such works, can be certain of his interpretation. While some paintings created privately might have been intended as overtly republican, others could take an alternative view. The images’ ambiguity is an issue explored through different case studies.

This chapter focuses on the frequently represented theme of the “*mère éducatrice*” and explores how this traditional female role interweaves with the importance republican politicians and men of the cloth gave to girls’ education. The reasons for which female piety was tolerated and even encouraged by the majority of the French, despite the position of some radical representatives of the government, are investigated. The incompatibility between Catholic teachings and the modern world constituted the main argument in the secularists’ struggle to remove Christian elements from public education. The more optimistic among these men maintained that by banning religion from the classroom they would be rid of a factor which perpetuated the conflict among Catholics and republicans, leading to national division. As will be demonstrated, the new educational regime hoped to consolidate its spiritual authority and bring together the Christian France of women with the free-thinking

France of men through education. Anticlerical politicians maintained that family unity should not be undermined because of the ideological discord created between a progressive husband and a superstitious wife. Harmony and understanding needed to be established between the spouses; the public school should form young women who would belong to the modern world. This chapter tries to discover whether painters who treated the subject of girls' schooling conveyed these aspirations. Texts written by priests and pious authors reveal that the bold republican reforms provoked the indignation of the Church, something which resulted in the creation of two rival school systems: a secular and a congregational one. Could their existence ultimately compromise the moral unity of the French nation? Finally, I try to answer how Catholics and their ideological opponents used the ideal of patriotism, in order to persuade the people that their theses were correct.

## **2. Towards a Secular School.**

During the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church in France played a decisive role in children's education. The daily schedule and the books which were used in the classroom were designed by the *Ministère de l'Instruction Publique* and the Church. The religious element was vividly present in the life of French boys and girls. Thus, in 1830 the first chapter of the manual destined to be distributed to all primary schools defined the duties of men towards God.<sup>20</sup> This deity was not an abstract notion like the *Être Suprême* the eighteenth century French philosophers and revolutionaries set up, but the Trinitarian God whose essence was defined by the Christian doctrines. The Church confirmed and represented His incontestable authority over people's life. In each case, until the end of the 1870s, the State would not proceed to make any changes concerning children's education without the approval of the ecclesiastical hierarchy which was considered indispensable for such a purpose.

Even before the establishment of the Third Republic, politicians who understood anticlericalism to be a fundamental quality of republican orthodoxy, addressed the necessity to strive for secular and obligatory primary education. In 1866, the author, journalist, teacher and future senator Jean Macé, venturing to imitate the example of those who had earlier

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<sup>20</sup> Marie-Odile Mergnac, *Communions d'hier et de toujours* (Paris 2008), p.8.

commenced a successful educational reform in Belgium, created a republican society in the canton of Fère, in the department of the Aisne.<sup>21</sup> This cell comprised the basis of the *Ligue de l'Enseignement*, a greater organisation whose members encouraged the creation of schools and libraries for the people and promulgated the idea of an *éducation libre et laïque*.<sup>22</sup> Macé's objective was to persuade the entire nation of this necessity and to engage a large number of conscientious citizens in his efforts.<sup>23</sup> He asked his colleagues to refrain from religious and political arguments and defined the notion of *laïcité* explaining how this should be applied: "*Laïcité c'est neutralité qu'il fallait dire à savoir: que les écoles seront placées en dehors de tout rite particulier, de toute doctrine confessionnelle.*"<sup>24</sup>

A few months before the establishment of the Third Republic, radical republicans proclaimed themselves determined to offer free access to school to every French child regardless of its social status. Thus, on 10 April 1870, in his *discours sur l'égalité d'éducation*, Jules Ferry, one of the fathers of the educational reform, designated the duties of those who were resolved to fight for this noble cause: "*Mais nous sommes un grand siècle (...) à condition de bien connaître quelle est l'œuvre, quelle est la mission, quel est le devoir de notre siècle. L'œuvre de notre temps est une œuvre pacifique. C'est une œuvre généreuse et je la définis ainsi : faire disparaître la dernière, la plus redoutable des inégalités qui viennent de la naissance, l'inégalité d'éducation.*"<sup>25</sup> For Jules Ferry, future minister of public instruction, there was an indissoluble bond between equality in education and the idea of *laïcité*.<sup>26</sup> The survival of the society free-thinkers wanted to establish depended on the promulgation of democratic ideals, which all children should imbibe during their school years. For the new government, observed Françoise Beaugrand, the *éducation scolaire* represented a collective ideal which had to become reality and be brought into perfection, despite the obstacles set by men who were seen as conservative religious bigots.<sup>27</sup> The Church could not fit into the new

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<sup>21</sup> Jean Macé, *Les Idées de Jean François : Aux cercles catholiques, Sociétés républicaines*, (Léon Le Vasseur, 1876), p.35.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Dessoüy, *Jean Macé et la fondation de la Ligue de l'Enseignement*, (Paris 1883), p.86.

<sup>23</sup> Dessoüy, *Jean Macé*, p.VII.

<sup>24</sup> Gabriel Compayré, *Jean Macé et l'instruction obligatoire* (Paris 1905), p.97, Dessoüy, Jean Macé, p.VIII.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Robiquet, *Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry*, v.1, *Le Seconde Empire-La Guerre et la Commune* (Paris, 1893), p.287.

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Chevallier, *La Séparation de l'Église et de l'école; Jules Ferry et Léon XIII* (Paris 1981), p.7

<sup>27</sup> *Paris à l'école, qui a eu cette idée folle?*, Châtelet Anne-Marie, Françoise Beaugrand *et al.* Paris, Pavillon de l'Arsenal, 28 January-9 May 1993 (Paris 1993), p.130.



educational vision which would not be realised until after 1877, when the conservative party of the Catholic President MacMahon lost the power to the Opportunist republicans.

On 16 June 1881 religious instruction was permanently abolished from public schools, and on 9 December 1881 the crucifixes and statues of the Virgin Mary were taken down from every classroom wall in Paris. Also, since 1881, nuns and monks were no longer allowed to teach unless they held the *brevet de capacité*, which was provided after state exams conducted by a committee set by the government.<sup>28</sup> However, despite their outspoken hostility towards Catholicism, the lack of female teachers reduced the anticlerical governments of the Third Republic to accept the *bonnes soeurs* among the teaching staff.<sup>29</sup> It should be mentioned that a law concerning female secondary education had preceded the laicisation of the primary school; introduced by Camille Sée on December 1880 it created secular lycées and colleges for adolescent girls. Finally, in March 1882 primary education was rendered mandatory. Thus, from the 6th until the 13th year every French child regardless its gender had to be sent to school.<sup>30</sup>

### **3. Women's Education; the Importance of the *Mère Éducatrice*.**

By the eighteenth century, the philosophers of the Enlightenment and precursors of the Revolution had come to the conclusion that the education of young girls and future mothers should become the primary concern of the people; women are by natural law the first instructors of their children. The *philosophe* Jean-Jacques Rousseau professed that: “*Les hommes seront toujours ce qu’il plaira aux femmes: si vous voulez qu’ils deviennent grands et vertueux, apprenez aux femmes ce que c’est la grandeur et la vertu. La première éducation appartient incontestablement aux femmes; si l’auteur de la nature eût voulu qu’elle appartînt aux hommes, il leur eut donné du lait pour nourrir leurs enfants.*”<sup>31</sup> As I discuss later, intellectuals who held reactionary political views shared these positions.

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<sup>28</sup>Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.275-276.

<sup>29</sup>Mergnac, *Communions*, p.10.

<sup>30</sup>James McMillan, *France and Women; Gender, Society and Politics*, (London 2000),p.145.

<sup>31</sup>Paul Bert, *Cléricalisme: Questions d’éducation nationale* (Paris 1900), p.152.

During the Third Republic, the discourse on children's instruction continued to revolve around the woman, who was charged not only with her daughters' but also, and most importantly, with her sons' early education. Since they would bring up future voters, making them freethinking republicans or devout Catholics, the well-being of the nation depended on the education the mothers received as young girls. For both advocates and enemies of secular school the *mère éducatrice* was the starting point of their debate; she comprised the platform upon which they developed their arguments. If the rhetoric of people who represented opposing ideologies overlapped on this particular issue it is because they were both convinced that wives and mothers “*président et dirigent que se fondent la moralité et l’immoralité*”.<sup>32</sup> *Croyants* and *laïques* were persuaded that “salvation comes from women”, although for each side the notion of salvation had a dissimilar context. They invariably brought forward questions concerning female morality in peril, but for each party, dangers were thought to come from different sources.

It appears that the Enlightenment and the fall of the *Ancien Régime* in 1789 did not bring radical changes in female education. Even after the French Revolution men were prepared for the “active life” and were expected to become knowledgeable, good citizens, while women had to learn how to be pleasant, obedient and useful to their husband and offspring. *L’enseignement féminin* focused on girls’ moral integrity which would be manifested in chastity, modesty, hard work and maternal skills. Thus, nuns and private tutors taught girls calligraphy and prevented them from reading literature which was considered morally dangerous. In history classes young women were not told about kings’ adulteries and illegitimate children; it was better for them to remain ignorant and pure than to be informed and corrupted. Since it was indispensable for young ladies to stand in a social gathering they would have to learn to play the piano and sing.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the art of embroidery formed a fundamental element of female education throughout the entire nineteenth century. Actually, the Comtesse de Bassanville, in her book *Du perfectionnement de l’éducation des filles* written in 1847, argued that needlework should accompany a girl everywhere, becoming the attribute of her gender. Twenty years later, in the same spirit, Dr Jean Baptiste Fonssagrives professed that “*l’aiguille est le gardien de bonnes moeurs*”, because it prevented women from staying idle.<sup>34</sup> An example which illustrates that these convictions remained unaltered after the

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<sup>32</sup>W. F. Liebrich, *Lettres aux mères de famille sur l’éducation* (Paris 1884), p.65.

<sup>33</sup>Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, passim.

<sup>34</sup>Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.124.

establishment of the Third Republic is the work *La Bonne Éducation* of the obscure painter Paul Thomas (1868-1910), shown in the SAF in 1896 (Fig.1). This artist portrayed a dutiful, solemn bourgeois mother instructing her two daughters in the drawing room. The older girl is standing before the woman reciting her lesson, while the younger one, sitting at a small table, is focused on her needlework. In the corner, on the floor, we see a doll and a basket containing sewing material. In 1896, in his comment on Paul Thomas's painting, an anonymous journalist expressed an opinion which does not differ from the views communicated by the Comtesse de Bassanville, or Dr Fonssagrives some decades earlier: "*La bonne éducation c'est travail et travail pour la petite fille est lecture et couture. La jeune fille commence par apprendre avec chagrin une science dont elle saura si bien se servir quelques années plus tard.*" Obviously, the little girl is rehearsing a role; today she is making a dress for her doll, but in the near future she will make clothes for her children. The art critic found that this work exudes a "*parfum de santé et de bonheur.*"<sup>35</sup> Thomas's image is perceived as morally healthy because it encompasses an unchallenged ideal; good education is the one provided by the mother who should inculcate in her daughters a spirit of diligence, and prepare them for domesticated life.

During the Third Republic, the *mère éducatrice* is rendered to us invested with all the qualities of a stereotype, being at once a reality and a construction. In painting, the cherished features which were considered indispensable for a woman who transmits knowledge to her progeny are manifestly present: attentiveness, warmth, gentleness and patience. The artists who depicted mothers either teaching their children to read or listening to them reciting a lesson do not seem to have attempted to escape the canon; they usually placed these women in an ideal context, exalting and sacralising their figures. The teaching mother is usually a *bourgeoise* situated in a comfortable drawing room; indeed, a working-class woman or a peasant had other vital priorities and therefore less time to deal with her sons' and daughters' education. Additionally, the titles of the paintings treating this subject often contain the word "first". In this context, works such as the *Premières études* of Madame Colin-Libour (Fig.2), evoke a dominant idea; by being the first teacher the mother is incontestably the most important one. She constitutes the source of primary knowledge and the guardian of her children's morality. She moulds their character and defines their future. Expected to put the

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<sup>35</sup>Anonymous, *Le Panorama Salon 1896* (1896), no page number.

foundations of her offspring spiritual development, she is not shown to fail in her mission but meets with the viewers' expectations. There seem to be few ruptures between these secular *Madonnas* and their little students. In this category of works where the father is always absent as if the process does not require him, order and propriety rule. These images were meant to please and provided people with a moral lesson of how things must be. In the *Premières études* of 1895, a middle-class woman is portrayed helping her daughter with her homework. The little girl, modestly crossing her hands behind her back, listens to her instructions. Disobedience and revolt on behalf of the pupil do not come to disturb this sacred moment of communication of knowledge. A few books and a quill placed at the corner of the table comprise the attributes of learning and instruction. In *La Leçon* of 1889 (Fig.3), Auguste Toulmouche represented a lady seated in a lavish interior turning her head to her well-behaved daughter who is reading her book. The picture, besides its saccharine sweetness, has all these elements which would make it pleasant and acceptable: an obedient child and an attentive mother.

Here, it should be pointed out that although it was for the sake of boys and future voters that female education was secularised, in most of the images the mother is portrayed teaching her daughter and not her son. This fact might have to be related to the firm belief that there was a more powerful bond between a woman and her female child due to gender solidarity, although there were fathers who actively participated to their daughter's spiritual development.<sup>36</sup> Possibly, the belief that women were appropriate mostly for their girls' education, while the boys should leave their mother's influence quickly had strong roots.

#### **4. The Great Debate: the Republican School and the Catholic Reaction.**

Directly or not, the Church had been responsible for French females' spiritual development; for centuries girls were taught by nuns or by their devout Catholic mothers. Nevertheless, whereas the *mère éducatrice* is such a common theme in art, research has not uncovered any paintings depicting children's life in congregational schools. To my knowledge, only the American artist Elisabeth Nourse, who pursued her career in France and participated regularly to the Salons, produced two works portraying nuns instructing young

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<sup>36</sup>Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.22.

girls. Interestingly, in these paintings titled *Leçon de lecture* (Fig.4) and *Leçon de couture* (1894, oil on canvas, dimensions and location unknown) teaching does not take place in a regular classroom. In the *Leçon de lecture* of 1895 (SAF 1896), we can see two girls sitting on a bench under the window and four others on wooden chairs; the six children surround their *enseignante*. The fact that this latter is a Sister of Charity allows us to deduce that Nourse depicted a convent rather than an ordinary school.<sup>37</sup> How could the lack of images representing congregational schools be interpreted? Probably, they were regarded as a trivial topic, while the *école républicaine* was a totally new institution which attracted the artists' interest. It should be also pointed out that male painters did not have access in religious establishments where children were taught. Finally, unlike its opponents who wanted to advertise the new secular school through visual arts, the Church had secured its position in the field of education during the course of time. As it shall be thoroughly discussed, although Catholics felt seriously threatened and reacted against the educational policies applied by radical free-thinkers, they rightly presumed that most families would trust their children, and especially their daughters, to the representatives of the Church. It was precisely this situation which caused great anxiety among republicans.

Already in 1843, the historian Jules Michelet, who was an advocate of the 1848 revolution and held traditional ideas regarding the female role, warned his readers about the dangerous influence that priests exercised on women as their spiritual directors.<sup>38</sup> In his discourse of 1870 which was quoted in the beginning of this chapter Jules Ferry professed that:

*“Les évêques savent bien: celui qui tient la femme celui là tient tout, d'abord parce qu'il tient l'enfant, ensuite parce qu'il tient le mari; non point peut-être le mari jeune emporté par les orages des passions, mais le mari fatigué (...) c'est pour cela que l'Église veut retenir la femme, et c'est aussi pour cela qu'il faut que la démocratie la lui enlève; il faut que la démocratie choisisse,*

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<sup>37</sup> The *Leçon de couture* was painted in a convent of Sisters of Charity in Brittany. The window before which girls are sewing under the supervision of a nun, is exactly the same as the one in the *Leçon de lecture* painted the next year. Mary Alice Heekin Burke, *Elisabeth Nourse 1859-1938 A Salon Career*, (Washington D.C. 1983), p.166.

<sup>38</sup> Michelet, *Du prêtre, de la femme et de la famille*, (Paris 1843), passim. It must be pointed out that Michelet's anticlericalism was founded not only on his political beliefs, but mainly on his personal experiences; his lover's confessor prevented him from visiting her when she was on her deathbed. Nevertheless his ideas were very influential.

*sous peine de mort ; il faut choisir, Citoyens: il faut que la femme appartienne à la science ou qu'elle appartienne à l'Église.*<sup>39</sup>

With the expression “*sous peine de mort*” Ferry wanted to remind his audience that in case they failed to accomplish their task the Republic would perish.

The fact that women were indoctrinated by the clergy was a well-founded conviction. For instance, the charcoal drawing *Le Mois de Marie à la Chartèves* (Fig.5) created by Léon Lhermitte in 1885, depicts an old village priest who addresses his sermon to a congregation comprised exclusively by women and little girls. This image belongs to a series comprised by twelve drawings under the title *Les Mois rustiques*, published in the *supplément* of the journal *Le Monde illustré*, during the course of the year. Each drawing symbolised a month. For Catholics, May was traditionally dedicated to the Virgin Mary about whom this clergyman is preaching, while pointing at her statue placed in the niche above the altar. A subtle rendering of village morals, *Le Mois de Marie à Chartèves* illustrates the mentality of the female peasants who listen to their *curé* attentively and with sincere devotion. In the background, the confessional where women received spiritual direction and consolation, along with two nuns who were traditionally charged with girls' instruction, complete the scene. Many of Lhermitte's paintings are inspired by the religious life of the Mont-Saint-Père, his natal place in Picardie, near the Flanders, where people were particularly pious. This artist painted Church images quite frequently and with a lot of respect. At the same time, his works were purchased by the republican State; in 1884, when Ferry was president of the *Conseil d'État*, he was named chevalier of the Legion of Honour.<sup>40</sup> These two facts, which appear contradictory, allow us to assume that he might have been a *rallié*: republican and Catholic at the same time. Creating this drawing Lhermitte did not venture to communicate an anticlerical message. Nevertheless, the reality his picture describes strengthens the arguments of Jules Ferry and Jean Macé concerning the relationship of female gender with the Church. *Le Mois de Marie à Chartèves* provides evidence for the reign of Catholicism in peasant women's lives during a period of thriving secularism.

The danger which resulted from the establishment of a secular educational system was visible to the ecclesiastical hierarchy since 1866, when Jean Macé laid the foundation stone of the *Ligue d'Enseignement* in Fère. Some members of the clergy declared their

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<sup>39</sup> Robiquet, *Discours et opinions*, 1893, p.305.

<sup>40</sup> Monique Le Pelley-Fonteny, *Léon Auguste Lhermitte, Catalogue raisonné des œuvres* (Paris 1991), p.35, 402.

disappointment and astonishment concerning the course of things in the field of education. For instance, the *curé* of Joinville, in the Haute-Marne department, posited that he was unable to imagine that the republican threat of secular instruction could possibly invade a devout Catholic community. This priest, like most of his colleagues, identified Macé's *Ligue* as a grouping of men who wanted to destroy religion. A school from where Christianity and faith in God are absent is deprived of moral principles, he said. According to this clergyman, a woman who is free from the influence of the Church and has no devoutness shall definitely become immoral; as it will be shown later, this thesis was extremely common.<sup>41</sup> Macé reacted against those who severely reproached him: "*Pourriez vous me dire quel rapport il y a entre l'alphabet et l'existence de Dieu? Si l'on peut faire tracer à un écolier des ronds et des jambages et des déliés sans toucher l'infailibilité du pape?*"<sup>42</sup> He posited that there is only one path to be followed and his tone was very similar to that of Jules Ferry:

*"Cette République, notre dernière ressource, après laquelle viendrait le déluge; la République du suffrage universel, elle a sa raison d'être dans certains principes qu'on appelle généralement les principes de 1789, mais qui datent de bien plus loin et qu'on pourrait tout aussi appeler les principes de l'Évangile. Leur formule en religion est la souveraineté de la conscience; en philosophie, la souveraineté de la raison; en politique comme conséquence dernière la souveraineté nationale."*<sup>43</sup>

This reformer was profoundly worried about the fact that the Catholic reaction would undermine and ultimately destroy modern society.<sup>44</sup> Those who want a school chained to the Church and identify the notion of *laïcité* with atheism can seriously compromise the work of the French Revolution, Macé stated. The people, he suggested, should be brought to realise that the republicans do not chase God away from schools by letting motherland in.<sup>45</sup> Certainly they did not challenge the humanitarian message of the gospel, or the belief in a Creator, but they openly rejected the Catholic doctrines as superstitious. Thus, in 1884, addressing the members of a *cercle pédagogique républicaine* in Nantes, the elderly Jean Macé suggested that in order to detach young women from the regressive mentality of the Church and cure them from their credulity, educators should help them to get acquainted with scientific achievements and show them how to serve their reason.<sup>46</sup> Naturally, the ecclesiastical

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<sup>41</sup> Dessoüyé, Jean Macé, p.91.

<sup>42</sup> Dessoüyé, Jean Macé, p.133.

<sup>43</sup> Macé, *Les Idées de Jean-François*, p.9.

<sup>44</sup> Macé, *Les Idées de Jean-François*, p.11.

<sup>45</sup> Dessoüyé, *Jean Macé*, p.134, 279.

<sup>46</sup> Compayré, *Jean Macé*, p.97.

hierarchy understood this programme as a menace which should not be left unanswered; militant Christians were determined to besiege the republican schools.<sup>47</sup>

Already in the 1870s the bishop of Angers had threatened those whom he considered as “enemies of Christ” like Jean Macé with a crusade: “*La cité de Dieu se bâtit au milieu des orages et c’est aux ruines mêmes qu’elle emprunte ses matériaux.*”<sup>48</sup> This prelate, who used the title of St Augustine’s work *Civitas Dei*, encouraged the faithful French to fill the country with Catholic clubs. Later, in 1882, just after Jules Ferry’s law was introduced, the *Sainte Ligue* would be founded in order to revolt “*contre la loi scélérate de l’instruction obligatoire et laïque.*”<sup>49</sup> The activity of the bishop of Angers was praised by Pope Pius IX. The pontiff in a letter addressed to the bishop, referred to the condemnable sects from where the disastrous *Ligue de l’Enseignement* emerged for the perdition of human souls.<sup>50</sup> With the Ferry reforms which deprived it of its once exclusive privilege to educate women, the Church was facing the possibility of losing its traditional and faithful ally who could convert a husband when this latter had lapsed from faith. Jean Macé in response encouraged republicans to create societies which would prevent the restoration of a medieval mentality in France.<sup>51</sup>

Jules Ferry considered girls’ secular instruction a veritable struggle the Republic should win, because he was certain that boys’ lay education would not be challenged with the same ardour.<sup>52</sup> Ferdinand Buisson, *directeur de l’éducation primaire* and former pastor who, like many liberal Protestants, had rallied with the republicanism, admitted that the secularisation of women’s education was the most delicate of all the works of the Republic.<sup>53</sup> The reasons which rendered this project unpopular can be found in the Catholic theses of Robert de Bressan. For this pious author the people who usurped a duty assigned to the Church aspired to impose a godless education on women. This idea, he posited, is hideous primarily because it promotes sexual promiscuity.<sup>54</sup> Free-thinking endorsed by the Republic was not seen only as the negation of the Christian spirit but also as a call to the expansion of sensuality and illicit passions. It appears that buildings which were destined to become public schools for boys were eventually purchased or built, whereas in the case of schools for girls

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<sup>47</sup> Compayré, *Jean Macé*, p.275.

<sup>48</sup> Macé, *Les idées de Jean-François*, p.12.

<sup>49</sup> Dessoüy, *Jean Macé*, p. 275.

<sup>50</sup> Dessoüy, *Jean Macé*, p.163.

<sup>51</sup> Dessoüy, *Jean Macé*, p.279.

<sup>52</sup> Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.73.

<sup>53</sup> Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.254.

<sup>54</sup> Louis le Bressan, *L’État, la mère de famille et l’éducation laïque des jeunes filles* (Paris 1903), p.3.



things were different; since the local authorities did not see them benevolently, they came up with various excuses presenting the finding of an edifice as an extremely difficult task.<sup>55</sup> It is worthy to mention that in 1900, the mayor in Le Mans in the department of Sarthe confirmed that girls' education was still almost completely under the control of the clergy and that many republican families continued to send their daughters to religious establishments.<sup>56</sup>

The protests on behalf of the Catholic Church whose representatives called the faithful to resist, prompted the republicans to act drastically. In 1880 Ferry tried to pass a law whose seventh article forbade schools run by Jesuits, Marists and Dominicans to function unless they were officially recognised by the State. More than 500 congregations could be affected by this legislation, which was finally not enacted.<sup>57</sup> Actually, those who ventured to secularise public education did not conceal their intention to abolish private religious schools. It is quite indicative that Gambetta's newspaper *La République française* insisted that the *Université Catholique de Lille* should be shut down.<sup>58</sup> Louis le Bressan, deplored the shutting down of 81 congregational schools for women which occurred in the late 1880s and denounced the brutality and oppressiveness of the atheist *libre-penseurs*.<sup>59</sup> In his turn, Mgr Forcade, archbishop of Aix, in a pastoral letter castigated the demagogues who instead of protecting the liberty of education were becoming its' worst enemies.<sup>60</sup>

Truly, the radical republicans who wanted to consolidate their authority displayed a lack of tolerance. Was their comportment completely unwarranted? Between 1861 and 1877 the number of establishments which were under the administration of male congregations and were not recognised by the State increased from 266 to 398. The Jesuits who traditionally had a leading role in boys' instruction posited that the Concordat should protect them from "secularist attacks", but overlooked the fact that the Concordat guaranteed the freedom of religion without recognising *ipso facto* the existence of congregations. The absence of state recognition rendered schools run by the Society of Jesus illegal, because the instructors taught as men of the cloth and not as simple citizens. The Church could not assume a role that belonged to the government, which claimed the exclusive right to decide on public matters of major importance such as the children's instruction. In this context the protests and

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<sup>55</sup>Curtis, *Educating the Faithful*, p.120.

<sup>56</sup>McMillan, *France and Women*, p.146.

<sup>57</sup>Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.115.

<sup>58</sup>Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.123.

<sup>59</sup>Bressan, *L'État, la mère*, p.3.

<sup>60</sup>Chevalier, *La Séparation*, p.127.

indignation of the Catholic hierarchy were treated almost with contempt. At this point, one is entitled to raise certain questions concerning the nature and the restrictions of republican liberalism. The members of the government unanimously espoused the idea of pluralism in education. Nevertheless, they refused to recognise the monks' the right to teach French youth; if they would cede to this it would be with regret and because, as was mentioned in the introduction, they were forced by the circumstances. Article seven of Ferry's law of 1880 was defeated in the senate with 148 against 129 votes; it met the opposition of moderate and deist politicians like Jules Simon, who were sceptical as to whether the separation of school and Church was opportune.<sup>61</sup> In reality, these men did not want a rupture with the Catholics who represented a large part of the population.

Ferry attempted to make a distinction between the Church and the clergy. He maintained that the Republic did not want to start a war against the whole institution, but ventured to diminish the political influence of its representatives. Jesuits taught young students to hate the "atrocious" 1789 Revolution and thus, defy the republican regime which was founded on its principles; the French state had to defend itself from those who undermined it.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, losing their educational role, priests felt marginalised. In 1879, three years before the law which abolished catechism from public schools was introduced, Ferry, then Minister of Public Instruction, said that "*le clergé français est solidaire au jésuitisme*" and that "*jésuitisme et catholicisme n'en font qu'un*".<sup>63</sup> Based on this discourse, the Jesuit Father Charles Clair, accused Ferry of acting against everything that Catholicism stood for; this politician and his supporters despised clergymen and discredited the doctrines they promulgated. He castigated him for profaning religion by treating whatever holy it contained the same way one would treat chemistry and biology; these two courses had become mandatory while catechism was made void. The whole France, Clair alleged, protests indignantly against this suspicion which has fallen over the Christian education. If Ferry's reformation triumphs, he concluded, moral decadence and ruin will occur.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.111, 131, 163, 168.

<sup>62</sup>Paul Robiquet, *Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry*, v.3, *Les Lois scolaires. La loi sur la liberté de l'enseignement supérieur. L'article 7, Les décrets- La loi su le Conseil supérieur, La loi sur les titres de capacités* (Paris 1895), p.189, 190.

<sup>63</sup>Robiquet, *Discours et opinions*, 1895, p.187.

<sup>64</sup>Charles Clair, *Lettres à Messieurs Paul Bert et Jules Ferry en réponse à leurs attaques contre l'enseignement catholique* (Paris 1879), p.8, 17, 18.

## 5. Structuring Girls' Morality; Religious Instruction.

A fundamental question which needs to be answered is whether the female morality endorsed by the republicans was radically different to the one proposed by the Church. In the journal edited by Jean Macé in 1871, one can read the amusing story of two little children titled "*Le chemin glissant*". Walking in the garden with her cousin Jacques, Miss Julie finds herself before a cherry tree. She must not eat the fruits because she promised her mother to ask for her permission before she touches anything. Jacques becomes the passive witness of Julie's struggle as this latter hesitates between obedience and transgression. The girl is proved to be stronger than her biblical ancestor and manages to triumph over her gluttony. "*Maman, je suis sage et je veux des cerises du grand cerisier*", she finally exclaims, proud of her moral victory.<sup>65</sup>

The subject matter of this short story written by P.J. Stahl and M. Worczok is similar to an episode narrated in a book which was published in 1859 under the title *Les malheurs de Sophie*. The author of this work, Countess Sophie de Ségur, was an ultramontane Catholic who had espoused the cause of the Church after being converted by her son, Monseigneur de Ségur.<sup>66</sup> M. Soriano maintained that for this writer: "*Le but essentiel qu'elle se propose en prenant la plume c'est d'instruire la jeunesse, de l'orienter vers la foi. Sa vocation littéraire est intimement liée à sa conversion. Son œuvre se veut militante.*"<sup>67</sup> It is very interesting to observe that despite this woman's ideological background, her work was very well received by parents and daughters for many decades; the coming of the Republic did not diminish its popularity.

In Ségur's story, Sophie confesses to her mother that she secretly ate the candied fruits sent to them as a gift from Paris, although she was not allowed to. A maternal kiss will be the reward for her sincere contrition.<sup>68</sup> The child had to learn how to conform to the rules set by adults since disobedience was regarded as the most terrible flaw for persons of her gender. Actually, girls in the novels of Sophie de Ségur should be convinced of the necessity of submission and continence which would make them devoted mothers. Compared to her

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<sup>65</sup>, Stahl M.-J. and P. Worczok, "Le chemin glissant", *Magazine d'éducation et de récréation*, vol.1, (1871-1872), p.26, 28.

<sup>66</sup> Marie-Christine Vinson, *L'Éducation des petites filles chez la Comtesse de Ségur* (Lyon 1987), p.155.

<sup>67</sup> Marc Soriano, *Le Guide de littérature pour la jeunesse* (Paris 1975), p.478.

<sup>68</sup> Sophie de Ségur, *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, (Paris 1896 (1859)), p.156

republican counterpart, Sophie is more susceptible to sin. She always finds herself in trouble for trying to materialise her ideas; one might even suggest that her vice is actually the fact that her ideas are not dictated by the adults. Stahl and Worczok's secular view is slightly different; Miss Julie does not have to face the consequences of her audacity because she is capable of suppressing it. The role of the mother in girls' education arises as a major theme in both stories; mothers incarnate order and morality. Marie-Christine Vinson, posited that in the popular novels of this expatriated Russian, the mother, bestowed with the power to punish and forgive, reveals the will of God and operates as vehicle of divine grace. The maternal kiss, Vinson further affirmed, as a sign of forgiveness, symbolises the girl's restoration to a state of grace through maternal love.<sup>69</sup>

Did fathers of the free-thinking milieu oppose the influence of devoutly religious mothers on their children's moral and spiritual development? I would argue that the woman as her offspring's first catechetical instructor was not only an ideal espoused by the nineteenth century Catholics but also a reality tolerated by some of their contemporary rivals. Practices deeply rooted in people's everyday life and roles sanctified by time and habit could not be easily altered by the enactment of state laws. The Church expected its faithful daughters to dedicate themselves to an intense and prolonged evangelisation of their children. Through maternal teachings, in the domestic space, without the mediation of a priest, the sons and daughters of pious women acquired and affirmed their faith. In 1889, the cover-plate of the Christmas edition of the journal *L' Illustration* (Fig.6) represents an elegant middle-class lady who is teaching her daughter how to say her night prayer. The author of this image is anonymous. The toddler is kneeling on a cot with a canopy while a sweet-faced young woman, an almost archetypical rendering of the *mother*, is physically participating in the procedure. Thus, with her right hand she helps the girl to make the sign of the cross while with her left arm she envelops the little body. This mother is educating the child by laying the foundations of her adult relationship with Christian faith. Looking at this second-rate image the people who bought the journal were confronted with a familiar concept.

Piety is a spiritual quality which passes from the older generation to the younger through teaching and religious practice. Lhermitte's painting *L'Aieule* (Fig.7) was destined for the Flemish, Catholic public; exhibited in 1880 at the Salon of Ghent, it was immediately bought by the Belgian state. Here, a "serious" treatment of the subject of faith transmission

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<sup>69</sup>Vinson, *L'Éducation des petites filles*, p.157, 158, 159.

replaces the pleasant tone of the previous illustration. In the interior of a provincial Church an elderly woman in austere clothes is portrayed seated on a wooden bunk with a prayer book open on her knees. At her feet, on the ground, a kneeling girl with her hands joint in prayer is represented wearing a modest outfit quite similar to that of her grandmother, to the point that she is rendered a younger version of this latter. With their likeness Lhermitte possibly ventured to emphasise the fact that his sitters share a common religious background. The genuflection of the child indicates that we are dealing with someone who realises the solemnity of the occasion. The old woman is either pausing or, having finished the reading she is contemplating the text's meaning. The attitude of the devout granddaughter reveals that she can receive her catechism in the spirit of humility expected by her gender. I would argue that the grave atmosphere of this Catholic painting cannot be disassociated from the social background of Lhermitte's two models. The bourgeois Christian piety appears to differ from that of French villagers. For each part religious observance had some characteristic qualities which derived from their dissimilar life-styles. Thus, peasants saw the Church as a place where they found consolation and the courage to face the hardships they were often confronted with.

As it will be thoroughly discussed in the second chapter, in painting, the transmission of Christian faith from an older member of the family to a younger is usually represented as something which concerns only the female gender. However, radical republicans judged the indoctrination which took place in the domestic environment dangerous for the future of democracy, because mothers catechised also their sons and future voters. Many nineteenth century priests attributed their religious vocation to the solid faith of their mother. Years after his ordination Henri Lacordaire said: "*Élevé par une mere chrétienne, courageuse et forte, la religion avait passé de son sein dans le mien comme un lait vierge et sans amertume.*"<sup>70</sup> In an article published in 1998, Paul Seeley investigated the Catholic spirituality of bourgeois men in the city of Lyon during the Third Republic. For this purpose the historian used the book of the free-thinker Ernest Legouvé as a case study. Legouvé narrated the story of an agnostic, democrat father whose son became devout Catholic. In this work, titled *Les Droits et les devoirs des parents dans la question religieuse* (1868) the author gave his name to the protagonist. The latter renounces the Jacobin mentality which sought ideological conformity from men's wives and children. Quite interestingly, for Legouvé's hero and *porte-parole*,

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<sup>70</sup>Delumeau, *La Religion de ma mère*, p.314, 315.

Catholicism was the means of establishing harmonious natural bonds between the mother and her offspring. Teaching their boy the Old Testament, he claimed, his spouse spoke a simple, familiar and persuasive language that seemed to flow from her lips, as naturally as the milk from her breast; like Lacordaire, Legouvé compared the communication of knowledge of Christian mysteries to breastfeeding. Identified as an essential element which lives in the woman and forms her as a mother, Catholicism was thought to deserve as much respect as the maternal role itself.<sup>71</sup>

The above attitude was common among some republican deists and spiritualists like Jules Simon, who recognised Christianity as a superior religion and Catholicism as its most perfect expression. However, the tolerance displayed by the elderly Simon towards religion did not conform to the theses espoused by the republicans who held ministerial positions in the 1880s. It is notable that for Jules Ferry the Catholic morality was identified with the monastic ideal, which invited people to withdraw from the world and renounce active social life.<sup>72</sup> Ferry's radical anticlericalism did not allow him to see that Christians cherished celibacy for those who had this vocation but also promoted the idea of family. Although the *croyants* claimed that in prayer they sought force and courage to confront the hard realities of life, for free-thinkers prayer was only a form of abandonment to the divine will. I would argue that this belief is conveyed in some paintings. In the *Résignation* of Louis Deschamps (Fig.8) which was exhibited in the Salon of 1882, an elderly woman holding her rosary envelops a frowning, sad toddler who is kneeling on a prie-Dieu before her. Her lowered gaze is turned to the girl, possibly to ensure that she is saying the prayer properly. Like Lhermitte did with *L'Aïeule*, Deschamps raises the subject of faith continuity. However his rendering could be read as a critical view of religious practices which are transmitted to younger generations; judging from the title, religious observance might be identified with a passive attitude towards life. According to radical republicans, Christian morality taught resignation. The mentality of accepting one's lot belong to the Middle Ages and had no place in the egalitarian society the political authorities struggled to build. The poverty of Deschamps' sitters is quite striking; this work is about piety which befits uncultured people. As I intend to demonstrate, the educational reforms targeted the children and the grandchildren of those who, like the elderly

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<sup>71</sup> Seeley, 'O Sainte Mère', p.871, 872.

<sup>72</sup> Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.90.

woman in the image, were victims of indoctrination. The republican elite felt that it had the mission to civilise them; it was the duty of the bourgeois classes to the lower strata.

In 1901, in a spirit similar to that of Deschamps, Jean Geoffroy, a fervent republican artist, painted the image *Les Résignés* (Fig.9). A small group of impoverished people are praying in a church; a young mother with a baby on her lap is seated next to an older woman while behind them we can distinguish two other female figures. One man with his mouth half open seems to be lost in prayer; the artist portrays him abandoned in the misery of his social state. A little girl stands apart from the others, kneeling on her *prie-dieu*, a manifestation of the younger generation's piety and a proof that old mentalities are perpetuated. It is difficult to discern the intentions of the artist and bestow this work with an ideological identity, although the political convictions of its author are known. A *libre-penseur* who painted a religious picture did not necessarily wish to deprecate the Christian faith. Geoffroy's view is one of sympathy, but also of condescension. A republican viewer would say that these unfortunate individuals are plunged in superstition, while a Catholic would approve of their abandonment to the divine will. Another thing which enhances the ambiguity of this work is that the State bought it from the SAF and, two years later, it deposited it in Lyon, a city inhabited by a very pious population. Art criticism confirms how contradictory the reading of such images could be; the *Dimanche des Rameaux*, painted by the anticlerical Geoffroy in 1887 (Fig.10), was read as a praise to Christianity, an *idylle chrétienne*. A sister of Charity with a group of orphan girls are getting out of the church *La Madeleine* where they have just attended Mass; on the right hand corner, a woman holding her baby is begging for alms. The art critic exclaimed: "*Bravo maître! Vous n'avez pas craint de nous montrer une de ces bonnes sœurs que méprisent et jalousent nos tyrans du jour. Tous les grands cœurs vous sauront gré. Si j'osais et ne craignais de froisser votre modestie je vous dirais que votre tableau est une idylle chrétienne digne d'un musée.*"<sup>73</sup> The author of this comment was undoubtedly Catholic and he definitely ignored the ideological background of the painter, whom he describes as a resistant to the tyranny of secularism. He refers to the anticlerical castigation of religious women who renounced marriage and procreation and served as an icon for irrationality and hysteria; the *religieuse* was a sign of disorder within the order the Republic wanted to establish.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, praising Geoffroy for his courage to represent a

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<sup>73</sup>François Bournand, *Paris-Salon 1887*(Paris 1887) , p.52.

<sup>74</sup>Stone, 'Anticlericals and Bonnes Soeurs', p.106.

sister of Charity, the art critic does not seem to take into account that, despite the climate of hostility towards the clergy and the members of monastic orders, representations of nuns who assist the children's First Communion and accompany girls to religious processions were, as I will show in the second chapter, quite common. It is imperative to admit that images where an artist does not propagate an ideology under the auspices of the State or another institution, are ambiguous and open to various interpretations.

After the abolishment of religion in primary schools, catechism was completely adapted to the weekly school-programme. At the age of seven, children subscribed to the list of young communicants and to the catechism class, where they attended courses given by the parish priest. Their instruction would normally stop after six years, when they were considered ready to receive the Sacrament.<sup>75</sup> Jules-Alexis Muenier painted the *Leçon de catéchisme* in 1890 (Fig.11). The class is taking place in the garden of the presbytery where an elderly priest is listening to a boy reciting his lesson. Next to the standing child, a girl is concentrated in her book revising while she is waiting for her turn. Her well-behaved classmate keeps her eyes fixed on the teacher. A second boy appears distracted as he has turned his back to pick a flower behind the bench. Muenier diligently rendered the different attitudes of the children towards the lesson and succeeded in giving a natural and picturesque tone in this painting. Fifteen years later, in 1905, recalling the circumstances of this work's creation he admitted: "*Je ne suis pas fou de ce tableau. Voici comment j'ai été amené à le composer. Coquelin Cadet qui avait vu le Bréviaire m'avait dit : «Fais-moi un petit curé ! Je l'avais fait très vite. A Paris il fut bien accueilli et c'est l'État qui l'a acheté.»*"<sup>76</sup>

In his review of the painting published in *Le Figaro-Salon*, A.Wolff wrote: "*Quelques enfants seulement mais que ces charmantes têtes sont finement observées, arrêtées dans un dessein net, et quelle belle paix dans la nature et dans les figures!*"<sup>77</sup> The image, exhibited in the SAF, was appreciated for its poetry, the diligent rendering of the details and the perceptive observation of the individuals' psychology. All the sitters are captured in different postures and their faces are drawn delicately. The detailed naturalism of the painting corresponds to the artistic style favoured by the republican State and, as Richard Thomson observed, it invites us

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<sup>75</sup> Mergnac, *Communions*, p.14.

<sup>76</sup> *Itinéraires champêtres: Jules Alexis Muenier (1863-1942) peintre sous la IIIe République*, Sabine Gangi, Vessoul, Musée Georges Garret, 16 November 2002-31 March 2003, p.28. Coquelin Cadet was a famous French comedian, an art collector and friend of Muenier. In the *Bréviaire* (1886, oil on canvas, 113,5x140,5 cm, Cambrai, Musée des Beaux Arts) the same priest is sitting alone in the garden with a prayer book on his knees.

<sup>77</sup> Wolff, 1891 quoted in *Itinéraires champêtres*, p.29.



to look at the image attentively.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the artist claimed that this painting was considered to be the first serious portrait of a priest and that was the reason why the State was interested in its acquisition. The French audience, Muenier implied, was used to caricatures of gluttonous, alcoholic ministers: “*Ce qui lui a valu une attention particulière c’est que l’on n’avait pas encore fait en peinture un curé un peu sérieux. Celui-ci changeait des prêtres qui mangent des gigots ou qui caressent des bouteilles.*”<sup>79</sup> Actually, figures of worldly, carnal, vain and excessively ambitious prelates parade in the witty, malicious, but successful representations of Georges Vibert who did not spare a chance to mock the *moeurs* of the Catholic hierarchy (Fig.12). Muenier, whose religious beliefs are not known, attracted attention for being original; unlike most of his colleagues he did not venture to ridicule the clergy.

It should be pointed out that around the time this painting was created, the new pope Leo XIII asked from pious French people to co-operate with the hostile French government.<sup>80</sup> He was the first primate of the Church of Rome who did not support the restoration of monarchy. Realising that Catholicism had lost ground in France he decided to put the troubled relationships of the Vatican with the French secular State on a new basis. Thus, the commencement of his pontificate (1889) marked the beginning of the period of the *Ralliement* (1889-1908). However, it would be very precarious to interpret the quasi paradoxical decision of the State to buy a painting such as the *Leçon de catéchisme*, which was placed in the *Musée du Luxembourg* between 1891 and 1898, as a testimony that an air of reconciliation had just started blowing between the Church and the Third Republic.

Like in the case of Geoffroy whose work was previously analysed, this painting is ambiguous, in the sense that one cannot tell the artist’s intentions with certainty. Muenier’s clergyman is a humble country priest and thus not the representative of a powerful religious institution. His hands are those of a man who is accustomed to manual labour. He has been occupied with the digging of the garden of his presbytery and he paused in order to receive and instruct the students; the lower part of his cassock is soiled from the mud and his shoes are worn out. His profession renders him socially superior to the people of his parish, but he is

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<sup>78</sup>, Thomson Richard, *La République troublée. Culture visuelle et débat social (1889-1900)* (Paris 2008) (2004), p.239.

<sup>79</sup>*Itinéraires champêtres*, p.28.

<sup>80</sup>Cova Anne, ‘*Au service de l’église de la patrie et de la famille*’: *femmes catholiques et maternité sous la III République*, (Paris 2000), p.40.

quite possibly the son of peasants, like the rugged child who stands before him and whom he is invited to catechise. The *curé*'s rough features and modest standing would encourage the viewer to identify him with the opposite of the learned prelate. This old man who is frowning while he attentively listens to the little pupil, is not one of the sophisticated Catholic rivals of the Republic in the field of education. He benevolently tolerates the young boy who does not bother to conceal his distraction. Nevertheless, his indulgence might be taken as the proof of his incapacity to discipline his students. One could suggest that this child's attitude means that religion did not engage the younger generation, and especially the male gender; however, the boy reciting his lesson invites us to deduce the opposite. Does the fact that catechism class takes place in the garden and not inside the presbytery comprise a conscientious choice made by Muenier? As was mentioned before, the radical republicans did not present themselves as atheists but as anticlericals. They did not deny the existence of God but they despised the institution and its representatives. For them the Creator was present in the marvels of nature which is blooming in this painting from where the edifice of the Church is absent. The boy is turning his head from the clergyman to pick a flower; this gesture is almost certainly mechanical and signifies his dullness. However another interpretation is not impossible. Through the youth's figure the republican government which bought the work makes a statement; it is nature, not religious books, which communicates knowledge and reveals the truth. For the anticlerical viewer, Muenier's sitter with the uncouth face possibly constitutes the epitome of illiterate priest who would be accused of disseminating superstition. Also, his soiled clothes probably comprise an indication of his indifferent hygiene; as I discuss in the fourth chapter of the thesis, cleanliness was a value exalted by modern science and, subsequently, by the Third Republic. Should a parent trust his child's instruction to such a person?

In the Salon criticism published in 1891 Olivier Merson characterised Muenier's *curé* a venerable figure whose many wrinkles manifest his great kindness. Apart from praising the image as "*charmant d'expression, de finesse, de coloris, de tout,*" the art critic added that the elderly man is endowed with spirituality and gentleness. Also he found the attitude of the children, including that of the distracted boy, impeccable.<sup>81</sup> Although we do not know the religious beliefs of the man who commented on the *Leçon de Catéchisme* it seems quite

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<sup>81</sup> Merson Olivier, 'Deuxième exposition de la Société Nationale des Beaux Arts au Champs de Mars', *Le Monde illustré*, vol.68, 16 Mai 1891, p.379.

unlikely that he was an anticlerical. Could he be expressing only the opinion of Catholic viewers? For most of Muenier's contemporaries the portrayed priest probably incarnated the conscientious person who solemnly did his pastoral duty by catechising the village children, outside school hours, as the law of the Republic dictated. The multiple readings this painting permitted made it appealing to a large public; this could explain its acquisition by the State.

## **6. Republican Education and the Emancipation of Women: Aspects of the *Loi Sée*.**

Apart from the abolition of religious instruction from the daily schedule, republican reforms did not bring dramatic alterations in girls' schooling. Thus, Camille Sée's law of 21 December 1880 which established secular secondary education for women was not inspired by feminism but comprised the fruit of his vision for a lay State.<sup>82</sup> Although this radical republican emphasised the need to develop the "female character and disinterested learning", he did not venture to emancipate the woman; she was not expected to establish a basis of her future career but to acquire the knowledge that would permit her to thrive in the social milieu where she was called to live.<sup>83</sup> It is useful to remember that Camille Sée was a spiritual son of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had expressed his views on the question of girls' education in his book *Émile*, published in 1762: "*Toute l'éducation des femmes doit être relative aux hommes. Leur plaire, leur être utile ou se faire aimer ou honorer d'eux, les élever jeunes, les soigner grands, les conseiller, les consoler, leur rendre la vie agréable et douce : voila les devoirs des femmes de tous les temps.*"<sup>84</sup> Here, it is worthy to notice that Rousseau's opinions did not differ from those of the ultra-conservative, royalist Joseph de Maistre. In 1808, in a letter to his daughter Constance, the sworn enemy of the Revolution and the Enlightenment wrote: "*Le mérite de la femme est de régler sa maison, de rendre son mari heureux, de le consoler, de l'encourager et d'élever ses enfants, c'est à dire, de faire des hommes...je crois que les femmes, en général ne doivent point se livrer à des connaissances qui se contrarient leurs*

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<sup>82</sup>McMillan, *France and Women*, p.145.

<sup>83</sup>*La Femme les lois et les mœurs*, Archives Départementales du Val d'Oise, Préfecture du Val d'Oise, 25 November – 13 December 1975, p.3.

<sup>84</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou l'éducation* (Paris 1966 (1762)) p.75.

*devoirs.*”<sup>85</sup> When female gender was concerned, the acquisition of knowledge was not considered as good *per se*. Camille Sée deplored the deficient education provided to adolescent girls in convents and congregational schools because it rendered them unworthy of their secular, open-minded husbands.<sup>86</sup> The young politician shared the views of Ferry, who believed that “*Il y a aujourd’hui une barrière entre la femme et l’homme, entre l’épouse et le mari, ce qui fait que beaucoup des mariages harmonieux en apparence recouvrent les plus profondes différences d’opinions, de goûts et de sentiments.*”<sup>87</sup>

Creating *collèges* and *lycées laïques des jeunes filles*, Sée aspired to “bring the popular mentality into alignment with the enlightened views of the new elite”, comprised of bourgeois men who had converted to republican positivism.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, secondary female education was kept isolated from the traditional mainstream of the French educational system which was destined to serve the male population. Obviously the girls were not taught Latin; like Catholic educators, the atheist reformers regarded this language as “*la chasse gardée du sexe fort*”.<sup>89</sup> Instead, the daily schedule of Sée’s secular school included French, foreign languages, history, geography, hygiene, domestic economy, sewing and music.<sup>90</sup> The girls were led to the acquisition of a diploma but prevented from sitting the *baccalauréat*.<sup>91</sup> Sée’s intention was to reinforce the ideal of domesticity and also to make them less susceptible to superstition.<sup>92</sup> The students should not be left in the state of ignorance in which they would be reduced to remain if they had studied in a congregational school, where all they learned was *botanique asexuée* and *chimie du pot-au-feu*; nevertheless, the “*science*” they were taught in the republican *lycées* was elementary.<sup>93</sup>

Interestingly, the schools which were intended for the daughters of the *haute-bourgeoisie* and future spouses of the male members of the republican elite, recruited their pupils mainly among lower middle-class girls. More specifically, one third among them were the children of teachers and civil servants while another thirty percent were the offspring of

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<sup>85</sup> Joseph de Maistre, *Lettres et opuscules inédits du comte Joseph de Maistre, précédés d’une notice biographique par le comte Rodolphe de Maistre*, vol.1 (Paris 1853), p.190.

<sup>86</sup> Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford 1994), p.42.

<sup>87</sup> Robiquet, *Discours et Opinions*, 1893, p.305.

<sup>88</sup> McMillan, *France and Women*, p.146 and Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.27.

<sup>89</sup> Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p.43 and Bricard, *Saintes ou Pouliches*, p.100.

<sup>90</sup> Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.254.

<sup>91</sup> Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p.43.

<sup>92</sup> McMillan, *France and Women*, p.145.

<sup>93</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou Pouliches*, p.22.

self-employed businessmen. Only in Paris the students came from high social ranks; in the provinces, colleges chiefly had students from the petit bourgeois families.<sup>94</sup>

The establishment of secondary education for females created a need, and also a provision, for qualified, secular-minded teachers for the French youth. Thus, in 1882, a new *École Normale* opened in Sèvres, equivalent to the one which prepared the future *instituteurs* for boys in rue d'Ulm; its foundation might also be interpreted as a response given from the State to women who wished to be something more than housewives.<sup>95</sup> For females, who after the French Revolution and during the Third Republic had a minor role in public life and could not get involved in politics, Catholicism had been more than a refuge where they sought comfort; for many centuries the Church constituted the place where they could play an active social role. The profession of the *institutrice* was seen as the most befitting public role the Third Republic could offer to women, in order to integrate them in the plan of making France a modern, secular nation.<sup>96</sup>

Naturally, Catholics castigated the Sée law because for them the girl should be fully immersed into the religious values.<sup>97</sup> On 24 November 1880 the conservative *La Civilisation* castigated the government's decision to include the vain teaching of science in young women's studies and denounced the teaching of infants' hygiene as Darwinian. The *lycées* provided an education deprived of spiritual values; they were prisons where the ideal of the *jeune fille* would be abolished, maintained the Catholic *Le Gaulois* on 25 November 1880. By this statement the newspaper condemned Sée who wanted these establishments to function as boarding schools, where girls would be constantly under the influence of atheist teachers.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand the secluded environment of the convent where most of the nineteenth century upper middle-class girls spent their adolescence was not considered as disturbing or unacceptable.<sup>99</sup> The fact that nuns and priests educated women seemed normal to many people for reasons of natural and social order. Paul Janet, who was a vocal champion of the secular school for girls, tried to explain the reason why the reforms were defied. There was a fear that girls, due to certain qualities appropriate to their gender, were not susceptible to this kind of education: "*On craint deux choses dans l'instruction des femmes. On craint d'une*

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<sup>94</sup>McMillan, *France and Women*, p.146.

<sup>95</sup>Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.262.

<sup>96</sup>McMillan, *France and Women*, p.146.

<sup>97</sup>Liebrich, *Lettres aux mères*, p.15.

<sup>98</sup>Mona Ozouf, *L'École, L'Église et la République 1871-1914* (Paris 1982) p. 99, 100.

<sup>99</sup>Louis Delzons, 'La Famille bourgeoise et son évolution', *La Grande Revue*, 10 December 1912, p. 510.

*part que les hauteurs de la science ne les dégoûtent de leurs devoirs domestiques et de l'humble rôle de maîtresse de maison. On craint aussi que la sécheresse et la pédanterie de la science ne leur ôtent la grâce, l'agrément et la délicatesse qui font le charme de leur sexe. Les filles plus délicates, ont besoin de plus de docilité''* he continues, transmitting a common conviction which he did not share, *''elles doivent être élevées pour la simplicité de la vie domestique, pour l'obéissance, pour la piété, pour les vertus douces et timides. Ce qui est bien pour les hommes est un danger pour elles.''*<sup>100</sup> Émile Keller, deputy of the department of Haute-Rhine who was a militant Christian but not a royalist, said that women who had received a religious education were the glory of France: *''Elles ont fait de la France la première nation du monde en attendant que vos libre-penseuses en fassent la dernière nation. On vous propose d'enlever les femmes à l'influence de l'Église... et de frapper non seulement les jeunes gens mais aussi les jeunes filles à l'effigie de M. Ferry.''*<sup>101</sup> His words convey his anxiety; a woman who does not set her foot in Church should not be trusted since, as the pious Robert de Bressan had professed, every female who does not belong to God belongs to Venus.<sup>102</sup>

It is interesting that the opposition to these reforms did not come only from the Catholic milieu. Even the republican press expressed its reservations concerning the new law. Therefore, the journal *Le Reveil du dauphin* asked whether girls would be able to adapt to the new educational system. The text of the *loi Sée* was accepted on 16 December 1881 after some considerable alterations in some of its aspects. More particularly, the Senate, with 158 against 139, voted down the initial project of Camille Sée because it abolished not only religious but also moral instruction which was regarded as indispensable.<sup>103</sup> This politician had affirmed that when the education is not provided by the State it is provided by the Church; the enactment of his law was seen as a decisive step towards the amendment of a situation which kept the female gender in the grip of the clergy. Why would he omit moral instruction from the school programme instead of promoting a republican model of morality which would challenge the Christian one? Why would he leave this responsibility to the Catholics who have always considered the specific task as theirs? Like the novel of Ségur and the story in Jean Macé's journal which were examined earlier, Sée's omission is indicative of

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<sup>100</sup> Paul Janet, 'L'Éducation des filles', *Revue des deux mondes*, pér. 3, vol.59, 1 septembre 1883, p. 61,74.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.255.

<sup>102</sup> Bressan, *L'État, la mère*, p.125.

<sup>103</sup> Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.262.

the fact that, concerning the moral values women should imbibe, secularists and devout Christians did not have very different views. This can be one reason why anticlericals found it so difficult to extirpate religious institutions.

## 7. Art and Propaganda: Representing the Republican School.

In order to communicate its achievements in the field of education to the people and convince them for the necessity of the reforms, the Third Republic needed the assistance of both the liberal press and the artists. Through their works, these latter could promulgate the idea that by giving every French boy and girl the right to study, the anticlerical State also offered them an opportunity to improve their social status. Briefly, the benevolent government established free, obligatory and secular instruction in an attempt to provide to all her future citizens an access to a better life.

Jean Geoffroy would become the official painter of the school which emerged from the Third Republic's radical reforms. Since the beginning of his career this artist's work discloses his great interest in the children of the lower strata. From 1879 until 1895, he lived as a lodger in the house of a couple who worked in Paris as primary school teachers. Residing among his young models, the painter had the opportunity to observe them on an everyday basis; this experience helped him to discover his true vocation. From 1883 onward, Geoffroy, who identified himself ideologically with the new regime's principles, started considering the school milieu in a social context. In 1892 he illustrated the book *L'Université moderne*, an apology for the republican accomplishments in the field of education. One year later Ferdinand Buisson, former collaborator of Jules Ferry, met the *Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux Arts* expressing him his wish to see some contemporary aspects of school life perpetuated through painting.<sup>104</sup> Buisson, who is considered one of the fathers of the *école laïque*, assigned this task to Jean Geoffroy, who had been named member of the *Commission d'Imagerie Scolaire* a few years earlier. Within half a decade, the artist completed five paintings titled: the *Leçon de dessin* (1895, oil on canvas, 150x180 cm, École Normale d'Auteil, Paris) the *École primaire en Bretagne*, (Fig. 13) *École maternelle* (Fig. 14) as well as the *École Franco-Arabe à Tlemcen* (1896, oil on canvas, 195x237) *École normale*

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<sup>104</sup>*Paris à l'école, qui a eu cette idée folle*, p.130-134.

de Saint Cloud) and the *École professionnelle à Dellys-Travail du fer* (1899, oil on canvas, 185x135cm Rouen, Musée National d'Éducation). Each one of these works was exhibited annually in the SAF which took place between 1895 and 1899, and they were further presented altogether in the section of primary education in the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900.<sup>105</sup> It must be pointed out that the images Geoffroy painted for the State - in contrast with those that he and many other artists created privately – were unambiguous. They were not intended to leave the viewer with doubts and questions concerning the message they communicated, but were open only to one interpretation. The works of Geoffroy were expected to convey the grandeur of the Third Republic's educational vision; they had to be positive and straightforward, to justify the optimism of the politicians who introduced these reforms, by affirming their power to materialise their ideals and expand their benevolent oeuvre.

How can one explain the fact that three out of the five paintings commissioned from Geoffroy represent schools in the colonies and in the country? Since these works were created a few years after the death of Jules Ferry in 1893, it might be suggested that they conform to the essence of this man's political inheritance. Ferry was the most ardent proponent of French colonialism which started flourishing again thanks to his efforts. Like many among his colleagues, he felt that France had a "*mission civilisatrice*"; those who were from the colonies should be integrated and become worthy of France. The following words come from a speech delivered on July 1885 and their tone can be quite disturbing for a contemporary audience. "*Messieurs, il faut parler plus haut et plus vrai! Il faut dire ouvertement qu'en effet les races supérieures ont un devoir vis à vis des races inférieures [...]. Je soutiens que les nations européennes s'acquittent avec largeur, grandeur et honnêteté de ce devoir supérieur de la civilisation parce qu'il y a un devoir pour elles. Elles ont un devoir de civiliser les races inférieures.*"<sup>106</sup>

The republican state was also deeply concerned with the instruction of rural populations.<sup>107</sup> Thus, in the *Ecole primaire en Bretagne* of 1896, Geoffroy ventured to give a favourable record of the government's achievements in the field of female education in French provinces. As I will attempt to show, some of the latter were seen as "colonies".

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<sup>105</sup> Pierre Vaisse, *La Troisième République des peintres* (Paris 1995), p.309.

<sup>106</sup> Jean Suret-Canale, *Afrique Noire, Géographie, Civilisation, Histoire* (Paris 1973), p.244.

<sup>107</sup> Dessoyé, *Jean Macé*, p. 86.



Pursuing a faithful rendering of reality, the artist travelled to the *Pays Bigouden* located in the south-west of Brittany in order to observe his young models *sur place*. The interior of the classroom is of a modest and rustic taste, while the desks on which the children are working are identical to those we may see in his images depicting Parisian schools. The art-critic Henri Frantz, described the innocent charm of the young village girls represented by Geoffroy: “*Dans son école en Bretagne, Geoffroy rend bien le côté rêveur et mystique des petites filles dont les grandes coiffes font dans la lumière douce de la classe comme un envol d’oiseaux blancs. Il a fixé le caractère sérieux de ces petites figures roses, renseignées des leur enfance à ces longues et inévitables séparations, à voir partir chaque printemps du haut des falaises, des frères et des pères.*”<sup>108</sup>

Mona Ozouf posited that for Jules Ferry, pioneer of the new school policy: “*le particularisme communal est spontanément universalisant: c’est une heureuse disposition de la sensibilité nationale. Le local, n’est pas le lieu de la différence, celui d’où monte une volonté dangereuse de séparation, mais celui où peut s’enraciner une participation collective à la vie politique.*”<sup>109</sup> Geoffroy would not bring forward the particularities of various communities in order to castigate them as something which set them apart from a dominant life-style. This painter used their pleasant exoticism as local cultures, aiming to show that their existence did not form an impediment to the republican aspiration to build a modern nation comprised of educated people. Thus, it was not merely for the picturesque character of the costumes that the artist was prompted to represent *Bretagne* among other places in France. I would argue that the specific province where the class is taking place constitutes the key to understand the painting. The statistics which measure religious observance in this area are helpful in order to interpret Geoffroy’s message. In the largest city of Brittany, Nantes, between 1899 and 1902, 89.2% of the population would receive Easter Communion while 97.7% of the women would attend Sunday Mass. In Rennes 94% of the people in 1883 and 95.1% in 1899 would take Easter Communion. These were very high figures compared to many other parts of France. The *Bretons* were renowned for their superstition as well as for the extravagant way they demonstrated their religious piety. They were considered wild and uncivilised while their processions were seen as an infallible sign of their primitivism. Furthermore, most of them could barely speak French, something which alienated them and

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<sup>108</sup> Quoted in *Paris à l’école, qui a eu cette idée folle*, p.136.

<sup>109</sup> Mona Ozouf, *L’École de la France: essais sur la Révolution, l’utopie et l’enseignement* (Paris 1984), p.415.

made them unable to march with the rest of the nation in the path of progress. Ernest Renan asserted that in some areas of Brittany, including his birthplace, it seemed as if the Revolution had never occurred.<sup>110</sup> The Republic was trying to extend its ideological and educational values to one of the most uncultured communities in France: a place which was not touched by the Enlightenment and whose inhabitants did not always consider themselves as French.

Geoffroy's mission as a painter in the service of the State was to show the latter's power to mould the consciences and cultivate the power of reason among the daughters of superstitious sailors and peasants, who were acquainted with life adversities. If, as Henri Frantz maintained in his criticism, the father of Geoffroy's Breton girls was absent at sea, the paternal republican state was present through its educational institutions. Religion had plunged their spirit into the darkness of superstition; secular education would enlighten them and lift them from their savage state. The calm ambiance that rules in the classroom can be interpreted as the manifestation of an accomplished ideal. The atmosphere of order and efficiency results from a discipline which is not imposed by oppression or fear of punishment like in congregational schools attacked by the republican regime. The students in the background are concentrated in their work whereas some others, clean and well behaved, stand before their teacher listening to her instructions. One of them is modestly posing while grasping her apron and another is hesitantly putting her finger on the book held by the *institutrice*. It might be argued that the painting implies that the secular school possessed the elements in which it was accused of being deficient; decency, obedience and propriety are not the privilege of the Catholics because these virtues do not derive from religious doctrines but are founded on the cultivation of human reason which loves virtue and rejects vice. The secular teacher was there in order to teach the girls to read and write in French instead of *Breton*.<sup>111</sup> Soon, thanks to this policy of imposing a central culture the local dialects would be lead to their extinction.

The painting of Geoffroy may also be read as an attempt to gain the confidence of people who were reserved or even hostile towards lay education. In Brittany which was a "*pays de Catholicité*" state schools found it difficult to establish themselves, despite the high quality of teaching they could offer. Also, poor parents felt a moral obligation to send the

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<sup>110</sup>Gibson, *A Social History*, p. 175, 181, 229.

<sup>111</sup> Leslie Page Moch, 'Government policy and women's experience: the case of teachers in France', *Feminist Studies*, no.2, vol.14, Summer 1988, p. 303.

children to a religious school because priests helped their families. Often, in these French areas, when a school was becoming secular the mayor would take the furniture or refuse to heat the classroom and the police would have to interfere. There was also verbal abuse against secular schoolmistresses who tried to include their students in religious processions. In catechism for their First Communion children who were receiving state education were treated with excessive severity, but there were rare cases when clergymen would use force against a child. James McMillan recorded the case of Father Jules Leroy, a declared enemy of the secular state and Ferry's godless school. In 1896, this man was sentenced to 15 days of imprisonment for the use of abusive language in public and for acts of violence committed against a girl who had transferred from the local religious school to a state school in a neighbouring village. Leroy, who had assisted the adolescent's family, called her ungrateful while in the trial he said he recognised only the ecclesiastical authority. This priest's intransigence was dictated by a sense that he was doing his duty as a Christian soldier in the cultural war, and felt that he was executing his bishop's orders. To these state policies, the Catholic Church responded by encouraging the establishment of private religious schools.<sup>112</sup>

In Geoffroy's *Ecole primaire en Bretagne* the teacher, like the little girls, is dressed in a traditional costume. Additionally, she is not seated at a separate desk but on a chair surrounded by the children. The physical proximity might be interpreted as signifier of the fact that she does not want to distance herself from her students' needs. Furthermore, although her age and knowledge renders her superior to them, her outfit permits us to guess her rural descent; this young woman prefigures a state to which these girls are encouraged to aspire. Thanks to the providence of the State, they can escape the destiny of their illiterate parents who grew up under the Second Empire.

Some basic notions emerging from Geoffroy's works are those of equality and fraternity; these two ideals generate joy and confidence in the country's future. Thus, in his *Ecole maternelle* (Fig.14) completed in 1898, this painter deals with the harmonious coexistence of working class children of both genders in a state nursery, where these two fundamental values of the French Revolution preside. Boys and girls share the same education, thus putting the solid foundation of their common life as married adults; it was

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<sup>112</sup>W. Kaiser and C. Clark (eds), *European Culture Wars: Religious-Secular Conflict in the Nineteenth Century*, 2003, pp. 92, 94, 95, 96.

mentioned that both Ferry and Sée were convinced that women's sentiments and ideas should be in communion with those of their husbands.<sup>113</sup> In the image here, fraternity can be perceived in the charitable gesture of a boy who embraces his whimpering female friend in an attempt to console her. It should be pointed out that republicans considered solidarity the fruit of secularism, whereas they posited that clericalism sowed hatred and promulgated intolerance. A quarter of a century earlier, in November 1872 Emmanuel Vauchez claimed: "*Par laïcité j'entends la science à l'école et l'instruction religieuse à l'église ; c'est à dire la neutralité de l'école publique subventionnée par l'Etat ou la Commune. Les grands principes de liberté et de fraternité veulent que tous les hommes, qu'ils appartiennent au catholicisme, au protestantisme, au judaïsme, où d'autres religions, puissent vivre côte à côte et en frères.*"<sup>114</sup> In Geoffroy's *Ecole maternelle* the Republic is perceived as a dutiful mother personified in the figure of a young woman who gently bends over a pupil to arrange her dress. The girl's shining face conveys both her jovial character and the confidence she has in her attentive teacher; the message of the image is apparent. The children's rosy complexion and liveliness shows that they grow healthy and happy under the aegis of a secular State, which has fulfilled its educational vision.

It is worth pointing out that according to the government's Catholic opponents, the state nurseries which Geoffroy idealised in his work were morally and socially harmful. In 1910 Alphonse Piffault argued that: "*Des pouponnières remplaceront les foyers déserts. Des spécialistes de l'éducation remplaceront la mère et le père libres désormais, comme deux célibataires de leurs loisirs. Le fait capital, c'est que la femme mariée quitte la maison pour gagner sa vie ou pour jouir de la vie.*"<sup>115</sup> Bressan communicated a similar fear; for him, state nurseries were the beginning of the end for the family. The new educational system, he posited, using tolerance, neutrality and respect towards other religions as an excuse, ventured a monstrous thing. It did not merely nullify the role of the convent but it also attempted to replace the mother. It is repulsive when the republican state, that has been proved unable to substitute the "father" of the family, tries to interfere in the sacred maternal role, he observed.<sup>116</sup> However, it is interesting that Catholics considered it both legitimate and natural for the Church to pursue a parental role for the children.

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<sup>113</sup> Françoise Mayeur, *L'Éducation des filles en France au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, (Paris 2008), p.321.

<sup>114</sup> Dessoyé, *Jean Macé*, p.143.

<sup>115</sup> Alphonse Piffault, *La Femme de foyer, éducation ménagère des jeunes filles* (Paris 1910), p.VI.

<sup>116</sup> Bressan, *L'État, la mère*, p.4.

Another protagonist in the paintings of Geoffroy - although art critics do not seem to focus on her – is the secular-minded female teacher. Invariably young, benevolent and cheerful, she is represented prompt to assist her students. In the *École maternelle* she displays maternal tenderness and sincere affection for the toddlers who are the future of the nation. In the *École primaire en Bretagne*, she is represented dutiful and efficient in the task of communicating knowledge. The privilege of participating in the Republic's work is bestowed on her; she is trusted with the children's care and spiritual development. In this context she incarnates the notion of instruction along with the Republic's moral ideals and virtues.

In an earlier painting titled *En classe, le travail des petits* (Fig.15) Geoffroy rendered the young *institutrice* capable of keeping a class of primary school boys in order. This work was a state commission for the *Exposition Universelle* which took place in 1889, a century after the French Revolution. The Republic ventured to show the younger generation the progress which was made in the field of education during the course of one hundred years.<sup>117</sup> The boys are concentrated on their work; nobody looks bored or distracted. Their teacher is the product of Jules Ferry's law which was voted on 4 August 1879 and established the *Écoles Normales des Institutrices*. Ferry was greatly concerned to ensure that teaching in primary schools was carried only by trained, qualified persons and his legislation stipulated that every department had to have at least one training school for women primary teachers. It is the same law which decided that the instructors' professional competence had to be certified by a *brevet de capacité* which was provided by the State.<sup>118</sup> Here the young woman is endowed with the necessary skills which allow her to undertake the education of future voters and make them loyal citizens of the Republic. The pupils' behaviour proves that this confidence is well-deserved. Geoffroy's work does not focus on the teacher; as usual, his real protagonists are the children. Although she is represented in the background, her figure stands apart from her students as she physically rises above them. Also, the artist painted her head against the blue-green wall further emphasising the significance of her presence as that of a knowledgeable young adult with moral and spiritual authority over the little boys. Most of the children are struggling with their classwork while a few others approach this young woman who patiently receives them and corrects their mistakes. Furthermore the teacher is not seated in front of the rows of desks but on a chair next to the pupils. Like in the *École primaire en Bretagne*, here,

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<sup>117</sup> Paris à l'école, qui a eu cette idée folle, p.134.

<sup>118</sup> Ozouf, L'École, l'Église, p.96.

the physical proximity possibly indicates the quality of the relationship established between her and the boys who respect her but do not fear her. Thus, the learning procedure becomes more enjoyable without being debased.

This painting allows the viewer to deduce that the black-robed, smiling and calm *institutrice* is contented with her profession. Although Geoffroy's image is an instrument of republican propaganda it is true that the new regime, through its reforms, slowly managed to establish female secular instructors as respectable individuals. This fact did not prevent the commonplace theme of the unhappy teacher who often had to face hostility from being founded on real circumstances. Her everyday life was under constant surveillance and the judgment of the people was often hard on her; actually, she was not more emancipated than a woman confined to a domestic role. Not only was her social status inferior to that of a mother and a housewife but there was also nobody to protect her. The salary she received was low and did not increase during the early years of the Third Republic. Until the last decade of the nineteenth century, these persons who came from respectable families which had lost their financial standing were often condemned to celibacy if they wanted to remain in the profession.<sup>119</sup> The destiny of Sidonie who resigned from her dream to get married and create a happy family is narrated in a novel published in the newspaper *La République française*, in December 1871. Her story titled *L'Institutrice* was regarded as a typical example of a female teacher's life, before Sée's legislation.<sup>120</sup> Secular female teachers were a novelty to villages and small towns in the 1880s and often had to face the local population's suspicion. They were created in order to replace the *religieuses* who covered the two-thirds of teaching staff in girls' public schools in France.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, by 1900 the *institutrices* outnumbered the teaching nuns and the entire profession was feminised because elementary school teaching became increasingly acceptable for women. Finally, concerning their celibacy, the French state's administrative policy articulated in the 1890s, encouraged these teachers to marry one of their colleagues and bear and rear children while continuing to teach. France needed secular *institutrices* and could not dismiss those who wished to have a spouse.<sup>122</sup>

In the painting *En classe, le travail des petits*, Geoffroy subtly but clearly conveyed the idea of equal education provided to all regardless their parents' financial standing. The

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<sup>119</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.25 and Ozouf, *L'École*, p.137.

<sup>120</sup> Ozouf, *L'École, l'Église*, p.137, 138.

<sup>121</sup> Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.278.

<sup>122</sup> Page Moch, 'Government policy', pp. 301, 304.

boys portrayed in the back rows are younger from those seated in the front; children of different learning levels were taught together. Because of their clothes, we are entitled to guess that the young students do not come from the same social strata. Thus, the pupils who wear school-aprons with clean white collars probably belong to middle-class families, whereas their classmates' more casual outfits reveal their working class status. To what extent was it possible to establish solidarity among them? Ferry believed that: “*ce qui importe à une société comme la nôtre, à la France d'aujourd'hui, est de mêler, sur les bancs de l'école, les enfants qui se trouveront, un peu plus tard, mêlés sous le drapeau de la patrie.*”<sup>123</sup> Did boys and girls from poor backgrounds, despite the state's efforts, have the same opportunities to excel and profit from the secular school system? Could they expect to be treated with respect and tolerance from their classmates? In his 1888 work *La Retenue* (Fig.16), August Truphème deals with the common subject of the student who has to remain at school after the class is dismissed for displaying lack of diligence. In the first of two benches there are four girls; the one who has been punished is standing, covering her face while she is weeping. The two children sitting beside her make fun of her situation; the one is whispering something in the other's ear. Her comments are not benevolent because the child who is listening to them is laughing. A more charitable girl is turning to her friend trying to console her. I would suggest that the most interesting element in the picture is the fact that it addresses the subject of social classes and discloses aspects of their coexistence in a public educational institution. Thus, the dark clothes of the *retenue* are worn out and speak volumes of her parents' financial status. She, as well as the child who wears a similar outfit and shows sympathy for her, are very probably daughters of workers. On the contrary the other two girls' light coloured aprons and appearance manifest that their families are bourgeois. Solidarity and fraternity are developed among those who share a common social background. Finally it might have been assumed that the poor were more likely to be bad students, having none in their family to help their progress.

Those who established the secular school ventured to awaken among the children a desire to succeed and excel, by rewarding the efforts of the most diligent and well behaved. In order to serve this particular purpose the Republic organised ceremonies where exemplary students would receive a prize before an audience composed of parents, grandparents and

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<sup>123</sup> Robiquet, Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry, vol.4, *Les lois scolaires (suite et fin) Discours sur la politique extérieure et coloniale* (Paris 1896), p.39.

siblings. Such an event is represented in the work of Aimé Perret which was exhibited in the SNBA in 1890 under the title *La Distribution des prix* (Fig.17). The art critic Louis Enault underlined the painting's success among the public and posited that this fact is not surprising because the composition is clear and joyful and the scene is luminous and full of life.<sup>124</sup> In the background, in front of the village school, a platform is laid in order for the event to be visible by all the attendants. The fact that the *distribution des prix* occurs on a stage almost like a theatrical production and not on the level of the ground, accentuates the official character and the significance of the occasion. A little girl proceeds to receive her prize from the headmaster while some other people sitting on the edge of the platform observe her: among them we may see a priest sitting beside a civic official, possibly the mayor.

On 16 June 1889 the father of the *laïcité* Jules Ferry had voiced a certain self-criticism admitting that, possibly, the Republic had gone too far with the secularisation of the school. More precisely, he declared before the members of the *Alliance Nationale Républicaine* that he wished from now on a spirit of tolerance to be displayed towards the mayor and the priest of French communities, where Catholics and anticlericals lived together. The same year, on 21 December, Ferry underlined the urgent need for religious peace and affirmed how untimely the denouncement of the *Concordat* would be. To substitute the latter with a regime which would oppose not only the beliefs of many people but also their habits and traditions, would bring religious war and rivalry in French communities.<sup>125</sup> It is very unlikely that Perret's image comprised a direct response to Ferry's speech. The *curé* as well as the mayor – who could be a Catholic or an atheist - incarnate the authorities of the village who are naturally present in such an occasion. However, looking at the painting one might deduce that the republican state did not marginalise the clergy and that the priests did not necessarily demonstrate contempt or hatred towards secular education. In this sense we could argue that *La Distribution de prix* promotes tolerance, a notion on which the recent educational reform was based. It was possible for the French citizens to coexist in peace despite their ideological differences.

In this painting there is a sense of sequence; Aimé Perret represented three stages of the ceremony. Thus, apart from the child who is receiving the prize we see another one who has already been awarded and is embraced by her peasant mother. Finally an elderly woman,

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<sup>124</sup> Louis Enault, *Paris, Salon Champ de Mars 1890*, (Paris 1890), p.37.

<sup>125</sup> Ozouf, *L'École, L'Église*, p.150.



deeply moved, looks on the direction of her granddaughter who approaches carrying the symbol of her excellence. Enault admits his enchantment before the sight of these adolescent girls whose white dresses are especially made for the ceremony and reminds us that they shall later be crowned with a laurel wreath: “*couronnées de leurs cheveux nattés, diadèmes fournis par la Nature, qui valent bien les couronnes de lauriers qu’on leur donnera tout à l’heure.*”<sup>126</sup>

Emulation had to result from the children’s noble aspiration to meet the expectations of their parents. In the SAF of 1891 Henri Cain exhibited the *Retour des prix* (Fig.18) where the young girl with a laurel wreath hanging from her wrist, presents her prize to an elderly woman. The child is accompanied by her middle-class parents and the grandfather is also present in the scene. The pride of the grandparents for the diligence of their grandchildren that Perret and Cain represented in their works, might further suggest the progress made in education over the generations during the nineteenth century. These images show that people realised more and more the importance of schooling. Students’ perseverance and wish to excel was also anticipated to form an expression of their love and gratitude towards their motherland; young people were called to prove themselves worthy of their national inheritance. In 1884, Jean Macé gave an audience of educators the following advice: “*Développez devant vos élèves la grande idée de la patrie, l’amour et l’honneur du drapeau, symbole de la France, et vos élèves aimeront la République.*”<sup>127</sup> In Perret’s painting, some tricolour flags are placed on the platform where the ceremony occurs; the *Distribution des prix*, illustrates the belief that France would establish its future on the principles of the Republic from which these young girls were encouraged to draw their inspiration.

Finally, it might be argued that the *Distribution des prix* advocates another fundamental idea. These peasants can put their hopes in the next generation which, thanks to secular education, is advancing in knowledge. They may aspire to a better future incarnated in their parading children. Human progress depends on learning; the educated youth would change the face of the retrograde French provinces. The art critic Louis Enault claimed that the viewers are pleased because when they are looking at the image, they are confronted with honest, good people. Which element leads him to this moral judgment? The only thing we know with certainty for the group of adults who attend the ceremony is that they are villagers who decided to send their daughters to *anécole laïque*. The image clearly promotes

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<sup>126</sup> Enault, *Paris, Salon*, p.37.

<sup>127</sup> Compayré, *Jean Macé*, p.97.

secularism; the art critic, who quite evidently supports the educational reform, considers their choice sign of virtue: “*ils sont des braves gens.*” Gathered together in order to watch their offspring being awarded prizes, the villagers are offered the opportunity to rejoice for a common reason. Collective activities may be regarded as a service to the Republic because they established togetherness and consolidated fraternity. Finally, it is quite striking that this republican Enault does not say a word about the diligence of these children, nor does he mention the importance of knowledge for young women in a secular, modern society. On the contrary, what he admires is the girls’ graceful youth while he does not omit a reference to the husband they will meet one day, in order to accomplish their greater duty which was the creation of a family.<sup>128</sup>

## 8. Education and Patriotism.

It is essential to underline that both Catholics and republicans argued that their activities in the field of education were based on their love for the country. However, since this love was founded on different principles they blamed each other for lack of patriotism. For devout people national identity was ultimately defined by religious beliefs; somebody could not be considered French if he was not Roman Catholic because the country’s privileged relationship with Christ was historically established. For instance, during the early 1870s, intransigent right-wing Catholics who proclaimed themselves fervent patriots, organised pilgrimages at Paray-le-Monial devoting France to the Sacred Heart with the hope to expiate the country’s sins and restore the “social reign of Christ” along, of course, with monarchy.<sup>129</sup> More specifically, in October 1872 during the pilgrimage which took place in Lourdes, a devout journalist reported that nothing was dearer to the participants than their “mother-France”. Their country, he stated, was always present to their minds. Their patriotism compelled them to pray for the redemption of France.<sup>130</sup>

The devout Robert de Bressan described Sée’s secular *lycées des jeunes filles* as *Jewish* and *Masonic* institutions where a caring mother should never trust her daughter.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Enault, *Paris Salon*, p.37.

<sup>129</sup> Philippe Boutry et Michel Cinquin, *Deux pèlerinages au XIX siècle: Ars et Paray le Monial* (Paris 1980), p.6.

<sup>130</sup> Gibson, *A Social History*, p.148. For the patriotism of devout Catholics in France, see also the article of Detmar Klein *The Virgin with the Sword*, published in the *Journal of French History* on November 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Bressan, *L’État, la mère*, p.122, 127.

Indeed, the republicans who were members of Masonic lodges played a determining role in the educational reform; in 1870 Macé became a freemason, joining the Loge *La Parfaite Harmonie* of Mulhouse, while Ferry has been a member of the Loge *La Clémentine Amitié* since August 1875.<sup>132</sup> These people were treated like the representatives of an evil sect, were demonised and identified as the enemies of France because they ventured to dechristianise a nation that was Catholic par excellence. Bressan's characterisation "Jewish" should be read as a personal attack to Camille Sée's ethnic descent, which is in accord with the anti-Semitic climate cultivated in France during the Dreyfus Affair.

On the other hand, republicans who wanted to establish their moral authority through public schools disapproved of the fact that religious orders were still deeply engaged in children's education. Ralph Gibson, in his social history of French Catholicism, posited that the advocates of secularism were hostile towards the congregations' role in youths' instruction due to their ideology. More precisely, they considered monastic orders to be *foreign*; monks and nuns owed obedience to the Pope and not to the French legitimate government which demanded the recognition of its authority above any other. Anticlerical politicians promoted the identification of the nation with the republican state, refusing to consider them as two separate things; the reformed, secular state did not wish to be regarded as an impersonal mechanism. Its mission was to purify the nation, this great family which shared a common cultural background, and to confirm and form the French national character.<sup>133</sup>

Effectively, there was a cultural war during which moral ideals and thus the future of France were thought to be at stake. Republicans aspired to build a modern society on the ruins of clericalism and abolish the sectarian mentality propagated by religious congregations. The Church wanted to build a city of God and save France from secularism. The school was the locus of control, through which the two opponents sought to legitimise themselves and consolidate their authority.<sup>134</sup> The political and theoretical discourse of this era discloses the nature of the conflict that occurred in the field of public instruction. It is more challenging for a modern researcher to discern and understand the ideological aspects of this conflict through private works of art; such images were susceptible to various interpretations. However, it cannot be suggested that artists painted ambiguous pictures in order to leave their public

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<sup>132</sup> Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p. 63, 77.

<sup>133</sup> Gibson, *A Social History*, p.131 and Stone, 'Anticlericals and Bonnes Soeurs', p.114.

<sup>134</sup> Gibson, *A Social History*, p.130.

perplexed. They drew their inspiration from a complex educational reality which was not divided into backward congregational teachers and progressive secularists, or immoral atheists and dutiful Catholic instructors. The determination of the new regime to convince the citizens for the necessity of an educational reform can only be perceived in propaganda paintings; there, the meaning cannot be debated since the most crucial elements are deliberately rendered in order: the children are portrayed happy and obedient and the teacher competent and attentive. Finally, the works produced during the period under study affirm that the ideal of the mother as her children's first teacher, as well as the purpose of female schooling, remained unaltered: republicans and Catholics agreed that a woman had to be educated for the benefit of her spouse and children.

## SECOND CHAPTER.

### **Representing Girls' First Communion: a Catholic rite in anticlerical times.**

#### **1. Introduction and Historical Background.**

This chapter ventures to explore the nature of the bonds established between women and Catholicism as a system of moral ideas, via the representation of communicant girls in late nineteenth century France. The reasons which made First Communion a very popular rite after the 1870s will be discussed, and the question whether the anticlerical State and the Roman Catholic Church were indeed two completely separate spheres whose representatives promulgated incompatible female models will be investigated. Curiously, most of the French paintings which were made during the period covered by the dissertation and depicted scenes related to this ecclesiastical rite, seem to have been created and exhibited during the 1880s, a decade of thriving anticlericalism, rather than in the 1870s when the country was ruled by the conservative Moral Order government and the Opportunist republicans, or during the *Ralliement* in the 1890s. Could, therefore, certain paintings be read as a deliberate reaction against the country's apparent dechristianisation? Did some others constitute an attempt by republicans to acknowledge France's Christian heritage which was manifested in such rites and traditions? The fact that a number of works representing girls' First Communion was bought by the anticlerical State raises further questions; the chapter ventures to explain this paradox. I also look at several paintings which appear to confirm that the *Communion Solennelle*, was primarily perceived as a rite of passage and was affected by worldly bourgeois culture.

Despite their manifestly pious content these images can be ideologically ambiguous. Whenever art-criticism is available it is taken into account; it discloses how the various messages and ideals which painters wished to communicate were interpreted by their contemporaries. As I intend to demonstrate, sometimes, art-critics disregarded the religious aspect of works representing First Communion. Did they neglect it because it was too evident, or was there another reason? It is worth considering whether the Church aspired to benefit

from the appeal the First Communion exercised in the bourgeois and peasant milieu, hoping to reinforce its undermined spiritual authority among future generations. The almost exclusive representation of communicant girls is one of the most striking aspects of these images, and should most probably be considered in relation to the ideal of purity and innocence that young females were traditionally thought to embody. Finally, the fact that in certain matters, such as female chastity, Catholic and republican values were common rather than incompatible, will be brought out. In any case, considering this category of art works in isolation from their religious context - even when the Christian element seems secondary – would not be a valid way to proceed.

The history of the First Communion started in 1574 when Carlo Borromeo, the archbishop of Milan, outlined a detailed process by which each local priest should instruct the children in his pastoral care.<sup>135</sup> Borromeo divided the catechism into three stages, the first of which ran from the ages of five to six, when a person was taught to examine his or her conscience and to distinguish between right and wrong. This prelate described the ages of seven and eight as the little catechism, which led to the First Communion between the ages of ten and twelve. Borromeo's clearly articulated system was put into practice in France where another important development occurred: by preparing children together for their First Communion, the Church started admitting them to the Eucharist as a cohort, in a solemn ceremony. The event acquired its definitive shape during the first two decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>136</sup> More specifically, the *Communion solennelle* was inaugurated by Adrien Bourdoise (1583- 1655) in the parish of St Nicholas du Chardonnet, where this priest created his seminary in 1612.<sup>137</sup> For Bourdoise the idea of togetherness – a concept very similar to the republican *fraternité* - was crucial. He wanted the parish to comprise a unity of devout Christians for whom acts of piety would constitute a collective experience; private devotion was not encouraged because it divided people and distanced them from God. It was in this context that Bourdoise accepted and promoted the solemnisation of the First Communion of

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<sup>135</sup> Peter McGrail, *First Communion: Ritual, Church and Popular Religious Identity* (Ashgate 2007), p.11.

<sup>136</sup> McGrail. *First Communion*, p.12.

<sup>137</sup> Ki Bom Hong, *Catéchèse et profession de foi. A travers l'histoire de l'évolution de la Communion Solennelle*, thèse de doctorat, Institut Catholique de Paris 1999, p.39.

children. The community of St Nicholas tried to link together catechism and Christian life by rendering the first indispensable for the preparation for the First Communion.<sup>138</sup>

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward a number of non-ecclesiastical elements were assimilated into this ceremony, which was followed by a family meal.<sup>139</sup> The apogee of the ritual is to be found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it acquired its final form and gained major importance probably because - as will be discussed in the chapter dealing with maternity and *puériculture* - by that time children had become the object of greater attention at all the levels of society.<sup>140</sup> In 1897, Cardinal Gasparri, professor of Canon Law in the *Institute Catholique de Paris*, wrote in his *Traité canonique de la Sainte Eucharistie*: “*Cette coutume française de faire faire à tous les enfants d’une paroisse la première Communion le même jour, d’une façon solennelle nous paraît tout à fait digne d’éloge et nous l’approuvons complètement.*”<sup>141</sup> The testimony of abbé Delmas, who spent twenty years of his life as responsible for boys’ catechetical instruction in the diocese of Paris, confirms the great appeal of the ceremony amongst frivolous Parisians who were totally indifferent to religion:

“*Comme accourt avec empressement, avec honneur, sous les voûtes de l’église cette foule bienveillante et avide de ce spectacle unique et catholique! S’en trouve-t-il qui ose, non pas condamner, mais dédaigner cette fête de l’enfance? Je ne le sais. Mais ce qui est vrai c’est que le chrétien et l’impie, le protestant et le juif, l’homme du monde et le religieux se font une joie comme la terre n’en a pas de contempler ces ravissants enfants à qui le Dieu de l’Eucharistie se donne pour la première fois.*”<sup>142</sup>

In order to understand why people in late nineteenth-century France succumbed to this ritual’s charm, it is necessary to examine the diversity of their stance towards the Catholic Church during that time. After the fall of the Second Empire in 1870, outbreaks of violence against the clergy occurred in Paris, Lyon and some cities along the Mediterranean coast. This aggressive attitude mainly came from working-class people who saw the priests as enemies in the battle against conservative forces. However, the intensity of religious feelings depended on the area of France one inhabited and not only, or mainly, on the social class one belonged to. Thus, whereas in Brittany, the Alps and the Jura the peasants were very pious, in the

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<sup>138</sup> Hong, *Catèchese et profession de foi*, p.40-41.

<sup>139</sup> McGrail, *First Communion*, p.13.

<sup>140</sup> Jean Delumeau, *La Première Communion; Quatre siècles d’histoire*, (Paris 1987), p.12.

<sup>141</sup> Louis Andrieux, *La Première Communion. Histoire et discipline, Textes et documents. Des origines au XXe siècle* (Paris 1911), pp.317-318.

<sup>142</sup> G.Delmas, *Les Mystères de la Première Communion à Paris* (Paris 1874), no page number.

Charente and Provence a much lower proportion of the population attended Sunday Mass. There is also evidence that, in anticlerical provinces, on certain occasions processions were disrupted and that many boys no longer took their First Communion.<sup>143</sup>

Later, the government of the “Moral Order” which was established between 1875 and 1877 did not object to the desire of the clergy to infuse the state’s institutions with a Christian spirit.<sup>144</sup> However, to the great dismay of men like Louis Veuillot, journalist and editor of the ultramontane newspaper *L’Univers*, even “Moral Order” representatives tried to introduce Catholicism only as a useful social force and not as the official state religion. Typically, French governments after 1879 demonstrated profoundly anticlerical tendencies and their leaders strived for the country’s secularisation. For orthodox republicans, organised religion undermined democracy, promulgated superstition and was the enemy of reason and progress; it should therefore have no influence in public life.

Nevertheless, the Church won the favour of many bourgeois who adhered to Catholicism because it promised undisturbed social stability after the 1871 Commune.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, practicing Catholics posited that the historical links between the clergy and the French nation should not be disregarded: France was and had to remain the *fille aînée de l’Église*.<sup>146</sup> During the period under study, missions, the religious press, lay associations, pilgrimages and popular festivals were the active forms of rechristianisation of the masses advocated by the representatives of the *Nouveau Catholicisme*.<sup>147</sup> This tendency had been set forth since the middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by personalities such as Veuillot. The historian James McMillan observed that some of the features of the specific movement were the political conservatism of its supporters, the popularity of certain forms of piety which were sentimental and anti-intellectual, and the unprecedented promulgation of Marian devotion. Indeed, in 1854, Pope Pius IX established the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and in 1858, at Lourdes, Mary appeared to the peasant girl Bernadette Soubirous

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<sup>143</sup> Hubert Jedin and John Dolan (eds.) *History of the Church, Church in the Age of Liberation*, vol.8, (London 1981), p.100.

<sup>144</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.97.

<sup>145</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.101.

<sup>146</sup> Kaiser and Clark (eds), *European Culture Wars*, p.78, 79.

<sup>147</sup> Curtis, *Educating the Faithful*, p.9.



wearing a white robe; from that time onward the cult of the Virgin started flourishing in France.<sup>148</sup>

The political dimension of the intransigent *Nouveau Catholicisme* which thrived during the Third Republic is crucial. The French who adhered to this religious ideal refused to compromise with a government which tried to impose secularism. They abhorred the *état laïque* because it was based on the principles of a regicide, ungodly Revolution. Their ideology inspired the construction of the Basilica of the *Sacré Cœur*, which was offered in order to expiate the nation's apostasy. Actually, a number of religious devotions with great appeal among these people were occasionally used as instruments which could serve the purposes of their political vision. It is indicative that in the 1870s Lourdes had become a very popular place of pilgrimage among Catholics with royalist tendencies. These latter flocked to the place where Bernadette had her vision and prayed the Virgin to intercede for the restoration of monarchy; the shrine's popularity remained undiminished in the course of the following decades.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, priests, as spiritual directors, encouraged intransigent Catholics who were engaged in the crusade against the anticlerical Republic to put all their hopes into Mary, because she could miraculously obtain the restoration of social order as they envisaged it. Thus, in 1883, Father Ambroise Monnot said "*Nous combattons avec la Sainte Vierge. C'est elle qui doit vaincre les ennemis de nos âmes, ceux-ci ont toutes les forces entre leurs mains, nous les vaincrons avec la croix et le chapelet.*"<sup>150</sup> As I will demonstrate, the Marian cult, apart from a political role, had a fundamental contribution into the shaping of the First Communion's spiritual character.

## **2. First Communion as a Rite of Passage.**

Although, after the 1870s, the number of couples who had a religious wedding after the obligatory *mariage civil* in the Town Hall declined and the civil funerals became common practice, the First Communion emerged intact from the secularisation of the French society. In this ritual people identified a ceremony which sanctified the entrance of a person to

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<sup>148</sup>Kaiser and Clark (eds), *European Culture Wars*, 2003, p.83.

<sup>149</sup> Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity*, (Oxford and New York) 2005, p.181.

<sup>150</sup> Bruno Dumons, *Les Dames de la Ligue des Femmes Françaises (1901-1914)* (Paris 2006), p.60

adolescence; this pivotal moment had to be solemnised and there existed no equivalent civil ritual which could function as a substitute for the religious one. Actually, for the members of the lower strata who lived in the rural areas of France, the ceremony constituted a precondition in order to commence their professional life. In the novel *Lettres d'un curé de campagne* written by Georges-Pierre Fonsegrive Lespinasse in 1894, the central character observed that even destitute peasants would spare no sacrifice in order not to deprive their children from the First Communion. To them this rite allowed their boys to hire themselves out as servants on farms and their girls to enter into service.<sup>151</sup>

The fact that the religious character of the *Communion Solennelle* was seriously compromised is confirmed by authors of the period under study; it appears that often children's First Communion was also the last time they received the sacrament.<sup>152</sup> In the twentieth century, certain priests still deplored the ritual's secularisation. "*Mais pourquoi avons nous besoin, nous prêtres de Jésus Christ, d'être mêlés à ce rite de passage, à ce folklore*", asked a young *curé* in the 1960s.<sup>153</sup> Some of his contemporaries appeared more indulgent in their judgment of people's attitude towards the ritual. Thus, in 1965, Abbé Berthier in an interview with the journal *La Voix Lorraine* maintained that the First Communion had always served as an occasion during which adolescence was presented to the world. According to him, parents were so attached to the ceremony "*à cause des raisons humaines et sociales qui sont d'ailleurs valables. Dans tout temps et dans toute société, le passage de l'enfance à l'âge adulte s'accompagne souvent d'un rite d'initiation.*" Abbé Berthier even admitted that he regarded the family meal after the Communion the extension of the Eucharist.<sup>154</sup> Finally, Father Ki Bom Hong, in his thesis published in 1999, observed that in the *Communion Solennelle* the distinction between social and religious elements was abolished; the rite was at the same time First Communion, profession of faith, feast for the parish and the family. As it served mainly in order to mark the threshold of social and spiritual maturity and thus the end of childhood, it was seen as "*une affaire d'enfants, un souvenir sentimental.*"<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Curtis, *Educating the Faithful*, p.143.

<sup>152</sup> Curtis, *Educating the Faithful*, p.143.

<sup>153</sup> S.Bonnet and A.Cottin, *La Communion Solennelle. Folklore païen ou fête chrétienne* (Paris 1969), p.21.

<sup>154</sup> Bonnet and Cottin, *La Communion Solennelle*, p.25.

<sup>155</sup> Hong, *Catéchèse et profession de foi*, p. 67.

Children's reception to the Eucharist was called "*Premières Pâques*", since the end of the nineteenth century; actually, in the *département du Nord* the verb *passer* meant to receive First Communion. One can justify the understanding of the ceremony as a *rite de passage* once one examines how the process of spiritual preparation for the Sacrament was structured. First of all, the girls – as well as the boys - who entered the preparatory stage were separated from the group of very young people to which they already belonged. By attending catechism classes, which was a necessary procedure for the understanding of Catholic doctrines, they were set apart from those who did not receive a religious education. Furthermore, the children became members of an aggregation comprised of individuals of the same gender who would meet every weekend for the same purpose.<sup>156</sup> The fact that boys and girls rarely mixed in catechetical instruction signals that they were considered or expected to become conscious of their sexuality, which they should therefore be able to control.<sup>157</sup> Finally, persons about to receive First Communion were expected to live separately from the other members of their parish. Without having to leave their home, they were invited to observe different rules under the supervision of their father and mother; the ecclesiastical milieu demanded the energetic contribution of the family in the children's preparation for the Sacrament.<sup>158</sup>

An example which illustrates that First Communion was understood and experienced as a rite of passage, is Jules Breton's work of 1884 titled *Les Communiantes* (Fig.19) This artist, a moderate Catholic of republican convictions, depicted the ritual at the same time as a solemn procession taking place in nature, a village feast and a triumph of adolescence which makes its debut in the adult world. Breton's reputation had flourished in the United States, where the clientele interested in his work steadily increased. This was largely due to the efforts of the art-dealer Samuel P. Avery who, in 1882, requested from Breton a painting with one, two or three figures for the sum of fifty thousand francs. A few months later the same man, who knew and supported the French painter since 1865, sent a letter confirming his faith in his talent: "*J'ai tant de confiance dans votre génie que je suis convaincu que vous en ferez une oeuvre maîtresse et puis je veux vous laisser libre de faire ce qui vous intéresse le plus.*" The artist's wife Elodie, recorded in her diary that her husband did many preliminary studies in his native Artois. "*J'ai passé mon été à étudier et préparer ce tableau des Communiantes que j'ai exécuté pour vous et qui comptera parmi mes oeuvres les plus importantes,* Breton

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<sup>156</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.174, 175.

<sup>157</sup> Bonnet and Cottin, *La Communion Solennelle*, p.21.

<sup>158</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.174, 175.

said to Avery, thus confirming his aspiration to create a work of substantial value. In 1886, *Les Communiantes* was bought by the bank of Montreal for forty-five thousand dollars.<sup>159</sup>

In *Les Communiantes*, instead of painting the moment when the girls actually receive the Eucharist, Breton represented the solemn procession which precedes the Sacrament and could be observed by the village's inhabitants. Certain art critics applauded the painter's decision to refrain from rendering the "awe-inspiring" moment when the children kneel before the tabernacle, thus avoiding any hint as to the doctrine of the Transubstantiation. For instance, in the journal *Le Monde latin*, a journalist observed: "*Breton s'est bien gardé de nous faire assister à l'entrevue redoutable de l'hostie. Il a supprimé le prêtre et le tabernacle. Sa cérémonie à lui se passe dans la nature.*"<sup>160</sup> The absence of the clergy and the nuns who usually accompanied the children, along with the discreet presence of the Church edifice in the background and the focus on the rural landscape, give to the ensemble the aspect of a mystical feast whose religious aspect is modestly disclosed. Breton's devoutness, as well as the piety of the portrayed individuals, is discreetly manifest in this image, possibly because he had to satisfy an American patron and a clientele which was not necessarily Catholic. He achieved his target by rendering a procession in the French countryside, a theme he found exciting and mastered very well; he had repeatedly rendered the *Pardons* in Brittany, attracted by the manifestations of the peasants' primitive faith. The fact that the ecclesiastical aspect of the First Communion interested Breton should not be doubted. On the contrary, as the poem he wrote in order to accompany his ambitious work clearly shows, he was very sensible to the exaltation of the child during this Sacrament: "*O doux Jésus descends! Ah! Viens divin époux te mêler à notre être...Recevoir dans ton corps le Dieu qui fit la terre.*"<sup>161</sup>

*Les Communiantes* were in accord with the sensibilities of contemporary criticism, which appreciated the naturalistic representation of village rites and cherished the nostalgic mood emanating from the presence of the elderly couple who caress their granddaughter. The image's ambiance, encompassed in its luminous tones, was perceptively described by Henri Houssayé in his 1884 Salon criticism: "*Dans ce paysage printanier et matinal, tout illuminé*

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<sup>159</sup> Annette Bourrut-Lacouture, 'Les Communiantes de Jules Breton et le thème de la procession : genèse d'une œuvre d'après des documents inédits', *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de l'Art Français*, January 1983, p.177-179.

<sup>160</sup> Quoted in Bourrut-Lacouture, 'Les Communiantes', p.189.

<sup>161</sup> Breton Jules, 'Les Premières Communiantes', *Revue des deux mondes*, pér.3, vol.75, 15 mai 1886, p.441. The poem, which was dedicated to Mme Alphonse Daudet and sent to her on 7 November 1883, shares the same title with the painting. An extract of it figured in the Salon catalogue entry.

*de soleil et tout humide de rosée, les robes chiffonnées des communiantes mettent une tache de blanc mat qui vibre sans dissoner.*''<sup>162</sup> Actually, the painter's fascination with this colour is evident throughout his artistic career; the *Bénédiction de blés; Artois* (1857, huile sur toile, 128x318 cm, Arras, Musée des Beaux-Arts) and the *Jeunes filles se rendant à la procession* (1888, huile sur toile, 125, 7x175, 3 cm, Utica, Munsor-Proctor Institute) comprise two characteristic examples. Here, the dominant snow-white tones possess a symbolic power and function as a sign of the girls' virginity; the importance of this idea is also revealed in the repetitive use of the word '*blanc*' in Jules Breton's poem.

The first verses of *Les Communiantes* focus on the notion of rejuvenation as this emerges from the blooming nature and the presence of children:

*“Parmi ces frais lilas, les renaissants feuillages  
Par ce printemps qui chante et rit dans les villages  
Par ce dimanche clair, fillettes au front pur  
Qui marchent vers la messe entre les jeunes branches  
Avez-vous pris au ciel, communiantes blanches  
Vos robes de lumière où frissonne l'azur?”*<sup>163</sup>

Breton represented the event taking place in spring, because children's First Communion nearly always coincided with the period after Easter. It might be argued that the artist intended to encapsulate the meaning of the work in its atmosphere. Like many of his contemporaries he understood the ceremony as an occasion whose purpose was to exalt adolescence. In *Les Communiantes* the morning light and the flowering earth emphasise the idea of youth as a condition whose grace is paired with the qualities of the specific season of the year. The good weather and the idea of freshness suggested in the morning dew on the grass, can be perceived as physical signs introduced in the canvas to underscore a crucial event; this is the moment when girls officially abandon childhood and enter the “springtime” of human life, becoming physically and socially mature.<sup>164</sup> In this framework the image is profoundly optimistic. The children have only a short past and a long future; everything –

<sup>162</sup> Houssayé Henri, “Le Salon de 1884”, *Revue des deux mondes*, pér.3, vol. 63, 1 June 1884 p.582.

<sup>163</sup> Breton, ‘Les Premières Communiantes’, p.440.

<sup>164</sup> Colin Heywood, *Growing up in France from the Ancien Regime to the Third Republic* (Cambridge 2007), p.81.

hopes and aspirations - is yet to come. Finally, in order to accentuate the idea of the *passage*, Jules Breton let the viewer see only the backs of the white robed girls who have already traversed the village street that leads to the church. His representation seems to suggest that their *passage*, like any other, is inevitably ephemeral and will soon become a thing of the past. The message he wished to transmit emanates from the last verses of his poem where he encourages the maidens to enjoy the bliss of this unique moment:

*“Chantez vierges! Demain l’été fera sa gerbe ;  
A l’automne, les fruits mûrs tomberont dans l’herbe,  
Chantez au blanc printemps votre premier hymen!”*

The idea of a passage which marks the onset of a person’s maturity, also emerges from Eugène Carrière’s painting *Le Premier Voile* (Fig.20) The work represents the preparation of a young girl who is going to receive First Communion; exhibited in the Salon of 1886, it was immediately bought by the French State. It must be underlined that unlike his colleague Breton, Carrière was not a believer or a practicing Christian. The republican art critic and educationalist Paul Desjardins, in the obituary he wrote for the painter, observed that the artist structured his composition around the immaculate white effect created by the child’s veil and dress.<sup>165</sup> In order to achieve his purpose he did not place the model in the centre, but on the left side of the canvas, near the window.<sup>166</sup> Thus, her youthful presence was related to the clarity of the sunlight and hence to the world which lay outside the dark interior. He alluded to the fact that the child is preparing to leave the age when one is heavily dependent on the domestic environment in order to enter another life-stage, which will bring her one step closer to womanhood. The impression of an aureole created by the veil that is solemnly held by the mother bestows the image with its sacred quality. The painter idealised the sitter’s youth and extolled her purity in his vision of the woman this girl would soon become. I would argue that in this image, Carrière dislocates the ritual from its ecclesiastical context without depriving it from its religious character. The explicit reference to her future marriage and the concept where the communicant is envisaged as a bride will be discussed below.

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<sup>165</sup> The girl was erroneously identified as his 8 year old daughter Elise, while no child was allowed to receive this sacrament before the age of 12 or, occasionally, 10 years old until 1910.

<sup>166</sup> Paul Desjardins, ‘Eugène Carrière, artistes contemporains’, *Gazette des Beaux Arts* per 3.vol. 38, 1 July 1907, p.23.

The popularity of this rite could be attributed to the fact that, in its structure, it enshrined elements which promoted ideas of family unity and continuity, advocating the value of filial respect due from the younger to their elders. The presence of grandparents in images representing First Communion is quite frequent, while scenes where the communicant girl embraces her infirm grandmother before the ceremony were particularly favoured by artists such as Alfred Guillou in 1888 in his *Soir de Première Communion* (Fig.21) and Albert Fourié in 1886 in the *Jour de fête* (Fig.22). Contemporary historians have agreed that the older generations formed an integral part of the procedure which preceded the ceremony; thus, the previous evening, the children were expected to ask for their parents' forgiveness and receive their blessing. Actually, a few moments before the children receive the Sacrament, one of them was supposed to recite the *Acte de pardon aux parents* in front of the congregation. This text comprises simultaneously an act of reconciliation, a statement of love, and a moral commitment on behalf of the young not only to obey the divine law, but also to revere those who brought them into the world:

*“Bien chers parents nous nous sommes mis à genoux devant vous en implorant votre meilleure bénédiction... désirant réparer publiquement les fautes dont nous nous sommes rendus coupables envers vous, nous venons protester de notre sincère repentir. En présence de notre bon pasteur qui nous a recommandé si souvent de vous aimer, nous vous promettons d’être désormais plus obéissants envers vous, plus respectueux, plus dévoués, ainsi que la loi divine nous commande. Nous nous empresserons d’imiter vos vertus et les saints exemples que vous nous montrerez. Vous êtes nos guides, nous nous attacherons donc toujours à vos pas certains que vous ne nous enseignerez jamais, ni par vos exemples, ni par vos paroles ce qui pourrait nous éloigner de la pratique de nos devoirs religieux.”*<sup>167</sup>

Examining *Le Premier Voile* in this context, it could be suggested that Carrière used the ritual as an occasion in order to make a conspicuous comment on the harmonious coexistence of three different generations and the importance of continuity within the family. The fact that the painting communicates an ideal which is not only Christian but also pre-eminently republican, might explain why it was bought by the State. The discreet presence of the grandparents underscores the sacred character of the event as a celebration which magnifies the notion of family solidarity along with all the virtuous things that spring from it. The elderly couple stand in the background and observe their grandchild; it seems as if, approaching the end of their life, they consciously withdraw in the shadows while a younger

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<sup>167</sup>Anonymous, *Chants pour la Première Communion*, (Bar-le-Duc 1878), p. 6, 7.

generation is coming forth. The girl is recognised as an individual, claiming an active role and gaining the beholder's attention. Also, returning to Breton's work of 1884 and considering it in this framework, it could be argued that he conceived and narrated the event in two dimensions. He first portrayed it as a collective, communal happening that one may observe in the background and then he rendered it as a family experience by recording the reactions of the individuals in the foreground. Leon Pléé, art critic, wrote of this image: "*Une des communicantes arrête et ses yeux bleues sourient et vont à ceux qu'elle aime et qui l'admirent. Ils vont la suivre en esprit jusqu'à l'église.*"<sup>168</sup> The grandmother kisses the young girl and the grandfather stretches out his arm to touch her. This adolescent is the tangible proof that they can place hope in the family's continuity, a thought which is comforting to them.

### 3. The Communicant Girl as Symbol of Purity.

Children of both genders were admitted to the Sacrament the same day. However, in the works of art where this ritual is represented, boys are either absent or occupy a marginal place. Therefore, in his engraving *La Première Communion à Mont Saint Père* (Fig. 23) which was exhibited in the SAF of 1885 and in the Exposition Universelle of 1889, Léon Lhermitte illustrated the male communicants only by "squeezing" them in the right front corner of the canvas.<sup>169</sup> Jules Breton, in the image discussed above, concentrated on the procession of girls ignoring the row of boys which would have followed. The reasons for this choice might have been, primarily, of a purely artistic nature. The figure of the female communicant provided the painters with considerable visual advantages. More specifically, in 1897, the art-critic Louis Gonse, maintained that the First Communion was an inexhaustible subject because it constituted a pretext to create a symphony in white tones.<sup>170</sup> The white muslin of the girls' robes gave artists the opportunity to experiment with a colour with challenging qualities and study the light-effects on it. However, painters' preference should not be disassociated from the factors which define the art market conditions; girls are considered prettier, more graceful, and thus more commercialised subjects, than pubescent boys. The Dominican Henry Charles Chéry in his study of the history of the ritual talked

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<sup>168</sup> Bourrut Lacouture, 'Les Communicantes de Jules Breton', p.179.

<sup>169</sup> Le Pelley-Fonteny, *Léon Auguste Lhermitte*, p.452.

<sup>170</sup> Gonse Louis, 'Les Salons de 1897', *Le Monde moderne*, vol.6, July 1897, p.60.



about the “*charme parfaitement légitime qu’apportent ces blancheurs à l’église et dans les rues de la cité.*”<sup>171</sup> The representation of a person in the bloom of maidenhood wearing a bride’s habit, along with the suggested mix of her juvenile pride and embarrassment, allowed more sentimental responses than the rendering of a boy feeling uncomfortable in his first dark costume. Her portrait would enchant the viewer more than that of her male counterpart’s.

Nineteenth century French authors equally focused on girls’ and not boys’ Solemn Communion. Zola, in his novel *L’Assommoir* (1877), described young Nana’s preparation for the ritual along with the emotional outburst of her violent, alcoholic father who, before the spectacle of his daughter “receiving Christ” in front of the Church altar, found himself unable to hold his tears. The same writer narrated the rite of passage of two of his heroines: that of Pauline in *La Joie de vivre* (1883) and that of Angélique in *Le Rêve* (1888). Finally, in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (1862) the consumptive, moribund Fantine happily envisages the future First Communion of her illegitimate daughter whom she, a “fallen” woman, has not seen for over five years. “*Cosette aura un voile blanc, des bas à jour, elle aura l’air d’une petite femme.*”<sup>172</sup>

It should be remembered that the maiden in white is a powerful symbol with a long history in the visual culture of Western Christianity. Her delicate figure stereotypically invokes ideas of morality. Innocence, as well as sin, emerges from the depiction of the feminine; since the Middle Ages, both in literature and in painting, the female has been recurrently rendered as a vessel of virtue or vice. Women’s presence was considered more “meaningful” in the sense that it could become the vehicle which expresses certain established ideas. In this context, the social and religious undertones of the *Communion Solennelle* found a fuller expression in girls’ portraits. Young communicants, almost invariably represented by male painters from different ideological backgrounds, possibly reflect the power of seduction exercised by the ambiguous figure of the woman-child. Their portraits convey a reassuring and appealing idea of sexual innocence encompassed in the concept of the sacralised woman as this was envisioned by the French Symbolists and, earlier in the century, by the British Pre-Raphaelites.

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<sup>171</sup> Henry Charles Chéry, *La Communion Solennelle en France* (Paris 1952), p.123.

<sup>172</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, vol 1. Paris 1935, (1862), p.329

At this point, I intend to argue that a girl dressed in *habitu angelorum* was perceived as an incarnation of chastity. Therefore, to the eyes of the beholder, she became the signifier of the moral values which derive from this virtue, cherished both by Catholics and anticlerical Republicans. Considering the communicant, one might safely posit that everything about her, clothes and accessories, was charged with a symbolic import. The white robe reflected her purity, it referred to Christ as the Lamb of God offered during the Eucharist and symbolised the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin.<sup>173</sup> The crown which was made of roses and lilies - the flowers of Mary - represented the communicant's heavenly reward. The crucifix on her chest conveyed the virtues of courage and piety, the wallet hanging from her waist charity and the rosary confidence in the Mother of God.<sup>174</sup> Mary's presence was of great significance because it accentuated the idea of purity; since the seventeenth century the promoters of the *Communion Solennelle* insisted that youths should dedicate themselves to her.<sup>175</sup> Thus, the day after the great event, girls would place their wreath of flowers at the feet of the altar in order to honour Christ's mother.<sup>176</sup> Beyond that, the act of consecration to the Virgin formed an integral part of the ceremony since before the Eucharist children would recite the following words:

*“C’est à vous, après Jésus, que nous devons la joie de ce jour, le plus beau de notre vie. Nous vous promettons de travailler à nous rendre dignes de plus en plus d’approcher souvent de cette Table sainte; c’est la résolution que nous déposons à vos pieds. Soyez, Marie, notre Reine, notre Avocate et notre Mère, éloignez de nous le souffle contagieux du monde. Ne permettez pas que nous ayons le malheur de souiller cette robe d’innocence. Gravez ô divine Mère, dans le Cœur de vos enfants, votre éloignement pour le péché.”*<sup>177</sup>

In his work of 1888 titled *Première Communion* (Fig.24) Henri Desrousseau (1862-1902) represented a nun helping a little girl to put on her veil. The white tulle on the child's head comprises a signifier of virginity and modesty, two values encapsulated both in the imposing presence of the *religieuse* and in the image of the Madonna which is hanging from the wall, picture within the picture. An icon of the Virgin constitutes a particularly appropriate supplement in a painting which depicts a girl's preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist. She was a model of femininity fervently promoted by the Church which taught that she was

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<sup>173</sup> Florence Trebaol, Robert Roudaut, William Wheeler, *Souvenirs de Première Communion* (Paris 1997), p.40, 96.

<sup>174</sup> Trebaol, Roudot, Wheeler, *Souvenirs*, 1997, p.96 and Mergnac, *Communions d’hier*, p.30.

<sup>175</sup> Delumeau (ed.), *Première Communion*, p.153.

<sup>176</sup> Delumeau (ed.), *Première Communion*, p.182.

<sup>177</sup> Anonymous, *Chants*, p.43, 44.

conceived without original sin. Women were invited to lead their existence inspired by her perfect humility, maternal devotion, obedience to the divine will, but first and foremost her chastity. Again, looking at Breton's *Les Communiantes* of 1884, we can deduce that the ceremonial robe might have had a powerful effect on the way the others perceived the moral identity of the young girl who wore it. It seems that the immaculate habit not only marked its owner's transition into another life-stage but also elevated her to a mystical sphere; the robe made girls appear saintly, transforming them into beings that could naturally awaken people's affection. The elderly couple who are caressing Breton's communicant look emotionally overwhelmed; the white dress of their grandchild underscores her virginal fragility and reveals the reality of her purity.

It might be argued that the concept of holiness due to virginity emanate from portraits of communicants. In 1875, Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884), a republican painter, created the portrait of his fourteen year-old cousin and goddaughter Lucie as *première communicante* (Fig.25). Bastien had promised to give the work to the child's family when he realised that it could be sold at a good price, since the majority of the critics received it with enthusiasm and words of praise. To avoid displeasing his relatives, the young painter finally offered them a copy slightly larger than the original and signed it with the affectionate words: *bon souvenir à ma petite Lucie*.<sup>178</sup> Actually, the subject was not arbitrarily chosen: it was every godparent's duty to offer a gift to the youth in the memory of this event. The sitting position of Lucie and the firm drawing bear a striking resemblance with Hans Holbein's *Anne of Clèves* (Fig. 26), which Bastien would have had the opportunity to see at the Louvre.<sup>179</sup> In 1885, referring to this portrait, the deceased artist's friend and critic André Theuriet underscored the sitter's youthful embarrassment, along with the artist's affiliation with the fifteenth century Northern European Masters. The work's modernity seems to emanate from the ability of its author to assimilate a great artistic heritage:

*“Cette candide et gauche figure de fillette se détachant d’un fond laiteux dans la raideur légère de son voile blanc empesé, ouvrant naïvement ses yeux purs couleur de noisette et croisant ses doigts mal à l’aise dans les gants blancs, est merveilleuse de science et de sincérité. Elle rappelle la manière de Memling*

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<sup>178</sup> Marie-Madeleine Aubrun, *Jules Bastien-Lepage 1848-1884, Catalogue raisonné de l’œuvre*, (Paris 1985), p.96.

<sup>179</sup> *Jules Bastien – Lepage (1848-1884)*, Exhibition Catalogue, Lemoine Serge, Lobstein Dominique, Lecasseur Marie, et al. Paris, Musée d’Orsay 5 mai – 13 mai 2007, Verdun, Centre Mondial de la Paix 14 juin – 3 Septembre 2007, p.86, 87.

*et de Clouet avec un sentiment tout moderne. Elle offre d'autant plus d'intérêt qu'elle a été, pour le peintre, le point de départ de ces petits portraits si vivants, si intimes, d'une facture à la fois si large et si consciencieuse, qui comptent parmi ses chefs- d'œuvre les plus parfaits.*"<sup>180</sup>

The quality which made the Flemish primitives appealing to Bastien-Lepage was possibly the meticulous care these first lavished in the representation of lifeless objects, parts of the material or natural world, in an attempt to integrate them into great religious scenes.<sup>181</sup> The “*primitives*” observed everyday life and focused their interest on the humble and the commonplace. Their method showed Bastien the path which leads to the secularisation of religious subjects.

Through the composition's symmetry and the lack of narrative which derive from the absence of any social setting the artist managed to set up an icon. No episode disturbs the sense of balance coming from the sitter's stiff and conventional pose which evokes the way she experienced her situation. The portrait's viewer is confronted at the same time with Lucie as an individual and with the communicant girl as an idea, a social condition and a transitional life-stage. In its static solemnity the image of Bastien acquires a ceremonial quality. One might suggest that, in this youthful presence which emerges from the immaculately white mass of tulle, chastity manifests itself as sanctity. The crowned head of the child and the position of her hands carefully united under her waist trace an elliptical shape which reminds one of the aureoles that surround the figures of Jesus and Mary in Christian iconography. Nevertheless, art critics did not use religious connotations in order to describe this communicant. In reality, Lucie does not appear stirred by mystical joy, religious ardour or other pious emotions awakened during the Sacrament. The absence of two indispensable first communicant accessories strengthen the evidence that the republican artist did not venture to evoke Christian ideas: the child does not hold her breviary, nor do we see the rosary hanging from her belt. Thus, the Church's presence can only be perceived in the whiteness of the robe which refers to her virginity. Lucie's serene expression renders her as something more than a shy little girl. She has the serious and reserved attitude of the minor who assumes an adult role; actually, Bastien bestowed her with the *gravitas* of a young woman. It is important to remember that the transition from girlhood to womanhood which coincided with the time of the First Communion comprised a “dramatic” passage. This is marked by the appearance of

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<sup>180</sup> André Theuriet, *Jules Bastien, L'homme et l'artiste* (Paris 1885), p.25.

<sup>181</sup> *Jules Bastien-Lepage*, Lemoine et al, 2007, p.86.

physical symptoms such as menstruation which confirm the person's ability to procreate. It is possible that Lucie Bastien, wearing the "miniature" of a wedding gown, rehearses for the role she was destined to play later in life, envisaging herself as a real bride. The term *petite mariée* was utilised in order to label the communicant girl.<sup>182</sup> In Jules Breton's poem verses from which were cited above, the first communicants are described as brides of Christ who expect their divine spouse to descend and unite with them. In *L'Assommoir* Émile Zola narrated the moments when the pubescent Nana and Pauline receive both the humorous remarks and the serious advice of the adults who participate in the family meal after the ritual and make hints on the girls' future marriage.

*“Mais les reines de la fête furent les deux petites, Nana et Pauline, auxquelles on avait permis de ne pas se déshabiller; puis, au dessert, on causa sérieusement de l'avenir des enfants... Boche disait que Nana et Pauline étaient des femmes, maintenant qu'elles avaient communié. Poisson ajoutait qu'elles devaient désormais savoir faire la cuisine, raccommoier les chaussettes, conduire une maison. On leur parla même de leur mariage et des enfants qui leur pousseraient un jour. Les gamines écoutaient et rigolaient en dessous, se frottaient l'une contre l'autre, le cœur gonflé d'être des femmes, rouges et embarrassées dans leurs robes blanches.”*<sup>183</sup>

Zola also used the word 'reine' to describe the communicants. Quite likely, the choice of Holbein's *Anne of Cleves* as a model for the child's posture was intentional and bestowed her with royal dignity; for this special day, Lucie, like other communicants, is honoured as a 'queen' in her crowning day, timid and embarrassed because of her youth. Finally, I would suggest that the expectations Lucie received from her parents defined the way she perceived her own identity. In this portrait she is rendered the individual her mother and father wanted her to be; she incarnates their ideal which possibly did not differ from her personal aspirations.

Getting back to the idea of sexual innocence, the fact that the communicant's robe was fashioned in order to underscore her virginity is inextricably linked to nineteenth century convictions concerning marriage which was taken to encapsulate women's purpose in life. As will be extensively discussed in another chapter, both the Church and the State valued this social convention as pivotal. The notion of female chastity engaged *croyants* and *laïques* as it was to them at the same time a moral value and a marketable good, a virtue and a capital.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>182</sup> Trebaol, Roudot, Wheeler, *Souvenirs*, p.50.

<sup>183</sup> Emile Zola, *L'Assommoir*, (Paris 1976 (1877)), p. 394-396.

<sup>184</sup> Anne-Martine Fugier, *La Bourgeoise: la femme au temps de Paul Bourget* (Paris 1983), p.52.

Woman's sexuality was never regarded as something that she could possess. Before her wedding her purity, which was thought to contain the fullness of her moral integrity, was guarded by her father, who would offer it to his daughter's fiancé. Finally, after marriage, like her dowry and her assets, a woman's spousal chastity belonged to her husband.

In this context, an additional reason why the French state purchased Carrière's work might be found in the title. The words *Le Premier Voile* contain the idea of the First Communion as the prefiguration of the girl's anticipated wedding. In this painting, the maiden who wears the veil as signifier of her chastity will approach the altar and unite with her "divine Spouse", present according to the Catholic doctrines in the form of bread and wine. The second time, she will wear the veil whose symbolism is always the same in order to go to church and become somebody's wife. Élie Faure posited that Carrière always believed in the social necessity of symbols.<sup>185</sup> One might be tempted to identify a gesture of political inclusiveness in the state's decision to buy this work. The regime's representatives wished to show that if they had rejected Catholic doctrines, they tolerated Church rituals and acknowledged their symbolic power along with their ability to unite people. Furthermore, they possibly wanted to demonstrate their respect for and affiliation with Christian values, most of which were adopted by the Republic; in the last meeting of the Congrès de Tours on 18 april 1884, Jean Macé, who was brought up as a Catholic, said that: "*A mes yeux la République c'est la pratique sociale de la morale de l'Évangile... Ces idées-là, sont entrées en moi sous le couvert du divin, et, du divin parti, elles sont restées chez moi, parce qu'elles y étaient chez elles, parce qu'elles se trouvaient d'accord avec ma conscience et ma raison*".<sup>186</sup>

#### **4. The Woman's Allegiance to the Church: Catholicism as Doctrine and Ideology.**

Concerning the religious dimension of the rite, Catholic clergymen considered the Sacrament of Eucharist as the vital centre of Christian life. The development of a special Mass attended by all first communicants raised the public profile of the *Communion Solennelle* which comprised "a visible spectacle of faith and devotion for the parish community."<sup>187</sup> In its deliberate attempt to use this ritual in order to enchant those who were indifferent towards Christianity and bring tears to the eyes of stonehearted people, the Church was successful. As

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<sup>185</sup> Élie Faure, *Eugène Carrière, peintre et lithographe* (Paris 1908), p.82.

<sup>186</sup> <http://yannickdeshogues.free.fr/pdf/8CROYANT.pdf> in <http://yannickdeshogues.free.fr/index.htm>.

<sup>187</sup> McGrail, *First Communion*, p.12.

mentioned before, Zola in his novel *L'Assommoir* described the impact that this solemn ceremony exercised on young Nana's father:

*‘‘A l’église, Coupeau pleura tout le temps. C’était bête, mais il ne pouvait se retenir. Ça le saisissait, le curé faisant les grands bras, les petites filles pareilles à des anges défilant les mains jointes ; et la musique des orgues lui barbotait dans le ventre, et la bonne odeur de l’encens l’obligeait à renifler, comme si on lui avait poussé un bouquet dans la figure. Enfin, il voyait bleu, il était pincé au cœur. Il y eut particulièrement un cantique, quelque chose de suave, pendant que les gamines avalaient le bon Dieu, qui lui sembla couler dans son cou, avec un frisson tout le long de l’échine. Autour de lui, d’ailleurs, les personnes sensibles trempaient aussi leur mouchoir. Vrai, c’était un beau jour, le plus beau jour de la vie. Seulement, au sortir de l’église, quand il alla prendre un canon avec Lorilleux, qui était resté les yeux secs et qui le blaguait, il se fâcha, il accusa les corbeaux de brûler chez eux des herbes du diable pour amollir les hommes. Puis, après tout, il ne s’en cachait pas, ses yeux avaient fondu, ça prouvait simplement qu’il n’avait pas un pavé dans la poitrine.’’<sup>188</sup>*

In another novel, *Le Rêve*, Zola portrayed the way an ecclesiastical embroiderer experienced his adopted child's preparation for the Sacrament. Zola did not omit to mention that the girl's adoptive parents practiced with the simple faith of humble people and to a great extent in order to satisfy their clientele. However, by demanding a diligent spiritual preparation for the First Communion, the priests were counting on children in order to catechise the adults.<sup>189</sup>

*‘‘Lorsqu’ Angélique fit sa Première Communion, il lui sembla qu’elle marchait comme les saintes, à deux coudées de terre. Elle était une jeune chrétienne de la primitive Église, elle se remettait aux mains de Dieu, ayant appris dans le livre qu’elle ne pouvait être sauvée sans la grâce. Hubert, lui, s’interrompait parfois de tendre un métier, pour écouter l’enfant lire ses légendes, dont il frémissait avec elle, les cheveux envolés au léger souffle de l’invisible.’’<sup>190</sup>*

The Church always regarded the First Communion as the crowning moment of Christian initiation which coincided with the awakening of conscience and morality.<sup>191</sup> Etienne-Michel Faillon, priest and historian (1800-1870), posited that catechism which prepared the children for the Sacrament of Eucharist had a double purpose: a person's indoctrination and sanctification.<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, in 1891, cardinal Langenieux stated that the

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<sup>188</sup> Zola, *L'Assommoir*, p. 393-394.

<sup>189</sup> Trebaol, Roudot, Wheeler, *Souvenirs*, p.10.

<sup>190</sup> Emile Zola, *Le Rêve* (Paris 1888), p.39.

<sup>191</sup> Hong, *Catéchèse et profession de foi*, p.35, 43.

<sup>192</sup> Gerard Sloyan (ed.), *Shaping the Christian Message*. Essays on Religious Education (New York 1959), p. 99.

communicants should know by heart their “*grand et petit catéchisme*” so that they would later receive the Body of Christ displaying the devotion which was demanded by the Holy Spirit.<sup>193</sup> For the clergy, the ritual comprised an occasion when the individual was invited to repeat, thus renewing, the vows pronounced by his godparents during his christening. By this act, the adolescent consciously and eagerly proclaimed before the members of the parish the resolution to remain faithful to these sacred promises. The candle every child had to hold in its hand comprised a direct reference to the moment of baptism. The flame of faith, like that of the candle; should never be put out.<sup>194</sup> Finally, Peter McGrail in his study of the ritual explained that the service itself had to be short and dramatic in order to create an enduring impression to the young person whose emotional and intellectual response would ensure his allegiance to the Catholic Church.<sup>195</sup>

The person’s perseverance was not only crucial but indispensable according to ecclesiastics.<sup>196</sup> Youths who attended catechism would get small prizes according to the measure of diligence and piety they exhibited during the courses. Those who could read were rewarded with breviaries and other books of piety, while others were offered rosaries, or little icons.<sup>197</sup> Also, after receiving the sacrament they were all provided with a small keepsake image which, during the years of the Second Empire, would often depict a young communicant kneeling by the tabernacle before the Virgin and Christ as a toddler. Mary appeared to the youths as their “mother”, whereas Jesus as a “little brother.”<sup>198</sup> The Infant of the tabernacle signified less the real presence of his physical body in the Bread than God’s preference for the innocent hearts of the children. Nevertheless, in other keepsakes the communicants’ host behind the altar was Christ wearing a crown of thorns (Man of Sorrows); in the idea of his Sacrifice the doctrines of Incarnation and Redemption interweaved with each other.<sup>199</sup> After 1870 the imagery of these souvenirs became simpler: a dove, a lily or the Sacred Heart, were the most common motifs. Only in the 1880s, as a reaction to the increasing secularisation of France, was there an explosion of cheap images which were

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<sup>193</sup> Andrieux, *La Première Communion*, p.246.

<sup>194</sup> Chéry, *La Communion Solennelle*, p.48.

<sup>195</sup> McGrail, *First Communion*, p.12 and Jean Claude Dhotel, *Les Origines du catéchisme moderne* (Paris 1967), p.392.

<sup>196</sup> Chéry, *La Communion Solennelle*, p.313.

<sup>197</sup> Dhotel, 1967, p.392.

<sup>198</sup> Delumeau, *Première Communion*, p.153.

<sup>199</sup> Delumeau, *Première Communion*, p.160.



available to all, confirmed children's indissoluble bonds to the Church, and were intended to invoke in their memory the sentiments of piety felt during the particular day.<sup>200</sup>

As catechism was an indispensable part of the procedure that led to the First Communion, this latter could naturally be perceived as an opportunity seized by the priests who ventured to brainwash young, innocent minds. Pascal Blanchard, a member of the *Société des Artistes Français* who created the mosaics for the chapels of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louis in Paris, painted the work *Communion Solennelle* in 1902 (Fig.27).<sup>201</sup> In the row of genuflecting adolescents represented in the foreground of the canvas, the artist deliberately evoked the participants' state of mind which corresponds to three stages of the ceremony. He was eager to show the variety, depth and sequence of emotions connected to the most crucial moment of the ritual. In this context he represented absorption, anticipation and ecstasy. Thus, a girl who has received the Eucharist remains kneeling in prayer, while another one in the middle is about to receive the host administered by the priest. Finally, the person who is portrayed on the right hand corner waiting for her turn constitutes a manifestation of mystic exaltation. It has to be noted that although the clergy expected young people to participate in the Sacrament with fervour, there were reasonable voices which warned the priests not to stir the acolytes too deeply with their preaching. Father Faillon for instance, openly opposed methods which could raise strong emotions and upset adolescents, favouring a gentle form of indoctrination that would have more enduring results.<sup>202</sup>

Venturing to focus exclusively on the religious aspect of the First Communion as the supreme moment of a child's initiation to the faith, Blanchard deliberately omitted the children's parents and relatives. Therefore, in the image, the nun arranging the veil of the girl in the background is the only adult presence along with the prominent figure of the elderly priest. It would be absurd to maintain that Pascal Blanchard's rendering of the rite is derogatory; his stance towards it seems positive and his recording of the participants' sentiments naturalistic. A Catholic viewer would be contented with these young girls' display of devotion; their figures convey a sacred bliss, reminding of the verse of Breton's poem: "*Extase! Doux effroi du volupté mystique.*"<sup>203</sup> However, the atmosphere this work exudes

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<sup>200</sup> Delumeau, *Première Communion*, p.182.

<sup>201</sup> Jacques Benoist, *Le Sacré Cœur de Montmartre. Spiritualité, art et politique 1870-1923* (Paris 1992), p. 669-670.

<sup>202</sup> Sloyan, *Shaping the Christian Message*, p.100.

<sup>203</sup> Breton, 'Les Premières Communiantes', p.440.

could make a radical republican revolt. Blanchard's *Communion Solennelle* might be interpreted as a means of promoting Catholicism. The girls appear to be in the grip of the priests who have assisted the work of their indoctrination, orchestrated the ritual and taught them that Church is like Paradise, where they can speak with their Saviour as children with their Father. Indeed, the words of the prayer which the catechetical instructors advised the students to say after the First Communion are evocative of their attempt to provoke religious zeal: "O Jesus for Thee I live; for Thee I die; Thine am I in life and death. I thank Thee for coming to me, for giving Thyself to me."<sup>204</sup> The girls portrayed here, have embraced what the anticlerical milieu castigated as Catholic propaganda; with their downcast gaze, lost in the contemplation of fictional things, they are convinced that they are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. In their figures the advocates of a secular State might identify the eternal allies of an ultra-conservative institution, run by the enemies of reason and democracy and still flourishing in the dawn of the twentieth century.

In 1888, Henri Desrousseaux created the work *La Veille de la Première Communion* (Fig.28) which represents the interior of an old church where some girls are gathered together in order to pray. Based on the title we can deduce that the sitters are at the end of the three-day retreat period during which they were expected to meditate upon their condition as baptised Christians.<sup>205</sup> The painter, like Blanchard, recorded the different attitudes of the girls during this moment of devotion, aiming to evoke their different states of mind: one of them is rendered on her knees and with the head bending over her joined hands and another one is shown reading a breviary, while the child in the front row has turned her face to the altar where the Sacrament is kept. The fact that the future communicants are wearing the same sober, grey clothes and are observed by two nuns genuflecting on their *prie-dieu* chairs, allows us to maintain that they are residents of a Church orphanage run by a female monastic order. The presence of the nuns is extremely significant. They are the spiritual guardians of these orphan girls, responsible for their education and indoctrination and charged with the duty to make them pious and obedient to the Christian laws. They accompany the young students in order to encourage their exaltation, stimulate their piety and safeguard an impeccable religious observance by preventing them from lapsing into the frivolities that characterise their age. The presence of Christ in the monstrance behind the altar on one side,

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<sup>204</sup> James Nist, *Private First Communion Instructions for Little children*, (St Louis MO, 1914), p.2, 3, 4, 37.

<sup>205</sup> Hong, *Catéchèse et profession de foi*, 1999, p.12.

and that of his earthly representatives on the other envelop the five girls. This environment may be decisive for their future existence as it determines the shaping of their religious and moral identity. It must be mentioned here that in his short career, the now obscure Desrousseaux repeatedly treated the subject of First Communion, putting emphasis on the religious side of the rite. Actually, two of his works, are dated in 1888; it is not impossible that he wanted to defend its essentially Catholic character which was threatened by the increasing secularisation of France.

Another notion that emerges from representations of girls' First Communion is the continuity of faith. As discussed in the following chapters, French women remained more attached to Catholicism than men both due to the influence of their diligent instruction and to the effect of certain powerful cultural norms. In this context, I would argue that in Desrousseaux's work where the nun is portrayed dressing a girl for the rite this artist considers the idea that Christian belief and morality are going to be perpetuated. In this environment the young sitter imbibes the spirit of devotion that this sister assumes. One might claim that the absence of the mother in this solemn moment when the child puts on the veil indicates that she is either an orphan residing in a Church charity institution, or a student in a congregational school. In any case, since it is the nun who has taken the responsibility of preparing the communicant, the latter is not rendered the offspring of her natural parents, but identified as a spiritual daughter of the Church.

The importance of the continuity of faith was underlined by Guillaume Alfred Heinrich (1829-1887), the devout *doyen de la Faculté des Lettres de Lyon*. This man described the responsibilities that burdened young persons who had received the Sacrament of Eucharist; after their First Communion they were invited to infuse love and respect for Christian principles to the hearts of their juniors. The piety of the old safeguarded the devotion of the young.<sup>206</sup> Members of congregations and priests transmitted their creeds to future mothers and grandmothers, giving them an important role in the revival of the Church; thanks to women devotion would increase in the next generations.

It can be argued that the presence of the grandmother in images depicting girls' First Communion, confirms the idea that the Catholic faith is transmitted from the old to the young. In the *Soir de la Première Communion* (Fig. 21) exhibited in the Salon of 1888 by Alfred

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<sup>206</sup> Heinrich, 1911, p. 45, 55, 56.

Guillou, a communicant delicately holds the hand of a frail, elderly peasant woman who is also sustained by the child's mother. A gesture of filial respect, compassion and tenderness is almost anticipated by the angelic, vestal presence of this girl from Brittany. She is a befitting embodiment of female kindness, which might derive from her piety. Her charity - as the mother's presence indicates - is expected to be perpetuated. Besides, the mother, with her devotion and self-sacrificing love, was considered the only person who could mould a young girl's soul and make her a pious, amiable adult.<sup>207</sup> The *Soir de la Première Communion* does not portray the rite as a social convention; I would argue that it conveys the solidarity established among three different generations of women, who not only share a common destiny and social position but also, very importantly, partake in the same religious tradition. Léonce Bénédite, an art critic and, as the *Musée du Luxembourg* curator, a republican civil servant, in his short comment on the work did not mention anything concerning its Christian aspect, but was contented to praise the Breton Guillou for representing “*le plus joli fond crépusculaire dans sa promenade d'une jeune communicante aux blancheurs exquis.*”<sup>208</sup> According to Michael Orwicz ignoring the religious aspect of genre scenes which represented Catholic traditions constitutes a common characteristic of liberal criticism. Unlike the conservative art-critics, the republican left refused to consider the nuances of Christian piety in art-works.<sup>209</sup>

##### 5. First Communion as a Modern Spectacle: *La Communion à l'Église de la Trinité*.

Henri Gervex's large painting *La Communion à l'église de la Trinité* was exhibited in the Salon of 1877 (Fig.29) when France was governed by the Republic of Moral Order, and was bought by the State.<sup>210</sup> It would be precarious to assert that the conservative, “Catholic-friendly” regime straightforwardly encouraged the creation of such works or that it prepared the ground for their favourable reception. Referring to the origins of his inspiration, Gervex, republican and free-thinker, claimed that: “*c'était lespectacle très parisien à l'église de la*

<sup>207</sup> Guillaume-Alfred Heinrich, *Le Livre de la persévérance, conseils après la Première Communion*, (Lyon 1911) p. 94.

<sup>208</sup> Léonce Bénédite, ‘Le Salon de 1888’, *Paris illustré*, p.334. (date unknown, source taken from the Documentation of the Musée d'Orsay), p.334.

<sup>209</sup> Orwicz ‘Confrontations et clivages dans le discours de critiques de Salon 1885-1889’, Jean-Paul Bouillon (ed.), *La Critique d'art en France 1850-1900: Actes du colloque de Clermont-Ferrand 25-27 mai 1987* (Saint-Etienne 1989), p.182.

<sup>210</sup> Bourrut-Lacouture, *Les Premières Communiantes?*, p.177.

*Trinité qui m'a donné l'idée de ce tableau.*"<sup>211</sup> Using the term "Parisian spectacle", the artist put the work into the category of *genre*, thus undermining its reading as a religious painting. Actually, he was not particularly concerned with the participants' piety, but was preoccupied with conveying aspects of modern bourgeois life. The recently established church of the Trinity where this First Communion ceremony takes place, constituted a signifier for social class; completed in 1897, it was regarded as one of the most beautiful new buildings in Paris and many devout members of the upper bourgeoisie attended Mass there. Moreover, it is important to mention that the work comprises a product of Gervex's *flânerie*; his idea was born while he was strolling in the *quartier* where his own apartment was, not very far from this church.<sup>212</sup> In his painting Gervex represented some of his acquaintances who were also well known members of the Parisian society, a fact which enhances the contemporary and naturalistic character of his work. Thus, apart from the elderly architect of the church Théodore Ballu who is depicted on the bottom left of the canvas, the famous courtesan Louise Valtesse de la Bigne is also portrayed leaning against the balustrade. This young woman, the *maîtresse* of many artists including Gervex himself, is rendered as a mother reading her breviary, while the chorus of young virgins proceeds to receive the consecrated host. The choice did not provoke any scandal, but enhanced the worldly character of the picture.<sup>213</sup>

This painting's modern quality is conveyed via a number of elements one of which was regarded as a flaw; the art-critic Paul Mantz, writing in *Le Temps* on 27th of May 1877, reproached Gervex for a certain lack of accuracy in the drawing which intensifies the decorative effect. Nevertheless, despite his objections with regard to draughtsmanship, Mantz appreciated the work's luminous tones, the depiction of the church interior and the meticulous rendering of the women's dresses.

*"C'est un tableau où ne manquent ni l'imprévu d'une manœuvre un peu lâchée, ni la limpidité de l'atmosphère. Les robes blanches des communicantes s'y combinent avec les clartés de l'église neuve et les costumes de fête d'assistants. L'impression est franchement lumineuse. Je voudrais dans le maniement du pinceau quelque chose de plus serré et de plus incisif; ces intérieurs de l'église alors, même qu'ils sont d'une dimension inusitée, font toujours penser aux motifs analogues qui ont été la gloire de l'École Hollandaise: Monsieur Gervex n'a pas ces longues patiences, il est un peu décorateur et il va vite en besogne. Mais par l'aspect général la scène reste*

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<sup>211</sup> Richelieu Drouot, Catalogue de vente, Paris 18 novembre 1994, p 10.

<sup>212</sup> Jules Bertaud, *Gervex Henri, Souvenirs recueillis par Jules Bertaud* (Paris 1924), p.32.

<sup>213</sup> Richelieu-Drouot, p.11.

*vraie et curieux des toilettes exactes et des attitudes remuantes l'auteur a bien marqué le cachet mondain qui, aux heures élégantes caractérise les dévotions à la mode.*"<sup>214</sup>

The last phrase of Paul Mantz reveals the essence of the work *La Communion à l'église de la Trinité*. By focusing on female dresses, Gervex served his cause; he represented a scene which discloses the bourgeois spirit of his era. The artist recorded fashionable Parisian upper class people's habits and morals and conveyed their tendency to appropriate sacred traditions in an attempt to satisfy a psychological need for display and social exchange. The First Communion constituted the most *chic* cult of the time and was experienced as a parade of beautiful gowns worn by the girls and their mothers. Becoming a "*dévotion à la mode*", this secularised rite was actually a triumph of bourgeois elegance. In his thesis, Peter McGrail maintained that an excessive care was lavished upon the *communiantes* whose sumptuous dress "had been occasionally interpreted as a countersign to the elaborate dress in court society." The communicants, the same writer stated, had become fashion items.<sup>215</sup>

In his diligent analysis of Gervex's work in *Le Monde illustré*, the art-critic Olivier Merson detected more or less the same visual qualities and imperfections as Paul Mantz, and like his colleague he did not mention anything related to the Sacrament itself; ignoring the religious aspect of the scene, he dealt only with the composition and the technique.

*"Un artiste de talent qui sait beaucoup et bien mais il faut le prévenir tout de suite qu'il gâte des précieuses qualités natives et acquises, par une manière lâche et expédiée ... Parfaite harmonie des tons, charme des clartés adoucies par le coloriage des vitraux, l'atmosphère chaude et imprégnée d'encens qui vibre partait la finisse et la fermeté d'un effet doux, inattendu et juste à la fois. A premier vue ce tableau touche vivement les regardants. C'est seulement au bout d'un peu d'examen qu'on songe à réclamer de l'artiste ce qu'il a négligé. Pourquoi se singulariser par des contours toujours hésitants flasques, bavochés? Pourquoi viser principalement des types vulgaires et sans beauté ... ?"*<sup>216</sup>

Maybe the republican convictions of the above mentioned art critics rendered them oblivious to the fact that Gervex neglected the spiritual dimension of the Solemn Communion. Unlike them, in his comment, the Catholic Henri Houssayé implied that the image was trivial and deficient because it disregarded the sentiments of piety which should emanate from the girls' faces. "*On doit critiquer les têtes de ces petites filles, d'un faire très tâché, d'une*

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<sup>214</sup> Mantz Paul, 'Le Salon de 1877', *Le Temps*, 27 mars 1877.

<sup>215</sup> McGrail, *First Communion*, p.13.

<sup>216</sup> Merson, 'Le Salon de 1877', *Le Monde illustré*, vol.40, 5 mai 1877, p.279, 282.

*banalité sans égale. Ces enfants ne disent rien, ce qui est leur devoir, mais elles n'en pensent pas d'avantage, ce qui n'est guère en situation.*"<sup>217</sup> Gervex did not wish to add something that was not there anymore; secularism had trampled down mysticism, ecstasy, devotion. Heinrich, the pious French academic whose views have already been quoted, claimed that by the 1870s in prosperous urban areas the rite has discarded its sacred meaning in order to become an empty, meaningless formality, a semi-secular feast.<sup>218</sup>

With his *Communion à l'église de la Trinité* the artist stepped into the territory of religious painting in the sense that he represented a sacrament in a large canvas, but he also boldly played with the codes of genre painting. Quite interestingly, this transgression befits the subject matter itself; the republican painter represented a liturgy which many worldly elements had invaded transforming its intended ecclesiastical character.<sup>219</sup> The *Communion à l'église de la Trinité* can be read as the young artist's attempt to impress and gain the sympathy of the ruling social stratum. In his desire to establish his fame among a bourgeois clientele, we should probably trace the choice of the theme. This stratum comprised both Catholics who primarily considered the First Communion as an intimate union of the child with Christ, and free-thinkers who regarded it as a rite of passage and a feast of childhood. Painting this subject Gervex satisfied both sides.

## **6. First Communion as a Caricature: Toulouse-Lautrec's *Jour de Première Communion* (1888).**

If Gervex's imposing Salon painting can be perceived as the positive and naturalistic rendering of a secularised Catholic ritual viewed in the social context of a triumphant upper-middle class, in 1888 Toulouse-Lautrec created his also very modern *Jour de Première Communion* (Fig.30) for another purpose and, therefore, in a different spirit. His work was one of the four images commissioned in order to illustrate Émile Michelet's article published in *Paris illustré*, a journal read by the middle ranks of the bourgeoisie. The text, titled *L'été à Paris*, focused on the life of poor Parisians who could not afford going on summer

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<sup>217</sup>Henri Houssayé, 'Le Salon de 1877', *Revue de deux mondes*, pér.3, vol 21, 1 juin 1877, p.608.

<sup>218</sup> Heinrich, *Le Livre de la persévérance*, p.43, 44.

<sup>219</sup> McGrail, *First Communion*, p.13.

holidays.<sup>220</sup> According to Toulouse-Lautrec's friend and fellow-artist François Gauzi, the essence drawing was finished within a few hours; it represents a family of five strolling in a Parisian street shortly before or after their daughter's First Communion. Gauzi posed for the awkwardly tall figure of the father who is pushing a pram. Lautrec's sitter had to appear wearing something which would transform him into 'un ouvrier endimanché': "*Mon pardessus était devenu une redingote, mon pantalon avait raccourci et mes pieds augmenté de volume*", he said.<sup>221</sup> The figures of the chubby mother, the self-satisfied communicant and her little sister were invented.<sup>222</sup>

I would argue that with this picture the artist ventured to make a sarcastic remark on the ethos of the lower strata. Actually, Lautrec, whose mother was a very devout woman, had rejected Catholicism and abandoned every religious practice in his late teens, when attendance of Mass could not be forced upon him. It was in 1888, the year this essence drawing was published, when the painter was photographed wearing the vestments of a choir boy, evidence that, as a reaction to his own Catholic upbringing, he disdained – or was at least prepared to poke fun at – the clergy and the observance of Church rituals. In the *Jour de la Première Communion* he was not concerned with this family's level of piety, but ridicules their relation to religion; in reality, the target of his mockery was the superficiality and vanity of deluded social climbers. With the snobbism of his own social position as an aristocrat, Lautrec probably wanted to disparage the attitude of some lower-class individuals, who claimed their right to be identified as members of the bourgeoisie, by assuming certain forms of this stratum's behaviour or by adopting its dress code. The scene is taking place in the summer, when the real bourgeois – the journal's readers – have left the capital. Those who stroll in the Parisian streets imitating their social superiors form a pathetic masquerade; only a caricature would be appropriate to render the derisory effect they made. The poor cannot fit into the clothes of the rich; Gauzi's trousers are so short that they leave his ankles exposed. Furthermore, it could be argued that Lautrec comments on the stance of a social stratum towards fashion and consumption; not unlikely, he used this reference to the First Communion in order to reinforce his views on the matter. The gangling man is not absorbed by his lively child on the pram; a shop's window, where some white shirts, another external attribute of his

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<sup>220</sup>Toulouse Lautrec, Exhibition Catalogue, Claire Frèches-Thory, Anne Roquebert, Richard Thomson *et al.*, London, Hayward Gallery, Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais 21 February - 1 June 1992, p.196.

<sup>221</sup>Gauzi François, *Lautrec mon ami*, Paris 1992 (1924), p.161, 163.

<sup>222</sup>Toulouse Lautrec, p.200.



class are on display, has captured his attention. The daughter, a big white spot among the dark dressed family members, follows the father with an expression that conveys complacency in her good looks. Conceit is a word that might successfully describe Lautrec's figures, whose happiness seems largely based on appearances. The clothes, which can be bought and are perishable, become a major device with which the upper-middle class and, hence, those who emulated them defined their identity. The choice of the First Communion is not random, since among the religious rites, it was the most ineradicably marked by the worldly bourgeois culture. As has been pointed out in the introduction and in the analysis of Gervex's work, at the end of the nineteenth century the rite was not seen as a solemn initiation to the Christian faith, but as an opportunity to socialise and a chance for pretentious self-display. The children's gown always followed the latest style, and most of them saw the day of their First Communion as an opportunity to look pretty and attract everybody's attention.<sup>223</sup> The working population also participated in a ceremony whose public character ensured that they will become the focus of attention. Their presence at their daughter's *Communion Solennelle* could guarantee that they would receive the approval of the others; that they would look at them and be stared at by them. This was part of their struggle to resemble the members of a higher rank, although they would always belong to the lower strata.

### **7. *Parce Domine*: the Communicant in Allegorical Painting.**

In the field of the visual arts, Adolphe Willette's allegorical painting *Parce Domine*, shown in the SNBA of 1885 (Fig.31), constitutes one of the rare examples where the figure of the young *communiante* is profaned. Due to its uniqueness it is discussed more extensively. In order to interpret its blasphemous content, one has to know the purpose for which it was created. Completed in 1884, *Parce Domine* was commissioned as decorative piece for the *Salle de Fêtes* of the notorious cabaret *Chat Noir* by the latter's owner, Rodolphe Salis. The cabaret was inaugurated in 1881 in order to gather avant-garde, talented young artists and poets, who would have the opportunity to expose and discuss their work respectively. An irreverent spirit towards the Church and the Republic was favoured by the people who

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<sup>223</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.62.

frequented this place; Salis was himself an anticlerical and despised democracy.<sup>224</sup> In *Parce Domine*, in the right hand corner of the canvas, Willette represented the figures of eight communicants floating over the roofs of Paris. Only one of the girls is depicted veiled, dressed in a white robe and holding a candle, but her seven companions are rendered completely naked. The pubescent appearance of their bodies, which “ascend” in the Parisian sky, makes their nakedness even more disturbing. Two of them stand still with their eyes closed and their hands united in prayer as if they are about to receive the Host. A couple of others who have already realised where they are heading seem astonishingly keen on joining the delirious crowd of decadent can-can dancers. The Catholic priest Jean Benoist, described this group of Willette’s young virgins as the most lamentable one could ever imagine. To his eyes, these communicants are irretrievably condemned to hell since they are marked with the sins of lust, pride and avarice. Benoist maintained that they bring themselves to unite with this terrible crowd which manifests the painter’s tragic view of human life.<sup>225</sup> Indeed, behind his intention to poke fun at religion, Willette claimed that he wanted to communicate the sad destiny of the bohemian world where he belonged: “*Peut-être que demeurant isolé, au bruit de cris et des rires de joyeux damnés partant de la Chaudière qu’est le soir le cabaret, j’ai pensé au triste sort qui est réservé à la plupart d’entre nous victimes de l’insouciance.*”<sup>226</sup>

In the poem he wrote to accompany this painting, Willette attributed the communicants’ gesture of dropping the virginal veil on the white snow – the untimely loss of sexual innocence - to misery or curiosity: “*Les blanches communicantes sortent de leurs mansardes: c’est la misère ou la curiosité qui fait tomber leurs voiles sur la neige dont les toits sont recouverts.*”<sup>227</sup> The girls get out of the attic, signifier of the secluded world of adolescence they inhabit, and become part of the sinful reality of the vicious adult world. In the poem of Louis le Pardonnet, published in the *Album de Chat Noir* (ca 1885), life in nineteenth century Paris resembles a witches’ Sabbath. This author compared the communicants’ vague desire to a trembling candle flame; eroticism manifests itself in their nudity but their dawning sexuality is still uncertain.

*“Au Sabbat inconnu de Paris entraînées, Vous envolant du haut des noires  
cheminées, Allez Vierges, allez nues dans le ciel blanc/ Votre vague désir, un*

<sup>224</sup> Mariel Oberthür, *Le Cabaret du Chat Noir à Montmartre 1881-1897*, (Genève 2007), p. 13, 15, 26, 43, 44.

<sup>225</sup> Jacques Benoist, *Léon Adolphe Willette dit Pierrot (1857-1926): Sa Messe et son souhait. 1914; La Messe des cendres pour les artistes dites la Messe Willette*, (Paris 1998), p.10.

<sup>226</sup> Adolphe Willette, *Feu Pierrot* (Paris 1919), p.162.

<sup>227</sup> Pierre Lagarde and Albert Fiero, *Vie et histoire du XVIII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement*, (Paris 1988), p.96, 97.

*cierge au feu tremblant/ Où se crispant vos doigts transits des symbolismes/  
Pour les Communions premières à l'Église/ Ce Satan dont s'effraie au lointain  
désolées/ Notre Dame rêvant près des fleuves gelés.*'<sup>228</sup>

Pardonnet's verses acknowledge that the girls' virginal figures bear a great symbolic power. Willette desecrated the ideal of purity they traditionally incarnate in order to serve his allegory, which addressed an audience of authors and painters interested in themes such as misery and prostitution.<sup>229</sup> Looking at *Parce Domine* which is charged with the idea of transgression, one might evoke Arthur Rimbaud's poem titled *Les Premières Communions* written in 1871. Allegedly, the seventeen year-old poet wrote it as an angry response to his sister's First Communion. Both Willette's painting and Rimbaud's literary work concentrated on women's inclination to depravity and their tendency to sin against purity. For the poet young girls do not wish to be respected; on the contrary, they find satisfaction when they become the target of vulgar boys: "*Les filles vont toujours à l'église, contentes /De s'entendre appeler garces par les garçons/ Qui font du genre après messe ou vêpres chantantes.*"<sup>230</sup> The idea that lecherousness hides in the soul of girls despite their vestal appearance emerges also in *Parce Domine*. Between the cabaret dancers and the naked communicants we can see a woman of loose morals riding a black cat. Of course, the animal which participates in this whirling spectacle should be primarily regarded as an obvious allusion to the cabaret's name: it was the favourite animal of the Parisian "*bohème*".<sup>231</sup> However, the *chat noir* had recurrently been used as a sign of lust, and a reference to the female genitals; it figures as such on the bed of Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863, oil on canvas, 130,5cm x 190cm, Paris, Musée d'Orsay) one of the most notorious courtesans ever represented on a canvas. It is a symbol of illicit sex, which was abhorred by the bourgeois and the Church, the main ideological enemies of Willette, who, like his friend Salis, was anticlerical and anti-republican.<sup>232</sup> The woman sitting on the cat brandishes an infant; this could be her illegitimate child, a common case among women who lead her kind of life. It is possible that she functions as a manifestation of what the eight young communicants are bound to become. The naked girls probably embody a former stage of the cabaret dancer's life, when this latter was a virgin dressed up in white but eager not only to dispose of her chastity but also content to drive men to their mental and

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<sup>228</sup> Louis le Pardonnet, 'Parce Domine', Rodolphe de Salis and Henri Rivière (eds.) *L'Album de Chat Noir*, ca. 1884, no page number.

<sup>229</sup> Oberthür, 'Le Cabaret', p.129.

<sup>230</sup> Rimbaud, *Collected Poems*, (Martin Sorrel trans.) (Oxford University Press 2006), p.116.

<sup>231</sup> Oberthür, *Le Cabaret*, p.13.

<sup>232</sup> Thomson, *La République troublée*, p.362. A fervent nationalist, Willette was an antisemite candidate in the 1889 elections.

physical destruction. In *Parce Domine* the man, eternal victim of the woman, is personified in the figure of the Pierrot who is represented in a dandy's costume.

The unusual *communicantes* do not comprise this painting's only reference to religion. On the left side of the canvas we can distinguish three nuns in the habit of the Sisters of Mercy who participate in the funeral pomp of the dead Pierrot. Once again, the artist utilised symbols related to Catholicism in a wickedly subverted context. Having committed suicide, Willette's hero would have been considered damned and he would not have been allowed to have a religious burial. However, the nun leading the procession is holding a black banner, sign of mourning for the deceased whose coffin is ascending to heaven. It is equally important to observe that the title of the work is supposed to be read as a "call for divine mercy". The words *Parce Domine* explained Adolphe Willette, is a clamour of horror and distress addressed to God by sorrowful people.<sup>233</sup> The original antiphon: *Parce Domine populo tuo, ne in aeternum irascaris nobis* - "Lord, spare your people and do not be angry with us forever" was used as a salutation of the Holy Sacrament during Lent. It was understood as an evocation of the world's disorder and an acknowledgment that the society was in disarray because of sin and lack of Christian faith.<sup>234</sup>

The idea of putting naked communicants in such a work is not astonishing in the sense that the young girls' distorted affiliation with Christian rites interweaves with the strange nature of Pierrot's adventures. According to Jean de Palacio, Pierrot is Adolphe Willette's alter ego and incarnates the man who has been exiled from Heaven.<sup>235</sup> In a series of illustrations completed by Willette in 1887 under the title *Pauvre Pierrot*, there is a short story called *Pierrot chez le Bon Dieu*, where an angel is shown leading the protagonist to the Gates of Paradise.<sup>236</sup> In *Parce Domine* the communicant girl who is still wearing her robe might be seen as a harmless maiden who lives in a "state of grace". The role of the man-Pierrot is to make her his bride, but conjugal life is the site where he inevitably meets his destiny.<sup>237</sup> Thus, after their union, his much desired spouse is transformed into the heartless Columbine, an avaricious creature who leads him to bankruptcy, despair and suicide: "*elle chipait mon or; mon meilleur vin le buvait; mon dos, le battait et durement; quant à mon front, elle le*

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<sup>233</sup> Luc Willette, *Adolphe Willette, Pierrot de Montmartre* (Paris 1991), p.57.

<sup>234</sup> Benoist, *Le Sacré Cœur*, p.605.

<sup>235</sup> Adolphe Willette, *Pauvre Pierrot* (Paris 1877), p.123.

<sup>236</sup> Willette, *Pauvre Pierrot* no page number.

<sup>237</sup> Jean Palacio, *Pierrot fin-de-siècle, ou Les métamorphoses d'un masque* (Paris 1990), p.229.

*meublait*.<sup>238</sup> Willette said that it was poverty – *misère* - which led the girls to lose their innocence. Like Lautrec’s family in the *Jour de Première Communion*, the communicants in *Parce Domine* want to change social class; however, they do not achieve their target by changing their clothes, but through vice. Finally, just like in the biblical tradition, where the woman is rendered responsible for the loss of Eden, in *Parce Domine* she comes forth as the instigator of a death that will perish the soul of the man.

It should also be observed that in Willette’s work the colours have a symbolic meaning; in Pierrot’s clothes, Jean de Palacio claimed, the white represents innocence before the *Fall*, whereas the black refers back to the Original Sin.<sup>239</sup> Although this character from the *Commedia dell’Arte* may be at once holy and evil, Columbine’s metamorphosis does not allow her to bear simultaneously two opposing natures. After she transgresses the state of innocence that she enjoyed as a communicant maiden, she fully embraces a darker self. During the course of her “marriage” the angelic virgin is transformed into an ominous being with the wings of an insect. It could also be suggested that in Willette’s work the dressed *communiante* stands as a symbol of purity, while her naked companions form a travesty of it. In conclusion, the large dimensions of the provocative *Parce Domine* and its purpose as mural decoration for a cabaret, render it a wicked counterpart the republican Town Hall wall paintings. Willette, with his provocative subject matter, challenged the moralistic themes that were sanctioned by the new regime; in the place of virtue, progress and order, his work projects a decadent vision of the modern urban life and culture.<sup>240</sup> He provides the viewer with a perverted version of the rite of passage that First Communion was supposed to be; instead of leading the girl to a regular life as wife and mother, it opens a path to debauchery. Willette’s blasphemous work turns against two authorities: the Church and the Republic.

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<sup>238</sup> Palacio, *Pierrot*, p.81.

<sup>239</sup> Palacio, *Pierrot*, p.160.

<sup>240</sup> *Toulouse Lautrec and Montmartre*, Exhibition Catalogue, Cate Phillip Dennis, Weaver Chapin Mary, Thomson Richard *et al*, Washington DC, National Gallery of Art, Chicago, Art Institute, March - October 2005, p.6.

## 8. First Communion and the Republicans: Catholicism as a Force of Moral Control.

As extensively discussed in the chapter dealing with female education, a number of anticlerical republicans despised the dissemination of superstition and rejected the fact that priests, who were regarded as enemies of democracy and progress, exercised their authority over women. Also, being invariably hostile towards the doctrine of Transubstantiation, they would ridicule phrases such as “taste the bread of angels”, “approach the heavenly food”, or “receive the Divine Species”, which were used during the Sacrament of Eucharist.<sup>241</sup> However, scathing remarks against the ceremony and the participants, even on behalf of radical *libre penseurs*, were not very common.

Thus, Élie Faure informs us that Carrière, who was a lapsed Catholic, did not oppose the First Communion of his daughter Elise.<sup>242</sup> In his writings, the artist explained how his stance towards organised religion was formulated: to him the ceremony formed part of a tradition he could not renounce and the charm of which did not leave him indifferent. Although he had rejected the doctrines, cultural norms, concepts and habits related to Catholicism exercised an important influence on him.

*“Ma mère avait des sentiments religieux, ce qui m’amena à fréquenter des églises. De bonne heure, je me plaisais fort à la cathédrale de Strasbourg. Toute la pompe religieuse me séduisait fort. Je passais ainsi l’éducation mystique commune à tous les hommes de notre temps et sans laquelle on ne peut les comprendre ; un si long passé de sentimentalité religieuse ne s’efface pas aisément. Je pris alors part aux processions, pèlerinages, et à tous les exercices religieux en usage.”*<sup>243</sup>

Later, in 1901, when the wife of the Jean Jaurès sent their daughter to a convent in Villefranche d’Albigeois, in order to prepare for her First Communion, the socialist politician stood aside, respecting her religious faith. Jaurès was forced to answer to his comrades’ relentless attacks and explain why he allowed young Madeleine to receive this Sacrament.<sup>244</sup> He was accused of following the bourgeois current and being ideologically incoherent; although he publicly attacked the Church and denounced its’ privileges, he did not try to force his convictions to his family. Like Carrière, Jaurès had a pious mother whom he admired; like

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<sup>241</sup> Delumeau, *La Première Communion*, p.204.

<sup>242</sup> Faure, *Eugène Carrière*, p.82.

<sup>243</sup>Émilie Cappella, *Moi Carrière. Le Poème adorable et tragique des tendresses humaines. L’artiste vu par ses contemporains* (Paris 2006), p.32.

<sup>244</sup> Jean Jaurès, *La Question religieuse et le socialisme*, Paris 1959 (1891), p.24.

the painter, the politician's attitude towards religious practice was defined by his personal beliefs and his experiences:

*“Je suis depuis l’adolescence, affranchi de toute religion et de tout dogme ...Dans la plupart des familles de la bourgeoisie républicaine et prolétariat socialiste, les jeunes filles ne sont ni cléricales, ni libres penseuses. Devenues femmes et mères, elles n’entendent pas que la vie soit absorbée par une dévotion fanatique et minutieuse. Le mari, le père ne croient pas et ne pratiquent pas, elles ne s’en émeuvent point. A l’exception d’un petit nombre, toutes, ouvrières ou bourgeoises sont restées attachées par une partie du moins de leur pensée et de leur cœur à la tradition catholique. Elles n’ont pas dit non à la croyance religieuse. Elles n’ont pas hors du christianisme de point d’appui de la vie morale. A la tradition religieuse, elles rattachent encore les grands événements de la vie, le mariage, la naissance des enfants, la mort. Elles ne se croient pas le droit d’interrompre à l’égard des enfants une tradition avec laquelle elles-mêmes n’ont pas rompu.”*<sup>245</sup>

We cannot fail to see that a gender division is applied to the question of Christian devotion. Tolerant and open-minded Jaurès exposed women's natural inclination towards the irrational. He made a clear distinction between men and women, a male realm which evolves and a female realm which is bound to remain unaltered. Husbands' lack of faith does not compromise their wives piety. There was no need for them to change and become free-thinkers like their spouses and it would thus be pointless for men to attempt to change their wives' minds. Women were also seen by Jaurès as the natural guardians of a vital part of the nation's cultural inheritance; the one which involved the preservation of established religious practices. Most of Jaurès's contemporaries, including painters, shared his views and this can be the reason why First Communion images included almost exclusively girls. Furthermore, statistics speak volumes about female preoccupation with religion in France. Even before the Third Republic, in 1865, three out of four women attended Mass regularly, whereas only 32, 1 % of men continued to be practicing Catholics.<sup>246</sup> Finally, Claude Langlois's study of 1984 revealed a historical fact which proves that the religious lives of the two sexes diverged dramatically: in a total of 400 congregations founded between 1800 and 1880, there were eight female for one male.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Jean Jaurès, *La Petite République*, 12 Octobre 1901 and Margaret Pease, 1917, p. 50-52.

<sup>246</sup> Delumeau, *La religion de ma mère*, p.322.

<sup>247</sup> Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin: les Congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle* (Paris 1984), p.62, 63, 208.

It must be pointed out that only a limited number of Third Republic politicians who aspired to build a modern nation based on secular and democratic values thought that Catholicism was unnecessary in order to inculcate moral ideals. Jules Ferry, the terror of clerical France in the 1880s, posited that secular schools have the duty to teach the good old morality of their fathers.<sup>248</sup> The ethical system this politician referred to was largely founded on the principles which the Church ventured to instill in children for centuries. It would not be without interest to mention that as a schoolboy, Ferry won the first prize for religious knowledge at the *college de Saint Dié*.<sup>249</sup> Learning the anticlerical policies of the *Ministre de l'Instruction*, abbé Choizelat who was Ferry's catechist exclaimed: "*Es-ce croyable de la part d'un jeune homme, qui avait fait une si bonne première Communion?*" Upon his entering to the Masonic lodge *La Clément Amitié*, he confessed that he was brought up as a Catholic and he struggled to escape from it.<sup>250</sup> Even this republican who had rejected the Christian faith could not substitute the rules of conduct which accompanied the teaching of these Church's doctrines; he used a secular cloak to disguise them.

It is not surprising that most parents did not abhor but championed the idea of their daughters' growing up on the knees of the Church. To a great extent Catholicism was tolerated because it endorsed gender stereotypes; the ideas of submission and domesticity which supposedly befit women and were fostered by the priests, made catechism acceptable to local communities and elites throughout the century.<sup>251</sup> "*Si elle se baisse, c'est la religion qui l'entraîne*", French people used to say in order to describe the ideal young lady. Furthermore, as I discuss in the next chapter, a girl brought up in the Roman Catholic faith was considered more likely to be docile and abhor adultery.<sup>252</sup> In 1864, Abbé Laurichesse argued that the paternal figure of the *curé* contributed to the preservation of social balance because of the power he exercised over persons of female gender. Women confessed their anxieties and unhappiness to members of the clergy who, in their turn, persuaded them to stay with their husbands; therefore, said Laurichesse, the Church's representatives managed to save many marriages.<sup>253</sup> Actually, clergymen were seen as the embodiments of the system of moral

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<sup>248</sup> Theodore Zeldin, *Conflicts in French Society: Anticlericalism, Education and Morals in the Nineteenth Century* (London 1970), p.37.

<sup>249</sup> John McManners, *Church and State in France 1870-1914* (London 1972), p.49.

<sup>250</sup> Chevallier, *La Séparation*, p.77.

<sup>251</sup> Curtis, *Educating the Faithful*, p.174.

<sup>252</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.15, 39.

<sup>253</sup> Zeldin, *Conflicts in French Society*, p.29.



values via which sexuality was regulated. On one hand, they established the indispensability of penance and consolidated their spiritual authority in the horror of moral transgression, but on the other they protected wedlock. Therefore, many republicans did not oppose their wife or daughter having a spiritual father. The widespread conviction that Catholicism was morally useful for females, might be the reason why even secularists acknowledged the significance of First Communion for girls, if not for boys who were almost excluded from this kind of imagery.

Were there other elements which made anticlericals indulgent towards this ecclesiastical rite? A feature which is very common among the paintings representing this ceremony is the absence of any reference to the participants' social status. In the work *Communiantes* of Henry Royer (Fig.32) which was exhibited in the SAF of 1897, a group of young girls is portrayed kneeling on their prie-dieu chairs listening to the *célébrante* – the child chosen to pronounce *l'acte de renouvellement du Baptême* - who is reading from her breviary.<sup>254</sup> Due to their identical white veils and dresses, it is impossible to distinguish the stratum of society to which each one of these adolescents belongs. The same impression derives from all the representations of a *Communion Solennelle*, including the one by Blanchard. It is also known that wealthier families, as an act of charity, were encouraged to buy a dress for a child who came from a poor household in their parish. It should be remembered that the primary purpose of their outfit was not to abolish, or disguise external elements of class descent. The immaculate robe stimulated an emotional response and underscored the fact that the members of community who wore it shared certain common qualities: their religious creed, their adolescence and their virginity. Could then other experiences resulting from the preparation for the Sacrament be regarded as an opportunity to develop a sense of fraternity and equality among the adolescents? Since the offspring of the bourgeoisie and those of the workers attended the same classes of religious instruction and received Communion all together, their social and financial differences seemed to be temporarily put aside. However, the canon Joseph Colombe informs us that during catechism, students' benches were parallel and divided into several groups of rows described as sections. The children, he maintained, were arranged there according to certain principles which diplomatically set the poor apart from the rich. There was no particular desire on anyone's

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<sup>254</sup> Anonymous, *Conduite pour bien faire la Première Communion et la vie d'un enfant après sa Première Communion, pour en conserver le fruit*, (Paris 1737), p 54-57.

part to engage in favouritism, he alleged, but they thought that offending the sensibilities of the wealthy would be lack of deference.<sup>255</sup> Equality among the communicant girls was based on appearances, therefore it was superficial and temporary; it cannot be compared to the ideal of *égalité* endorsed by the Third Republic.

In the late nineteenth century, the First Communion, described by catechists as a mystical experience which capitalised the essence of Christian faith, had become a habit integrated in the secularised life of the French people.<sup>256</sup> More particularly, the case of urban middle-classes, the *Communion Solennelle*, confirmed the acceptance of a woman's path within her rank in the social hierarchy. The bourgeois character this rite had obtained was extolled by Gervex and defied by Toulouse-Lautrec. Despite its worldly aspect, First Communion remained a manifestation of Catholic piety which stimulated strong emotions to the participants and their relatives; this was illustrated in the paintings of Blanchard and Breton.

There was indeed a considerably larger number of First Communion images created during the 1880s. The popularity of such a subject in a decade of radical anticlericalism can be attributed to the fact that these years coincided with the period when the specific rite had reached its peak, attained its permanent features and established its charm among French people. Both in art and in social practice the *Communion Solennelle* conveyed the cherished value of female chastity in an eloquent manner which appealed to religious and atheist viewers. In cases like that of Desrousseaux, the viewers are encouraged to read his overtly pious works as a Catholic response to the secularisation of French society and the anticlerical legislation introduced by the government. On the other hand, the interest of republican artists like Carrière for this theme and its acquisition by the state may be interpreted as an acknowledgment that cultural practices which structured family life were profoundly marked by religion. Persons who had rejected Catholic doctrines thought that the influence of the Church could be beneficial, as long as this institution did not interfere in public affairs. Finally, the presence of girls and women in works depicting religious subjects was considered

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<sup>255</sup> Sloyan, *Shaping the Christian Message*, p. 105

<sup>256</sup> Zeldin, *Conflicts in French Society*, p.10. Marie d' Agoult (1805-1876), a feminist thinker, observed that even though the Catholic Church did not rule, over the mind and the heart of the French society, but over its habits. But in a country in which principles are so weak and passions so changeable, she affirmed, command over habits is command over life itself.

not only natural, but also indispensable; faith and devotion interweaved with femininity, since this gender had maintained a privileged relationship with the Church.

## **THIRD CHAPTER**

### **Images of Marriage under the Third Republic.**

#### **1. Introduction.**

Throughout the nineteenth century in France there was a great focus on marriage. Michelle Perrot observed that this institution served innumerable functions and was seen as the vital cell of human society because it comprised a device for procreating, fulfilling class expectations and meeting sexual needs.<sup>257</sup> For every family, whether aristocratic, bourgeois, or peasant, marriage constituted above all an economic system for raising and channeling property. Even if the financial aspect of two young persons' marital union was of major importance, it did not form the centre of the Christian and republican moralists' discourse, but appeared as a secondary subject of it. As it will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapter of this thesis, these men were greatly worried about the birthrate decline and believed that French people's preoccupation with property comprised the root of this social ailment, which threatened the nation's future. They castigated this mentality and focused on the psychological benefits of wedlock and the moral values upon which conjugal life should be founded, underlining the vital importance of begetting offspring. More particularly, Catholics encouraged procreation for the glory of God, while free-thinkers praised it as an act of patriotism. In their turn, Third Republic painters, regardless of their ideological affiliations, did not emphasise the economic dimension of wedlock, which constituted a very common theme in contemporary fiction, in a straightforward manner. How can this phenomenon be explained? The evidence of images suggests that French artists either focused on the subject of the couple's physical union as this emerges from the ideal of bridal virginity, or represented provincial customs, rituals and traditions related to marriage, and even marital discord. In this part of the thesis, I investigate the themes of chastity, conjugal love and adultery addressed by authors and painters and I examine the historical and social reasons for the anxieties communicated through moral manuals and works of art. Was the republican model of the honest, loving wife similar, or different to the Catholic portrait of the good spouse? What

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<sup>257</sup> Philippe Ariès, Georges Duby et Michelle Perrot (eds.), *Histoire de la vie privée: De la Révolution à la Grande Guerre*, vol.4 (Paris 1999 (1987)), p.180.

virtues were married women expected to have? How was the idea of female purity underscored and promoted by the artists? How did the theme of conjugal infidelity emerge from paintings?

Before the establishment of the Third Republic, philosophers, demographers and sociologists who considered themselves spiritual children of the French Revolution underlined the importance of wedlock as safeguard of good morals. In 1849, the republican Auguste Debay posited that marital union leads people to happiness and permits them to become useful to society and pay their debt to the State by providing it with citizens. According to this author, marriage was necessary for the individual's physical and moral development because this institution obliges both husband and wife to work hard in order to reassure the well-being of their family.<sup>258</sup>

Marriage as a means to avoid debauchery is a common thesis of the Catholic Church based on the first epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians. In 1869, the archbishop Félix Dupanloup wrote that through the sacrament of marriage Christ “*enchaînait la dépravation et l'inconstance humaines; il captivait au sein de la société en péril les passions tumultueuses; il voulait protéger, bénir et sanctifier l'humanité tout entière en établissant sur la concorde inviolable et sur la sainteté des mariages la paix et la société de tout le genre humain.*”<sup>259</sup> Wedlock, apart from regulating sexual behaviour and being the safeguard of social peace, it served a basic purpose: procreation for the sake of divine glory. Like Émile Zola in his novel *Fecondité* written thirty years later, Dupanloup showed fertility as a manifestation of purity and moral sanity. The bishop, in his text, affirmed the will of the Creator: “*Croisez, multipliez car jamais vos enfants qui seront les miens ne se multiplieront trop sur la terre. Couvrez la donc de vos familles: que vos alliances soient toujours pures, fécondes, sans tache, élevez vos enfants dans mon amour et ne craignez pas.*”<sup>260</sup> How does the moral dimension of marriage emerge from paintings? Do republican and Catholic models of conjugal life differ and are their differences discernable in visual arts?

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<sup>258</sup> Auguste Debay, *Philosophie du mariage* (Paris 1849), p. 20, 23.

<sup>259</sup> Félix Dupanloup, *Le Mariage chrétien*, (Paris 1869), p.40.

<sup>260</sup> Dupanloup, *Le Mariage*, p.16.

## 2. The Horror of Celibacy: the Spinster.

In France the number of marriages was relatively high and stable until the early 1870s. The considerable decline which occurred between 1875 and 1900 coincided with the fall in birthrates causing a great deal of social angst. In 1880, the republican demographer Jacques Bertillon observed that marriage helped people realise that they are social beings and gave them a motive to live:

*“Tous les maux qui persécutent l’espèce humaine, toutes les perversions physiques et mentales, frappent le célibataire plus que l’homme marié; la maladie, la folie, et sa forme la plus cruelle, le suicide, sont plus fréquents chez lui et enfin l’ennemi de l’humanité qui résume tous ces malheurs, la mort, est pour lui plus hâtive. Ces conclusions s’appliquent également aux femmes mais avec moins de rigueur. Aussi les gens qui ont des enfants, ceux qui sont entourés d’une famille nombreuse sont moins frappés par tous ces malheurs que ceux qui n’ont pas autour d’eux des enfants dont la vue les rappelle à leur devoirs et les soutienne au milieu de misères d’existence.”*<sup>261</sup>

In 1888, Charles Letourneau, a militant free-thinker, contradicted Bertillon. He claimed that individuals do not become deficient or self-destructive because of their celibacy but quite the opposite; physical and psychological inferiority, low social status and bad financial situation, forced most of them to remain single. Letourneau seemed to consider the fear of marriage a feature which pertained to his compatriots and especially to those who resided in urban centres and attached a great importance to money. Actually, according to statistics, in 1888, only 29 % among those who resided in the city would decide to take a spouse when they were between 20 and 25 years old.<sup>262</sup> Finally, in Paris, among married couples, 323 out of 1000 had no children.<sup>263</sup> It was anxiety over depopulation which made the idea of marriage important. Therefore, in 1890, George de Dubor accused those who preferred to live without a spouse as selfish, unworthy citizens. Dubor underscored the fact that great republican men of the past shared this opinion. Thus, in 1785, when France was still under the reign of Louis XVI, Jérôme Pétion de la Villeneuve (1754-1791), a young lawyer and revolutionary identified the fear of marriage with debauchery and lack of patriotism, and invited the State to declare “*une guerre à mort aux célibataires.*” In his *Essai sur le mariage considéré sous des rapports naturels, moraux et politiques ou moyens de faciliter et*

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<sup>261</sup> Bertillon, *La statistique humaine de la France (naissance, mariage, mort)*, (Paris 1880), p.38, 39, 47, 48.

<sup>262</sup> Charles Letourneau, *L’Évolution de la famille* (Paris 1888), p. 436, 438, 439.

<sup>263</sup> Robert Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven and London 1988), p.59.

*d'encourager les mariages en France*, Pétion posited that everyone had the duty to find a spouse and procreate; celibacy was seen as a shameful condition which had to be punished. The state must show no indulgence to the French who do not marry, but treat them as enemies of the country and “*perturbateur[s] de l'ordre*”, he affirmed.<sup>264</sup> Half a century later, Debay asserted that marriage encourages virtue and prevents vice, further suggesting that it is an ignominy for a woman to remain unmarried. In this context, he invited national governments to encourage marriage, moralise conjugal unions by establishing new laws and dishonour those who, after a certain age, were living out of wedlock.<sup>265</sup> The social and moral order many republicans envisaged favoured the penalisation of celibacy. How was the social importance of marriage promulgated through painting? To what extent was the disapproval of celibacy and its dangerous consequences manifest in works of art?

Although the problem of celibacy haunted free-thinkers who never failed to castigate it as an unnatural condition and a source of social evil, Catholics were not of the same mind. An individual did not have to be married in order to be accomplished, since the clergy and the members of monastic orders had taken vows of chastity. This position was, of course, anathema to republicans.

Did celibacy constitute a stigma primarily for the woman? In the 1850s, Hippolyte Taine, learning about his sister's imminent wedding, wrote to his mother “*Je devine que Virginie se marie pour plusieurs raisons. La première est que la vie d'une femme n'a guère d'autre but. Il lui faut un protecteur, un ami. Une femme seule est trop seule. A la rigueur un homme peut vivre solitaire. Il a pour s'occuper la science, l'ambition, la politique, le plaisir du voyage.*”<sup>266</sup> Thomas Graindorge, Taine's fictional doctor of Philosophy in the University of Iena, analysed the various aspects of unmarried women's position in France. The work was published in 1867 and Taine, through the mouth of Graindorge, repeated what he had privately said about his sister's wedding: “*Ridicule, la vieille fille est surtout inutile. Alors que les hommes valent par eux-mêmes, et peuvent envisager le mariage comme un éventuel et paradoxalement, la condition de leur liberté; là où tout est liberté pour l'homme tout est un embarras pour elle. Elle se marie parce que il n'y a pas d'autre carrière pour une fille.*”<sup>267</sup> In

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<sup>264</sup> Georges de Dubor, ‘De la dépopulation de la France d'après Pétion’, *Revue de famille*, nouv. sér., vol.7, 15 octobre 1890, p.154.

<sup>265</sup> Debay, *Philosophie du mariage*, p.20, 24.

<sup>266</sup> Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, Catherine Salles, Robert Lafont (eds.), *Histoire du mariage* (Paris 2009), p.669.

<sup>267</sup> Hippolyte Taine, *Vie et opinions de Thomas Graindorge*, (Paris 1867), p.245.

the early 1890s the elderly politician Jules Simon described marriage as a woman's predestination. More importantly he posited that the choice of a husband constitutes the "*choix d'un état*" and that females can aspire to be happy only as wives and mothers. In a paternalistic tone Simon gave French girls the following advice: "*Prends un mari, ma fille. C'est le bonheur parce que c'est la maternité. L'amour n'est qu'une ivresse passagère.*" Women are described as weak beings, unable to live without male protection or without a master who will put them under his authority. "*Tu as besoin d'un protecteur*", said Simon. "*Regarde les hommes; le plus faible d'entre eux t'écraserait d'un coup de poing. Tu as même besoin d'un maître.*"<sup>268</sup> This republican moralist envisaged family as a mini-state governed by the benevolent husband and regarded the wife as the immature citizen who had to be guided and protected. Other moralists like Mme Louise d'Alq (1840-1901) who focused on the maternal role and the education of young women, made a distinction between the "*femme célibataire*" and the "*vieille fille*" and condemned those who spoke of unmarried females with disdain.<sup>269</sup> However, she also claimed: "*je regarde le mariage et je le proclame hautement comme le seul état désirable pour une femme.*"<sup>270</sup> Through marriage, the woman, who did not have the right to vote, acquired social identity; a spouse gave her respectability and merit. He formed her as a being and bestowed her with a sort of citizenship; because of her union with him she sprang into existence. Did painters participate to the debate juxtaposing male superiority and self-sufficiency to female docility and dependence in representations of married couples?

Late nineteenth century French fiction is rich in portraits of ageing unmarried women who had to confront social prejudice and contempt and were sources of anxiety and embarrassment for their families. The image of the "spinster" as we know it today was born in the nineteenth century; it emerged from a climate of the unprecedented hostility and disdain towards celibacy. James McMillan claimed that both in literature and in moral discourse, the *vieille fille* was constructed as a fossilised, repugnant, pretentiously pious and emotionally barren creature that would spy on her neighbours and spread malicious gossip.<sup>271</sup> Aunt, older cousin or tutor of young girls, she always bears negative traits; she is morally dangerous,

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<sup>268</sup> Simon, *Le Choix d'un état*, p.289,299.

<sup>269</sup> Louise d'Alq, *Essai pour l'éducation du sens moral: La science de la vie; la vie intime* (Paris 1881), p.90.

<sup>270</sup> d'Alq, *Essai pour l'éducation*, p.26.

<sup>271</sup> McMillan, *France and Women*, p.155.



gluttonous, ugly, unloved and unable to love.<sup>272</sup> In 1984, Cécile Dauphine observed: “*il fallait que la vieille fille fasse peur pour que le système social soit préservé.*” The spinster defied the social and natural order. Therefore, she was frequently presented as suffering from illnesses which are caused by unsatisfied passions.<sup>273</sup> The descriptions of authors who were more indulgent towards unmarried women disclose the condescending compassion which someone feels for those who have the misfortune of being the “other”, the handicapped because unaccomplished person. For instance, Guy de Maupassant in his novel *Une Vie*, published in 1883, described the sad life and problematic social status of a 42 year-old virgin. This fictional character causes pity, but, as the author clearly points out in the last sentence of the quoted passage, she had only herself to blame.

“*La vieille fille, poursuivie par l'idée qu'elle gênait tout le monde, qu'elle était inutile et importune, se retira dans une de ces maisons religieuses qui louent des appartements aux gens tristes et isolés dans l'existence. C'était une petite femme qui parlait peu, s'effaçait toujours, apparaissait seulement aux heures des repas, et remontait ensuite dans sa chambre où elle restait enfermée sans cesse. On la traitait avec une familiarité sans gêne qui cachait une sorte de bonté méprisante. Elle ne tenait point de place; c'était un de ces êtres qui demeurent inconnus même à leurs proches, comme inexplorés, et dont la mort ne fait ni trou ni vide dans une maison, un de ces êtres qui ne savent entrer ni dans l'existence, ni dans les habitudes, ni dans l'amour de ceux qui vivent à côté d'eux.*”<sup>274</sup>

Often caricatured and stereotyped, the spinster was a very common character in nineteenth-century novels. Already in 1836, the unmarried 40-year old Rose Cormon is the protagonist in Balzac's book *La vieille fille*. However the spinster does not seem to appear in French paintings. We might suggest that the elderly, black-dressed ladies portrayed as chaperons of nubile girls are unmarried females, but we cannot be certain; they could as well be widowed relatives. Why do we not come across any evident representation of spinsters, when mothers, young virgins, even courtesans, are extremely ordinary types in visual arts? Does this striking absence reveal the fact that the ‘abnormal’ social and personal state of ‘unloved women’ – who, nevertheless, represented ten percent of the female population - was not only undesirable, but also unworthy to occupy the painters’ imagination? Does the artists’ silence mean contempt?

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<sup>272</sup> Françoise Parent-Lardeur (ed.), *Madame ou mademoiselle* (Paris 1984), p.215.

<sup>273</sup> Parent-Lardeur, *Madame*, p.218, 219.

<sup>274</sup> Letourneau, *L'Évolution*, p. 439.

Catholic authors did not encourage young females to remain single, nor did they approve the marginalisation of celibates because they did not see them as miserable people. Thus, in 1884 W. Liebrich exhorted women to be careful concerning the ideas they will pass to their daughters. Prejudices against celibacy, he warned them, could lead to very unhappy marriages.

*“N’imitez pas, Madame, le cruel dédain, l’impitoyable moquerie du monde à l’égard des femmes qui ne se sont pas mariées et qui ont été obligées d’étouffer tout ce qu’il y avait d’amour au fond de leur cœur. Il ne faut pas qu’une jeune personne soit effrayée à l’idée de rester vieille fille. Cette frayeur lui ferait désirer et rechercher le mariage à tout prix et le pousserait dans les bras du premier venu, c’est-à-dire dans les bras de la misère.”<sup>275</sup>*

The different attitudes towards celibacy derived from two fundamentally dissimilar views concerning the purpose of human life. The Church professed that a celibate, free from worldly cares, could dedicate his or her life to the service of God. For instance, Pope Leo XIII spoke about the special vocation of women who, due to circumstances and against their will, remained unmarried and seemed condemned to live without a purpose. These persons’ moral and social contribution is remarkable, said the pontiff, since they spend their time doing charitable works for their parish.<sup>276</sup> The Catholic celibate could be comforted with the thought that there was a meaning in his existence. However, for anticlerical republicans, life revolved around the fatherland which they identified with the egalitarian French state. According to their analysis, in the society they were struggling to build, unmarried and childless people were not only useless, but also harmful. Their status was considered as a sign of deficiency and social ineptness; even worse, it was seen as a manifestation of individualism which opposed to the ideal of fraternity.

### **3. Ignorance for the Sake of Purity: the Chastity Discourse.**

Moralists on both sides spared no effort in their urge to underline the importance of chastity for the woman before and after the wedding. Thus, a great part of their writings revolved around this notion, as well as the disastrous consequences of its transgression. Catholicism gave the tone to the moral discourse. In 1912, the devout Françoise Harmel,

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<sup>275</sup> Liebrich, *Lettres aux mères*, p.157

<sup>276</sup> Parent-Lardeur, *Madame*, p.225.

stated that: “*La pureté est la vertu par excellence si bien que on la nomme simplement la Vertu. La pureté est une force.*” The writer admits that this virtue which is so difficult to define manifests itself through modesty and reserve and is afflicted by people’s inability to control their sensuality.<sup>277</sup>

The virginal bride comprised an almost inviolable moral model. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the theme of female chastity – foundation of a happy marriage - is recurrent in art. Charles Bagniet’s work “*La prière de la mariée*” (Fig.33), illustrated the popular idea that female purity is linked to her piety. This painting of 1870 sold in reproduction by the popular French print company Goupil. It represents a young woman in her wedding dress kneeling on a prie-Dieu inside her bedroom before going to Church to get married. Pierre Lin-Renié has observed that the image hanging on the wall behind the bride is an engraving made after one of Paul Delaroche’s most famous works which depicts the sons of Edward IV and Elisabeth Woodville imprisoned in the Tower of London. During this period, the subject of the princes’ murder was extremely popular among members of the middle class who decorated their domestic interiors with those kinds of reproductive prints.<sup>278</sup> The print after Delaroche’s painting discloses the social status of the people inhabiting the house, while their daughter’s gesture reveals their religious convictions and ideology. However, the artist’s choice to place the *Princes in the Tower* as a picture-within-the-picture is probably not a mere reference to the dominant taste of the prosperous middle-class and a reminder of Bagniet’s former profession as an engraver. The painter seems to invite the viewers to discover the analogies between Delaroche’s historical subject and the event he represented. In 1483, both sons of Edward IV were assassinated either by their malicious relative King Richard III or by his successor, Henry VII. The scene in this famous work is inspired by the night of their murder. The young princes have stopped the reading of the Bible to listen to the footsteps approaching the room where they are kept imprisoned. Their assassin is already on the doorstep and we can see his shadow. Both boys look overwhelmed by fear before the unknown. They realise that something terrible is going to happen to them but they can only perceive the inescapable threat of their premature death in the obscure and uncertain way of a child. Like the deposed king’s children, the youthful bride looks intimidated; she

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<sup>277</sup> Françoise Harmel, *Une grave question de l’éducation des jeunes filles: la chasteté* (Paris 1912), p. 36, 37.

<sup>278</sup> Pierre Lin Renié, ‘The image on the wall: Prints as decorations in 19<sup>th</sup> century interiors’, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, No. 2, vol.5, autumn 2006. <http://www.19thcworldwide.org/index.php/autumn06/156-the-image-on-the-wall-prints-as-decoration-in-nineteenth-century-interiors>

will soon be introduced to something unknown. The bed's presence in the background is indicative because it marks, along with the wedding ceremony itself, an irreversible alteration of personal and social status which she is going to embrace. The 'first night' signals her transition from the state of the *jeune fille* to that of the *épouse*. In her case 'death' does not equal physical destruction, but should be comprehended as a notion functioning within the world of metaphor and symbols. She is entering into a different stage of existence beyond which her former self will cease to be; she is 'dying' as a girl to be born as a woman.

The expression of the bride's youthful face does not allow the viewer to confirm whether she is unhappy or merely frustrated before the prospect of entering a new life-stage. The only certainty we have is the sitter's absorption in prayer and her sincere religious devotion. Her immaculately white dress and veil comprise signs of her chastity which manifests itself as fruit of her faith; she is a bourgeois brought up as an obedient child of the Catholic Church. This fact permits us to deduce that she had a sheltered adolescence and that she probably received a convent education. The painter's beliefs are not known but his rendering of the theme seems to correspond to a norm. It must be remembered that profound piety was seen as the safeguard of female morality especially among the ranks of the bourgeoisie, where the fear of scandal and public dishonour created by the exposure of an adulterous act was overwhelming. Being educated in a congregational school, a young woman had more chances either to be trained in the expectations of modesty or to become genuinely modest and abhor sin.<sup>279</sup> That is the reason why upper middle-class men favoured girls' Christian upbringing and appreciated devout wives despite the fact that their position often concealed hypocrisy: "*Il y a un fait prouvé qui tranche tout: la religion moralise le mariage*", said Zola's fictional Monsieur Duveyrier who cheated on his wife with this latter's cousin.<sup>280</sup>

*La Prière de la mariée* comprises the icon of a model bride, an archetype approved by the artist and his contemporaries. It is worth mentioning that a few moralists appear astonishingly liberal by not considering the virtue of premarital chastity indispensable. Thus, Auguste Debay, in 1849, admitted that he would prefer a wife with a dubious past but honest, wise and resolved to remain faithful to her husband, to a virgin who would later betray her spouse. Before the wedding, this author asserted, a female must be entitled to dispose of her body according to her own will as long as she knows that after her marriage she belongs to her

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<sup>279</sup> Delzons, 'La Famille bourgeoise', p.509, 513.

<sup>280</sup> Émile Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, (Paris 1982 (1886)), p.124.

husband. The free-thinker Debay's indulgence which would cause indignation to the Church, derived from the realism. Purity, he posited, means the absence of any physical intimacy with the opposite sex and this is extremely rare among young women from 18 to 25 years of age.<sup>281</sup>

The first night was traumatic mainly for the bourgeois girls who, unlike young female peasants, lived a secluded life.<sup>282</sup> Where urban upper strata were concerned, 'defloration' was regarded as a necessary but violent act. In literature it has been likened to a legitimate rape. In 1866, Gustave Droz in his widely read *Monsieur Madame et bébé* gave an amusing description of the husband's demanding role and his inescapably embarrassing position during the wedding night: "*Le plus difficile des rôles où il faut à force d'adresse, de tact et d'éloquence, faire accepter la plus rude des réalités sans que le rêve s'envole, mordre la pêche sans en flétrir la peau, terrasser une ennemie qu'on adore et la faire crier sans s'en faire hair. Il faut être à la fois diplomate, avocat et homme d'action.*"<sup>283</sup>

The significance of the *nuit de nocces* interweaves with the virginity of unmarried girls, which, apart from being a great moral value, was related to the importance society gave to property and inheritance. By marrying a virgin woman a man was certain that the first child his wife would bear him would not be somebody else's offspring. This fact reassured him that his wealth would go to his own son or daughter. Dupanloup raised yet another dimension; spousal chastity preserves the purity of the race: "*La chasteté protectrice unique de la foi mutuelle dans les mariages, seule fidèle dépositaire de la noblesse des races et la pureté du sang et qui seule même en sait conserver religieusement la trace.*"<sup>284</sup>

Late nineteenth-century literature is brimming with stories narrating the sometimes romantic, often traumatic, but nearly always adventurous first experience of conjugal intimacy. During the same time-frame, in works of art which subtly addressed the subject of bridal virginity or that of the consummation of marriage, religious elements seem dominant. In the specific moments of human life, the Church, both as an institution and a moral law, is manifestly present through its representatives and the religious practice of the faithful. First of all, as discussed later in this thesis, the secular models of morality were not yet established. Republican moralists were only making their debut in a field where the ecclesiastical milieu

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<sup>281</sup> Debay, *Philosophie*, p.26, 29.

<sup>282</sup> Martine Segalen, *Amours et mariages de l'ancienne France. Arts et traditions populaires*, Paris 1984, p.68.

<sup>283</sup> Gustave Droz, *Monsieur, Madame et bébé* (Paris 1866), p.125.

<sup>284</sup> Dupanloup, *Le Mariage*, p.40.

had ruled for a very long time. Furthermore, the ideological and cultural background of the French people was deeply marked by Catholicism. Frequently, clergymen comprised the couple's, and especially the woman's, marital counselors. The Church sanctified marriage and blessed the wedding night which, as already mentioned, functioned as a rite of passage. Therefore, it was very difficult to contemplate, discuss, experience or represent certain moments outside of a religious concept.

An interesting example of the way in which such subjects were illustrated in painting is Eugène Buland's *La Restitution à la Vierge le lendemain des noces* (Fig.34). Exhibited in the Salon of 1885, the work of this Parisian artist and member of the Legion of Honour was awarded a third-class medal. The scene takes place in the interior of a church where a peasant girl is shown standing before the altar; in a niche on the wall we may discern a statue of the Madonna. The young woman is ready to depose a handful of orange blossoms before Christ's Mother. She has taken off her shoes as a sign of reverence while the flowers she is offering, symbols of virginity, are the same which adorned her head on her wedding day. On the first row of wooden benches on the right Buland represented the girl's husband dressed in a black costume. We might argue that his relaxed posture displays male pride in having achieved what he always desired. The girl and her assets are his trophy and the performance of this ritual constitutes the public declaration of pre-marital chastity proved the wedding night. His self-confidence is justified; not only she belongs to him, but he knows that she never gave herself to another man. The groom does not seem particularly concerned with the religious dimension of this ceremony. His indifference is contrasted with the piety and the emotion of his parents-in-law who are seated behind him with their hands joined in prayer. It is possible that he, as a young French male with bourgeois clothes, incarnates modernity and the future, while his spouse and the elderly couple represent tradition and attachment to the past. Although modestly dressed, with a gray robe and a white bonnet, the peasant-girl is the dominant figure in this scene. Her ceremonial gesture confirms her passage from the state of the virgin to that of a wife. She is offering Mary the emblems of her previous state of being, both as a sign of acknowledgment and as a promise that she shall be a chaste spouse. Her figure is bathed in the sunlight which is coming from the glass-stained window while the other three sitters are left in the shadow. By using the light the way he did, Buland aspired to tell the viewer that the protagonist in his story is the girl as a virgin. The idea of chastity traverses the context of the image which is associated with Catholicism. This religious

confession does not only provide us a setting but it also bestows the artist's narrative its character. In *La Restitution à la Vierge le lendemain des noces* it seems that the Church, with the values it promulgated for centuries, has shaped the moral identity and special character of human things: conjugal relations, female purity as a source of male pride, parental emotions and traditions. I would suggest that if the light caresses the bride it is because she is entering its space; the sunrays fall upon the altar and thus upon this young wife who humbly approached it as a good daughter of the Church.

The critic Louis Enault, curiously saw the offering to the Virgin as an act the girl is forced to perform because her moral conduct was questioned. This fact contradicts the purity and honesty which, according to him, are manifest in her figure.

*“Ce tableau de Buland pour joli qu’il soit, il est vraiment fort joli, m’intrigue comme les énigmes du Sphinx intriguaient jadis les passants. M. Buland intitule son tableau Restitution à la Vierge et le livret malicieux ajoute le lendemain du mariage. Sans être absolument jolie cette petite mariée elle plaît par un grand air d’honnêteté et une candeur que l’on n’a pas encore entamée. Elle présente à la mère Immaculée de Jésus une corbeille de fleurs, dans laquelle je reconnais les symboliques boutons de l’oranger, orgueil des chastes fiancées et emblème de leur vertu intacte. Tout ceci me laisse infiniment perplexé et bien des spectateurs avec moi. Et quoi est-ce que cette douce Agnès avec son air de ne me point toucher aurait besoin des fleurs d’oranger d’en emprunter à la Sainte Vierge?”<sup>285</sup>*

In *La Restitution à la Vierge le lendemain des noces*, Enault did not identify the representation of a provincial custom and maybe it was not. A work of art is a construction where the artist, inspired by different aspects of reality, invents a narrative. It does not function as a mirror reflecting material things, relations and morals the way they exist around us, but represents the possible turns which human lives can take permitting the viewer to make assumptions. On the other hand, according to the art-critics Auguste Boisard of *Le Monde illustré*, this charming rendering of an episode from village people's life is not ambiguous. The public's increasing appreciation for the meticulous naturalism and lack of pretention of these images, made Buland's work a great success. Parisian audiences had developed a taste for the untamed French peasantry; the less refined these people looked the better. *“Nous en aimons ce sujet rendu avec une grande simplicité, et donnant l'impression fidèle et vraie de la vie elle-même... Voici bien des vrais paysans, mal à l'aise dans leurs habits de fête, guindés, gauches, lourds, avec leurs figures à l'expression engourdie, et leurs*

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<sup>285</sup> Louis Enault, *Le Salon de 1885* (Paris 1885), p.79, 80.

*attitudes empruntées, sentant la gêne et la timidité.*”, wrote Boisard.<sup>286</sup> Possibly, the urbanised population was also searching for its roots, nostalgic for an age of innocence. I would further suggest that the ethical dimension of Buland’s painting contributed to its Salon triumph; a girl’s premarital chastity, despite its ordinariness, was a popular, inexhaustible, always up-to-date, even intriguing theme. *La Restitution à la Vierge le lendemain des noces* was immediately bought by the State. The republican administration did not fail to recognise the value of these conventional, moral subjects which appealed to a large audience, comprised both by Catholics and secularists.

To claim that young women knew very few things about sexual life would be a generalisation. Working-class females, as well as peasant girls, were more likely to be acquainted with the clandestine, although natural, aspects of conjugal intimacy. By sleeping in the same room with their parents or by living in nature and observing the life of animals, they had the opportunity to learn about things which their bourgeois counterparts typically ignored. On the other hand, as it was discussed in the work *La Prière de la mariée*, girls who came from the upper strata had often a very confused idea of what happens between two spouses during the ‘first night’. They spent their adolescence in nineteenth century congregational schools which were hardly places where one could receive sex education. Often, among these persons, the fear of violating the rules of chastity was accentuated by an induced sense of guilt for matters concerning their body and its functions.

Female etiquette and behaviours which resulted from this sort of education can be traced in works of art, such as Alfred Stevens’s *Le Bain* (Fig.35). The painter represented a charming young woman of marriageable age taking her bath in a metal tub. The swan-shaped copper tap allows us to confirm that the sitter belongs to the upper middle-class since, during the nineteenth century, only prosperous households in Paris possessed running water. The marble soap dish in which the girl has placed an expensive pocket watch, along with the golden bracelet around her left arm, comprise elements which enhance the impression of luxury and wealth. Stevens’s young model seems lost in romantic thoughts; the white roses she is loosely holding among her fingers might have been offered to her by a man who courted her and she responded to his attentions. Her expression is quite ambiguous; should one consider her contented and calm or is she also slightly troubled? Actually, the fact that the

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<sup>286</sup> Auguste Boisard, ‘Hommage à la Vierge’, *Le Monde illustré*, vol. 57, 24 octobre 1885, p.278.



sitter is not bathing naked but wearing an undergarment offers us valid information on her cultural background and religious beliefs. Alfred Stevens, who was himself a practicing Catholic, represented a bourgeois female educated in a congregational school in order to become a faithful daughter of the Church. It is a matter of record that nuns would only allow adolescent girls to take a bath if dressed in a long chemise; seeing the reflection of their naked body was thought to provoke impure thoughts and was thus regarded as morally perilous.<sup>287</sup> Marie d'Agoult who lived with the *Sœurs du Sacré- Cœur de Jésus* between 1820 and 1822, explained that in the convent, children learned the denial of the flesh: “*Une idée d'indécence s'attachant pour les religieuses au corps humain. Il faut détourner les yeux et la pensée autant que le permet l'infirmité de notre nature déchue. On ne prenait de bains au Sacré Cœur que par ordonnance de médecin en cas de maladie. Hiver comme été de l'eau froide, une toute petite cuvette, une serviette si grossière qu'on évitait autant que possible le contact; de miroir on n'en voyait qu'à la sacristie.*”<sup>288</sup> In 1860, Théophile Gautier visited his daughter in a school run by a monastic order and finding her dirty he ordered the nuns to permit her to take a bath; the scandalised women allowed her to wash alone but without removing her chemise.<sup>289</sup> Things remained unaltered during the passage of time. Thus, in 1897, the Catholic doctor Lucien Grellety expressed his indignation for the unhygienic habits promoted in these establishments: “*Par un sentiment de pudeur ridiculement exagéré il y a certaines régions, dites honteuses, dont on évite avec soin de s'occuper et qui ne subissent qu'exceptionnellement le contact de l'eau et de l'éponge.*”<sup>290</sup>

Stevens's *Le Bain* (Fig.35) married the girl's sensual presence with what we read today as prudish comportment. The art critic Armand Silvestre, referring to this painting, wrote: “*jamais de chairs féminines n'ont été caressées d'un pinceau plus délicatement ému, dans un sentiment aussi parfait de virilité amoureuse (...) tout y est admirable depuis le relief merveilleux du modelé qui fait cette image tentante comme la vie jusqu'au rendu stupéfiant de la chevelure, lourde et légère à la fois qui fait penser à ce beau verset de Baudelaire: 'Ses cheveux qui lui font un casque parfumé'.*”<sup>291</sup> The portrayed girl's modesty, whether she is an

<sup>287</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.74.

<sup>288</sup> Marie d'Agoult, *Mes souvenirs*, 1806-1833 (Paris 1880), p. 159-160.

<sup>289</sup> Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.74.

<sup>290</sup> Lucien Grellety, *De quelques progrès à réaliser dans l'hygiène des pensionnats* (Paris 1897), no page number.

<sup>291</sup> Armand Silvestre, *Salon du Champ-de-Mars 1892* (Paris 1892), p.89.

unmarried virginal *bourgeoise* or, less likely, a married young woman, was so anticipated that the nineteenth century commentator did not bother to focus on it.

Did Stevens intend to represent a young sitter having had a romantic encounter with a future fiancé, feeling troubled, not knowing how to deal with emotions she has not experienced before? Is her fear that she does something improper mixed with excitement for being the object of a man's attention? Next to the metal tub, on a stool, lay a pile of white clothes and an open book, possibly not of a religious context. This attribute helps us to understand the young woman's state of mind. There is possibly an affiliation between the text she has been reading and her feelings; maybe the ideas which are emerging from the pages of the book mingle with her turbulent thoughts.

In the case of unmarried girls, the habit of reading novels and especially contemporary literature was openly condemned by the Church and discouraged by republican moralists. Even Debay, who tolerated premarital relationships, thought that reading literature is a dangerous hobby for young wives.<sup>292</sup> Georges de Dubor identified his ideas with those of Pétion: “*Dans l'éducation des femmes il faut plus s'occuper du cœur que de l'esprit. Il n'est pas nécessaire qu'elles soient savantes. Que les femmes soient douces et fidèles, onctueuses et compatissantes, bonnes mères et chastes épouses; qu'elles aient des connaissances ordinaires, quelques talents agréables, elles en sauront toujours assez pour leur bonheur et pour le nôtre.*”<sup>293</sup> Republican arguments concerning the role of married females remained unaltered for over a century: Pétion la Villeneuve in 1785, Debay in 1849 and Dubor in 1890 held similar positions on the matter.

From the opposite camp, in 1862, an anonymous author wrote emphatically: “*Fuyez jeunes filles! Que l'aimable Vierge Marie vous cache dans son voile blanc, que l'ange du berceau vous couvre de ses ailes, que les personnes qui vous élèvent ne se laissent point (...) séduire par la littérature perverse du siècle.*”<sup>294</sup> In 1882, the Catholic W. Liebrich invited mothers to prevent their daughters from reading modern literature.<sup>295</sup> Moralists encouraged a mentality which was dominant among the bourgeois parents. This was confirmed by painters

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<sup>292</sup> Debay, *Philosophie*, p.75, 91, 92.

<sup>293</sup> Dubor, ‘De la dépopulation’, p.153.

<sup>294</sup> Anonymous, *De l'éducation des jeunes filles sous l'influence de la foi* (Paris 1862), p.326-327.

<sup>295</sup> Liebrich, *Lettres aux mères*, p.89.

and authors; in 1865, Auguste Toulmouche painted an image titled *Le Fruit défendu* (Fig.36) which was exhibited in the Salon of the same year. The charming sitters' costume and the setting of the highly finished piece of work permits us to deduce that this painting was addressed to members of the upper strata among whom this artist found his clientele. In the work, three middle-class girls are furtively reading a forbidden book; a fourth keeps watch so that they will not be caught red-handed by an adult. Seventeen years later, Zola, in *Pot-Bouille*, confirmed that in bourgeois families, fathers – even those whose moral conduct was far from exemplary - were cautious when the purity of their unmarried daughters was concerned. Therefore, they kept certain readings away from them: “*Mais l'architecte, brusquement, eut une révolte de pudeur. Il venait d'apercevoir que la petite, par-dessus son histoire sainte, lisait la Gazette de France, traînant sur la table. - Angèle, dit-il sévèrement, que fais-tu la ? Ce matin, j'ai barré l'article au crayon rouge. Tu sais bien que tu ne dois pas lire ce qui est barré. - Papa, je lisais à côté, répondit la jeune fille.*”<sup>296</sup> Girls' ignorance was an infallible sign of good upbringing. In the same novel, M. Vuillaume, a retired *redacteur* of the Ministry of Public Instruction boasted to the young Octave Mouret: “*Vous me croirez si vous voulez, monsieur, mais ma fille n'avait pas encore lu un seul roman, à dix-huit ans passés.*”<sup>297</sup>

The “facts of life” offered to the *jeune mariée* if not culled from forbidden reading, were often limited to the vague information given by her mother the day before the wedding. Actually, in Guy de Maupassant's novel *Une vie* it will be the father Baron des Vauds who takes the responsibility to instruct his daughter Jeanne on the subtle matter:

“*Mignonne, je vais remplir un rôle difficile qui devrait revenir à ta mère; mais comme elle s'y refuse, il faut bien que je prenne sa place. J'ignore ce que tu sais des choses de l'existence. Il y a des mystères qu'on cache soigneusement aux enfants, aux filles surtout, aux filles qui doivent rester pures d'esprit, irréprochablement pures jusqu'à l'heure où nous les remettons entre les bras de l'homme qui prendra soin de leur bonheur. C'est à lui qu'il appartient de lever ce voile jeté sur le doux secret de la vie. Mais elles, si aucun soupçon ne les a encore effleurées, se révoltent souvent devant la réalité un peu brutale cachée derrière les rêves. Blessées en leur âme, blessées même en leur corps, elles refusent à l'époux ce que la loi, la loi humaine et la loi naturelle lui accordent*”

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<sup>296</sup>Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, p.506.

<sup>297</sup>Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, p.93.

*comme un droit absolu. Je ne puis t'en dire davantage, ma chérie; mais n'oublie point ceci, que tu appartiens toute entière à ton mari.*"<sup>298</sup>

What were the effects of French society's preoccupation with girls' virginity? What kind of dangers lurked behind the adult determination to preserve a young unmarried woman in a state of ignorance? Maupassant's heroine, unhappy, frustrated and longing to run away, will finally abandon herself to the inevitable repeating mechanically to her husband what her father taught her: "*Je suis à vous, mon ami.*" Maupassant describes the moment between the couple: "*Elle ne remuait pas, raidie dans une horrible anxiété, sentant une main forte qui cherchait sa poitrine cachée entre ses coudes. Elle haletait, bouleversée sous cet attouchement brutal; et elle avait surtout envie de se sauver, de courir par la maison, de s'enfermer quelque part, loin de cet homme.*"<sup>299</sup>

The sufferings, surprise or embarrassment of the virginal bride which authors explicitly and repeatedly narrated in novels, were things that painters could remotely suggest; only the moments before the wedding and those of the morning after are depicted. Thus, *Le Lendemain de la nuit des noces* (Fig.37) painted by Eugène Buland in 1884, represents a newly-wedded couple visiting the *curé* in the presbytery. If the painter dealt with the same subject matter twice, in two consecutive years, it was certainly because he knew it would appeal to the Salon public. The modestly seated young woman keeps her gaze lowered while her husband who is standing beside her, addresses the priest; man and wife wear a red-flower corsage as sign of their marital union. The girl's bodily posture betrays her embarrassment and natural reserve, two female qualities which are vividly juxtaposed with her spouse's male alertness. The artist created a narrative which concurs with Catholic practice and morality. The two individuals incarnate the presiding ideal of distinct, traditional gender roles: she looks passive, docile and humble, letting her energetic and decisive husband to talk on behalf of both. The man's figure is imposing; his hand rests on the back of the chair where his wife is seated, thus enveloping her; the young woman is clearly under his protection. His masculine strength is rendered the shelter of her feminine fragility. Buland's *curé*, who is depicted as somebody conscious of the moral responsibilities of his profession, is assuming here his role as a spiritual advisor. His upright position on the armchair is a sign of attentiveness due to the

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<sup>298</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *Une vie* (Paris 1987 (1883)), p.44, 45.

<sup>299</sup> Maupassant, *Une vie*, p.47.

seriousness of the occasion and his facial expression discloses sincere concern for the young spouses. It should be mentioned here that the role of the priest who administered the sacrament of marriage was regarded as extremely significant. He was there as the voice of the Church and reminded the couple of the divine law. Quite surprisingly, the traditional sermons which were addressed to young couples and blossomed in nineteenth century France, did not decline during the Third Republic, when Catholicism was attacked. In this period, when the idea of the family was cherished as never before, priests tried to make their homilies more human, taking into account the parents. Typically, they praised their Christian virtues and the diligence with which they transmitted them to their offspring. The conjugal duties remain unaltered: honesty, hard work, devotion for the man and purity and obedience for the woman.<sup>300</sup>

The title of Buland's painting is evocative; the viewers are invited to relate the couple's visit to what has occurred the night before. We may assume that these young people have come to receive a blessing after their physical union; possibly they also seek for some advice. The woman is holding a small paper sachet whose content she has just offered to the priest; this latter's hand is mechanically placed on this object which is difficult to identify. The statue of the Virgin as "Immaculate Conception" which figures on the clergyman's bureau enhances the ideas of chastity and sexual innocence. The Crucifix on the wall and an image of the Sacred Heart of Christ are less prominent. Buland consistently created and exhibited pictures which articulated provincial-town beliefs. Showing the major importance of entrenched Catholic practices in rural France, this painter's works consciously and successfully engaged with a vivid moral debate of his time.

The fact that female education rendered young women unaware of the realities of marriage, preoccupied enlightened moralists, doctors and feminists during the late nineteenth century.<sup>301</sup> Frank sexual education was increasingly encouraged not only among republicans but also in some Catholic quarters. Thus, in 1896, the republican Jeanne Schmahl asserted that: "*Il serait désirable de voir disparaître cette crainte chimérique des parents de souiller la pensée de la jeune fille en lui enseignant à l'avance quelles doivent être les conditions de son existence d'épouse et de mère.*" If one of the young spouses must remain ignorant concerning the natural and moral laws, posited Schmahl, it would be preferable to be the man, who has a

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<sup>300</sup> Melchior-Bonnet, Sales and Lafont, *Histoire du mariage*, p.677.

<sup>301</sup> Fugier, *La Bourgeoise*, p. 57-58

secondary role in the reproductive procedure.<sup>302</sup> In a research conducted in 1912 by Jacques Lourbet, the director of the journal *Le Flambeau*, militant feminists stressed the indispensability of girls' instruction in the matter of conjugal relations. Jeanne Oddodeflou, *présidente du groupe français d'études féministes et des droits civils des femmes*, observed that a clever mother would not let her daughter marry a man without teaching her the complex aspects of human sexuality. This duty, she argued, should be performed delicately, within the spirit of maternal affection, and promptly, so that the first experience of the girl would not be traumatic as it usually is.<sup>303</sup> The same year, the Catholic Françoise Harmel also voiced her opposition to the social prejudice which plunged young women into ignorance. Sexual education must start when the girl reaches puberty because girls are early exposed to moral danger.<sup>304</sup> One should not be afraid to go against preconceived ideas since this constitutes the only way to save the institution of marriage upon which the survival of society is depended. Mothers do not protect the purity of youth by concealing reality, claimed Harmel. The safeguard of female chastity is piety and not ignorance: "*Donnons à la jeune fille chrétienne d'aujourd'hui, épouse chrétienne de demain, la forte doctrine des Saints, et mettons d'abord son esprit en état de comprendre toute cette doctrine*", she said.<sup>305</sup> Parents, Harmel asserted, have to teach future wives the exact notion of the conjugal act, protecting the latter's dignity and amending any misconceptions. Young women should not see in sexual intercourse a trivial necessity or a sinful pleasure but something that brings with it great duties and heavy responsibilities.<sup>306</sup>

Preoccupation with female chastity formed a serious obstacle in young people's relationships. Jules Simon, in 1890, observed that the daughters of French bourgeois families do not enjoy any liberty. In social gatherings, this moralist added, very few people would dare to approach a girl and have a conversation with her; reserve, pretence and mutual embarrassment were permanent impediments. Unfortunately, posited Simon, during the short period of the *fiançailles* the young couple did not have the opportunity to get more intimate: "*Ni l'un, ni l'autre n'est à son aise, ils ne se voient pas dans leur naturel; ils jouent un rôle,*

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<sup>302</sup> Jeanne Schmahl, *L'Avenir du mariage* (Paris 1896), p.15.

<sup>303</sup> Jacques Lourbet, *Faut-il instruire les jeunes filles des réalités du mariage ? Enquête du "Flambeau" auprès des principales militantes du féminisme français* (Arrège, Saint Girons 1912), p. 4, 5, 6.

<sup>304</sup> Harmel, *Une grave question*, p.19.

<sup>305</sup> Harmel, *Une grave question*, p.6.

<sup>306</sup> Harmel, *Une grave question*, 29, 20

*même sans vouloir.*” he claimed. “*Un peu de liberté dans les relations de société vaudrait mieux que ce temps d’épreuve,*” he added.”<sup>307</sup>

The work *Hésitation* of the obscure artist Melanie Besson (Fig.38), illustrates the conditions under which nineteenth century courtship would often take place without violating the idea of propriety and putting in danger the girl’s honour. In this image exhibited in the SAF of 1896, a bearded man and a young, middle-class woman are represented seated around the table in the middle of a drawing room. Their body language is evocative of the rules to which they had to conform according to their gender. Thus, the man is leaning forward, extending his right arm to the lady, while he is talking to her. This latter, sitting in an upright position, has put her hands on her embroidery avoiding his touch. She keeps her eyes lowered so her gaze does not meet that of her companion. In the background we can see a dozing elderly escort. Spinster or widowed, aunt or family friend, it is under her supervision that this love has to be born.

Since middle-class girls were always chaperoned for moral reasons, they hardly got to know the person they were going to spend their life with. Maupassant, in his novel *Une vie* which was quoted earlier, narrated the drama of Jeanne, who paid dearly for the fact that she became the spouse of the man she met in the sheltered, sterilised family environment, under the unreal conditions imposed by her social class. Jeanne will end up more miserable than her ageing unmarried aunt: “*Aimait-elle son mari?*” *Voilà qu’il lui apparaissait tout à coup un étranger qu’elle connaissait à peine. Trois mois auparavant elle ne savait point qu’il existait, et maintenant elle était sa femme. Pourquoi cela? Pourquoi tomber si vite dans le mariage comme dans un trou ouvert sous vos pas?*”<sup>308</sup>

Simon accused middle-class parents of obliging their daughters to live in a “glasshouse”, Besson represented an ordinary, supervised nineteenth-century courtship scene and Maupassant described the consequences which derived from the often precarious marriages. The moralist, the artist and the author participated to the same debate. From the data they offer, we may deduce that bourgeois marriages were not forced, but they were in their majority arranged, or took place with the parents consent.

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<sup>307</sup> Simon, ‘Le Choix d’un État’, p.196, 197

<sup>308</sup> Maupassant, *Une vie*, p.45.

#### 4. *“Mariage d’Amour” or “Mariage de Convenance”*: Bourgeois and the Love of Money.

In 1912, Louis Delzons demonstrated that an arranged marriage could become a marriage of inclination; most bourgeois girls thought it was natural to wait for their parents or their family’s friends to find them a husband and they easily fell in love with him: “*Cet homme qu’on l’autorise à aimer, elle l’aime aussitôt, pour peu qu’il lui plaise, de tout l’élan de son coeur et il se fait ainsi une foule de mariages, qui sous les apparences les plus raisonnables et paisibles, sont en réalité, pour les jeunes filles, des mariages d’amour.*”<sup>309</sup> How frequent, or rare, were happy marital unions thought to be among higher social classes?

In 1891, the French painter Joseph Frappa exhibited a work titled *Mariage d’inclination* (Fig.39) at the SNBA. The aspect of conjugal life this artist decided to represent is rather unique because of its great intimacy. The painting shows a couple sleeping in the bed where they have spent the night; we traverse the century when the aristocratic habit of separate bedrooms was gradually abandoned and the bourgeois double room triumphs.<sup>310</sup> The man embraces his young wife whose head and bare arm repose on his chest. The smiling face of the woman discloses the bliss which results from previous moments of affection. Why would an artist exhibit such a work? Even if marriages by proxy and love matches did not always constitute two separate categories people tended to consider them as such. It could be argued that the title invites the viewer to juxtapose the mutual and anticipated display of tenderness of two people in love, with the psychological distance and indifference which marked marriages of convenience.

Earlier in the century, Debay had posited that few people are united in matrimony because they feel emotionally attached to each other. Civilised men, he asserted, see in wedlock a way to raise their fortune, forgetting that real love constitutes the most chaste and solid bond which leads individuals to moral perfection. Furthermore, he castigated certain fathers who act like tyrants forbidding their children to take a spouse from an inferior social class than theirs, even when the person in question is honest and trustworthy. Law, he

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<sup>309</sup> Delzons, ‘La Famille bourgeoise’, p.511.

<sup>310</sup> Bonnet, Sales and Lafont, *Histoire du mariage*, p.736.



concluded, must protect young people from the abuse of paternal authority which can render the children miserable.<sup>311</sup>

It is important to note that nineteenth-century moralists who castigated the commercialisation of marriage did not necessarily advocate romantic unions at any cost. Thus, in 1883 the lawyer Alexandre Laya, observed that great passion does not guarantee an enduring happiness since excitement obscures reason. For instance young women are often tormented by jealousy and suspicion which poison their relationship with their husbands.<sup>312</sup> Jules Simon remarked: “*On demande depuis cinq mille ans, s’il faut préférer un mariage de raison à un mariage d’amour. Et depuis cinq mille ans les jeunes gens de 15 à 30 ans sont, en majorité, pour le mariage d’amour; les parents pour le mariage de raison. Le bon mariage est celui qui réunit raison et amour; et il en est ainsi depuis cinq milles ans*”, he concluded.<sup>313</sup> Republicans and Catholics seem to have shared the same opinions concerning the recipe for a good marriage; in order to be successful, wedlock had to combine affection and reason. In 1905 Father Jean Charruau posited that a good marriage combines affection and reason.<sup>314</sup> Later, Françoise Harmel communicated the conviction that human heart must submit to sound judgment. This pious author argued that love is a noble passion but the sense of duty and the idea of sacrifice surpass and master it.<sup>315</sup>

Like Debay, Laya confirmed that in privileged families, where education makes the children develop dynastic aspirations, arranged marriages comprise the norm. He asserted that the ideal future certain parents envisage for their sons’ and daughters’ reflects their own vanity. They wish to ensure a comfortable living for their offspring’s old age, consolidate their status and create for them a superficial happiness made of vain pleasures and meaningless friendships. In a context where their habits are never interrupted, husbands and wives gradually convert into machines.<sup>316</sup> A wedding where the only common element among husband and wife is the social background and the focus on money cannot be successful. In his work *Mariage de convenance* (Fig.40) the military painter Auguste Loustaunau illustrated the boredom, lack of passion and alienation which dominate the life of a couple married in order to meet their class expectations. The painting, which was exhibited at the Salon of 1878,

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<sup>311</sup> Debay, *Philosophie*, p.51, 54, 55, 57, 59.

<sup>312</sup> Alexandre Laya, *Causes célèbres du mariage ou les infortunes conjugales* (Paris 1883), p.19, 25.

<sup>313</sup> Simon, *Le Choix d’un État*, p.194, 195, 198.

<sup>314</sup> Jean Charruau, *Aux jeunes filles. Vers le mariage* (Paris 1905), p.317.

<sup>315</sup> Harmel, *Une grave question*, p.52, 55.

<sup>316</sup> Laya, *Causes célèbres*, p.10.

follows the tradition of the English William Hogarth; I would further suggest that the British counterpart of this French image is a homonymous work created by the Scottish William Quiller Orchardson in 1884 (Fig.41). Loustaunau represented a high ranking military officer and his wife having their breakfast in a luxurious interior furnished in a “*Directoire*” style. Loustaunau’s models have possibly returned from their morning promenade because the lady’s fur coat is placed on her chair behind her while her spouse’s walking stick is hanging on the back of his seat. The man, absorbed by his reading the newspaper, appears oblivious to his wife’s presence. Unlike the officer’s good appetite, the woman, who is rendered lost in her thoughts, has pushed her plate aside and her napkin lies on the floor by her feet. The splendid decoration of the dining room along with the military attendant, who has served breakfast and waits for his master’s orders, comprise signifiers of material comfort, which shelters and disguises the dullness of the couple’s marriage. One might argue that the big sleeping dog of the man reflects his being emotionally detached while the alertness of the wife’s smaller dog echoes her uneasy state of mind. The painting brings to mind Laya’s description of a conjugal life where everything revolves around conformism and material interest: “*La vie de l’hôtel dans l’hiver, des petites soirées confites. On a le tout décent, froid, surveillé, un peu mystique, d’ailleurs fort honnête, complètement inanimé, sans aucune passion, préparation - formule à ces unions qui s’exécutent un beau jour sans presque rien changer à la situation antérieure; exécution très simple d’une association à laquelle il ne manquait que la pose d’une couronne de fleurs d’orangers.*”<sup>317</sup>

In 1898, the republican Hugues le Roux also posited that money had become the substance of marriage. He asserted that the dowry “*qui devrait être un moyen de faciliter l’union - apparaît à la majorité des épouseurs comme le but de l’institution conjugale.*”<sup>318</sup> To affirm his thesis he quoted the cynical declaration of a young man whose uncle wanted to find him a bride: “*Mon cher oncle, ne prenez pas tant de peine. Je ne partirai qu’à 15 mille livres de rente.*”<sup>319</sup>

The dowry, this indispensable condition, occupied the thoughts of all bourgeois parents who were anxious to make their children happy. It represented the necessary material investment to every good marriage; therefore people remained extremely vigilant concerning

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<sup>317</sup> Laya, *Causes célèbres*, p.11.

<sup>318</sup> Hugues Le Roux, *Nos filles; Qu’en ferons-nous?* (Paris 1898), p.23.

<sup>319</sup> Le Roux, *Nos filles*, p.26.

the fortune of their child's future spouse.<sup>320</sup> It was considered to be vital for man and wife to preserve their wealth, augment it and pass it to their offspring; this old, solid tradition was not interrupted by the Catholic Church because this latter did not find that it contradicted Christian teachings. A girl without any property was a cause of anxiety for her milieu because, even if she was charming and came from a respectable family, she risked remaining celibate and adding to the number of spinsters who were ridiculed.<sup>321</sup> Many moralists condemned society's obsession with dowry, which was regarded as a sign of selfishness and the cause of unhappy and childless unions. The usage of dowry was held responsible for reducing the woman into an object for sale.

One of the rare images which directly deal with the social significance of dowry is James Tissot's *Sans dot* (Fig.42). In 1882, after the death of his mistress Kathleen Newton from tuberculosis, this artist left London and returned to Paris where he immediately strove to reintegrate into the artistic scene. In 1883, to announce his return to France, he organised an exposition of one hundred and two works he had made in England; this event took place in the *Palais d'Industrie*. At this time, in an attempt to reassure the public that he had remained French despite his long British exile, he conceived the series of 15 big paintings known as *La femme à Paris*.<sup>322</sup> Michael Wentworth posited that Tissot, drew his inspiration and the formal organisation of his series from Daudet's group of stories titled *Moeurs parisiennes*. The artist made highly finished etchings of the first five paintings, intending to do the same with the next ten and present them altogether in an album along with texts composed by different contemporary authors. The ambitious project was abandoned. Art-critics were not pleased by the works, finding the colours and the narrative genre very British, therefore alien to the Parisian taste. However, the popular novelist Georges Ohnet wrote a short story based on the work *Sans dot*.<sup>323</sup> In it, the young woman is left without dowry upon the death of her father who had been a colonel. After their loss, she and her mother spend the autumn mornings listening to music in the gardens of Versailles. The writer gives us a fairytale ending which is not implied in Tissot's image; the girl falls in love with a young soldier who finally gets engaged to her.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Bonnet, Sales and Lafont, *Histoire du mariage*, p.666.

<sup>321</sup> Bonnet, Sales and Lafont, *Histoire du mariage*, p.668.

<sup>322</sup> Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot, Catalogue raisonné of his prints* (Minneapolis 1978), p.300.

<sup>323</sup> Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot* (Oxford 1984), p.167-169.

<sup>324</sup> Georges Ohnet, 'Sans dot', *Les Lettres et les arts*, 1888, pp. 121- 127.

Actually, the only text that ever accompanied this painting as a commentary was written for an exposition which took place in London, in the gallery Arthur Tooth and Sons: “*Nous sommes à Versailles sous les arbres. Le soleil brille mais les gelées nocturnes ont commencé à bruler les feuilles et à les faire tomber sur le sol. L’été est fini, l’hiver vient pour elle comme pour tout le monde. Et voila qu’une des années de plus est écoulée et que ces douze derniers mois l’ont encore rapprochée du moment où elle sera vieille fille.*”<sup>325</sup>

The girl dressed in mourning is smiling. Based on her expression, it is difficult to say whether Tissot wanted to render her alert or daydreaming. In the fifteen paintings, the charming, fashionable female who is an expert in the game of seduction comprises a central theme. Being aware of her beauty, this elegant Parisian possibly wants to attract the attention of a future husband. The choice of Tissot to set the scene in autumn might not be accidental. The leaves falling from the trees could be a sign of passing time; the possibility of aging alone is ominously present for this young woman. Her elderly chaperone is concentrated on her newspaper and seems oblivious of her companion’s presence. Her behaviour could be read as discretion, or abandonment to fate; nothing can be done to improve their financial situation. In the background we discern a couple of military officers who were probably under the orders of the girl’s recently deceased father. The two men look at the young lady’s direction whispering that despite her physical charm, her financial situation makes her a bad choice. Like in Loustauneau’s work *Mariage de convenance* analysed earlier, the military context of Tissot’s picture strongly suggests social conservatism and conformism. To my knowledge, *Sans dot* is the only French image which deals with the thorny social problem of female celibacy. The beautiful sitter is portrayed as a potential spinster. It is crucial that the painting, like the other fourteen, was considered “foreign”; it would satisfy the Victorian viewers but did not conform to the taste of the Parisian public. Spinsterhood, which provoked pity and contempt, was a common theme in literature and moral discourse, but the French audience was unfamiliar with the idea of making the *vieille fille* the subject of a painting.

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<sup>325</sup>*Pictures of Parisian Life by J.J. Tissot, 1886, cat. n°2, Douglas Druick and Louise d’Argencourt, Un autre XIXe siècle, Peintures et sculptures de la collection de M. et Mme Joseph Tanenbaum (Ottawa 1978), p.188.*

## 5. Adultery: The “Plague”, its Roots and its Treatment.

What were the consequences of the bourgeois obsession with money? Looking at late nineteenth century paintings one might perceive conjugal misery and *ennui* as two veritable plagues that affected the middle and upper-classes. Interestingly, in images such as Loustaunau’s *Mariage de convenance* which was previously analysed and the work *Retour de bal* (Fig.43) of Henri Gervex which deals with a similar subject and will be discussed below, children are absent. I would argue that this absence should not be regarded as accidental, nor could it be explained by the artists’ need to focus on the conjugal discord. It rather suggests that loveless marriages, unions for the sake of material interest, are barren; sites where children do not comprise the couple’s priority. Rich people preferred social gatherings to having sons and daughters who were considered as impediments to happiness; this self-destructive mentality was responsible for the low natality rates. In his 1866 book *Causeries*, the author Edmond About observed: “*La soif de luxe, des plaisirs va jusqu’à tuer chez certaines le dévouement, l’abnégation et le sens matériel qualités féminines par excellence. Le matérialisme et l’individualisme du siècle engendrent parfois des monstres qui épouvantent leurs contemporains.* Talking to her grandmother, a girl about to be married refers to her future child as *poupon* and is repulsed by the idea of breastfeeding a baby: “*Il n’y a pas de Bourguignons pour allaiter ces monstres là?*”<sup>326</sup> The conclusions Edmond About came up with were not very different from those of Hugues Le Roux thirty-two years later; many young women from this background would not waste their time with this tiresome task when they could socialise, travel and entertain themselves. To the love of luxury, said Le Roux, females sacrificed their dignity and the chance to be genuinely happy.<sup>327</sup>

In 1879, following the dismissal of his celebrated work *Rolla* (1878, oil on canvas, 175x220cm, Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux Arts) from the Salon the previous year, young Henri Gervex submitted another painting that brought into question the nature of the narrative which he wanted to portray. In a lavish drawing room a woman in a white dress is crying, covering her head with her arms. A bouquet of flowers is dropped on the floor before her, possibly in an outburst of anger. The considerably older man with whom she has apparently been arguing is sitting in the background looking at the direction of the viewer. The tears of his charming

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<sup>326</sup> Edmond About, *Causeries*, vol.2 (Paris 1866), p.39.

<sup>327</sup> Le Roux, *Nos filles*, p.47

wife seem to exasperate him. Does he think that this display of sorrow is faked, or a hysterical female reaction? Without having a provocative subject like *Rolla*, the *Retour de bal* (Fig.43) managed to excite the art-critics' imagination, fascinating them with its ambiguity. *Rolla* was based on the 1833 poem by Alfred de Musset, which recounts the fall from grace of an aristocrat and a young woman, forced by economic circumstances into prostitution. In the painting discussed here, there is no literary source which would help us interpret it. Nevertheless, it is possible that the artist himself changed his mind in the process of creating this image and decided to give it another meaning. More precisely, in the preparatory work for the *Retour de bal*, the lady was rendered wearing a common corset and not an expensive evening gown like in the final version exhibited in the Salon.<sup>328</sup> Based on this oil-study, certain modern authors suggested that Gervex had initially intended to represent a *demi-mondaine*; an honest married lady would have never been portrayed with her corset. By showing her in her ball dress, he avoided the titillating effect of the other version; he 'converted' the woman into the spouse of this aging gentleman, making their confrontation more equal and less troubling.

In *L'Illustration* of 1879, an anonymous journalist published a short story which reads Gervex's work in three acts. First, he commented on the ill-assorted union of a middle-aged man and a young woman: "*Un ménage marié depuis trois ans déjà; monsieur a quarante-six ans, madame vingt-deux, les tête-à-tête n'ont plus le charme des premiers jours; madame trouve que monsieur a constamment l'air préoccupé; et monsieur reproche à madame d'être bien jeune de caractère; il lui voudrait plus de sérieux, plus de gravité!*"<sup>329</sup> The woman does not comprise a model of fidelity to her spouse because she seeks compliments and attention elsewhere. In the same narrative, the husband is not portrayed as a victim, but as an indifferent person who fails to show her affection. Money and material interest are rendered the enemies of happiness: in the story we are told that the man left his pretty wife with some friends and went to gamble, only managing to lose a considerable amount. When he returns to find her: "*Il s'étonne d'y voir sa femme s'abandonner à l'enivrement de la valse entre les bras d'un jeune attaché d'ambassade réputé pour ses succès mondains; la jeune femme écoute avec complaisance les paroles de son danseur; elle se sent belle et admirée. Il a bien fallut*

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<sup>328</sup>Henri Gervex 1852-1929, Exhibition Catalogue, Jean-Christophe Gourvennec *et al.*, Bordeaux, Galerie des Beaux Arts 11 May-30 August 1992, Paris, Musée Carnavalet 1 February-2 mai 1993, Nice Musée des Beaux-Arts 7 mai-29 août 1993, p. 108.

<sup>329</sup>Anonymous, 'Retour de bal', *L'Illustration*, vol.74, 18 octobre 1879, p.247.

*suivre ce tyran égoïste, pris d'un accès subit de jalousie. Un premier pas a été fait, qui a creusé un abîme: il ne faudra pas nous étonner si avant deux ans le roman a son épilogue à la troisième page des journaux, au milieu des procès de séparation.*"<sup>330</sup> Habit, ennui and incompatibility of age and character could cause serious damage to conjugal relationships.

In a period when conjugal love and domesticity were exalted and attempts at restructuring family life became more intense, French society developed an obsession with adultery. They considered it a real epidemic, castigated it, were repulsed and yet intrigued by it. The caricature based on Gervex's work and published in the journal *Le Monde parisien* on 26 June 1879, should be seen within this context. The image, which represents the male sinner as a cuckold wearing horns, is followed by this comment: *Tableau instructif à méditer. Qu'on place donc un exemplaire dans toutes les mairies de Paris dans la salle des mariages.*<sup>331</sup> The author of this phrase communicated the common sentiment; marriage was an institution which suffered greatly, mostly – the caricature seems to suggest - due to the frivolity of women. Good men should know the real dangers and stay vigilant. The reading of nineteenth century novels is enough to convince us that adultery was seen as the most common symptom of the bourgeois marriage, this putrefying body that was hiding behind a pretention of dignity. For instance, in Zola's novel *Pot-Bouille*, Auguste, a shop-owner, is rendered desperate by his wife Berthe's quotidian wandering in the city, where she spends his money in order to satisfy her endless need for clothes and jewellery in a desire to look attractive. Thus, in an emotional outburst, the frustrated husband confesses his anxieties to his insensitive mother-in-law: "*Mais votre fille finira par me tromper!*"<sup>332</sup> His ominous words will shortly be confirmed. Berthe's character and deficient moral instruction, her attachment to worldly life – in sum her depraved mentality - lead her to adultery. Of course, like we may assume of the woman in the work *Retour de bal*, Zola's protagonists do not have a child.

The moral decadence of the nation was widely attributed to the way upper middle-class people led their lives; Gervex was a republican artist who recorded the modern *moeurs parisiennes* and with his work he contributed to great debates. Thus, the young woman he portrayed should possibly be seen as the incarnation of the spoiled and vain *femme du monde*. In 1890, the republican author Arsène Dumont characterised the Parisian culture of visits,

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<sup>330</sup> Anonymous, 'Retour', p.247.

<sup>331</sup> Anonymous, "Le Salon", *Le Monde parisien*, no.26, 21 June 1879, p.5.

<sup>332</sup> Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, p.297.

receptions, excessive luxury and sumptuous feminine toilettes as vulgar. He admonished the criminal behaviour of degenerate *bourgeoises* who were unable to understand the main obligation of their rank: procreation for the sake of the country.<sup>333</sup> A woman who wears very expensive clothes and jewellery is dangerous, posited Dumont, because those who see her want to imitate her, forgetting the real purpose of marriage. Generally, moralists argued that girls must be encouraged to develop a simple taste instead of giving into extravagancies. The republican Hugues le Roux pointed out that “*la concurrence effrénée pour le luxe est l’inévitable cancer d’une société bourgeoise*”.<sup>334</sup> The clergy, however, added another reason as a basic source of moral corruption: impiety, which destroys the unity of French marriages. Thus, in 1869 Dupanloup asked: “*Que sont devenus parmi nous depuis que la faiblesse des lois, l’irréligion déclarée chez les uns, et la fureur de la dissipation mondaine chez les autres ont si profondément altéré les mœurs domestiques; que sont devenus la paix et l’honneur des familles, la fidélité publique et privée, l’autorité maritale, la subordination nécessaire, l’affection réciproque, l’amour respectueux, la pudeur domestique, la sainteté du devoir, la chasteté?*”<sup>335</sup> It has already been shown that women’s religious upbringing was regarded as the safeguard of fidelity even among republicans. For the Catholics faith was important for both genders.

When Gervex painted the *Retour de bal*, the divorce law which had been abolished under Napoleon I had not yet been re-enacted. Discussions concerning the legalisation of divorce had started in the mid-nineteenth century and republicans promulgated its beneficial aspects. Agnès Walch, recently wrote that among the partisans of this cause the most common argument was the certainty that the divorce law would be the treatment against the epidemic of adultery.<sup>336</sup> Debay claimed that the idea of considering marriage indissoluble was completely unnatural. “*Considéré comme institution sociale, le mariage devait être garanti par les lois. Chacune des parties ayant contracté librement devait se conformer aux conditions du contrat; les enfreindre est un crime car l’infraction suppose une violation préjudiciable à l’une des parties et la loi doit satisfaction à l’offense.*”<sup>337</sup> On the other hand, Bertillon supported the legalisation of the divorce for the sake of French women who were more likely to suffer in a marriage: “*Presque toujours c’est la femme qui demande la*

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<sup>333</sup> Dumont, *Dépopulation et civilisation*, p.300.

<sup>334</sup> Le Roux, *Nos filles*, p.39.

<sup>335</sup> Dupanloup, *Le Mariage*, p.40.

<sup>336</sup> Walch, 2009, p.297.

<sup>337</sup> Debay, *Philosophie*, p.31.



*séparation ou le divorce (en France neuf fois sur dix). D'où vient donc qu'un auteur a récemment combattu le divorce comme préjudiciable pour la femme ? Si elle devait leur nuire, elles ne le demanderaient pas ! Pourquoi vouloir savoir mieux qu'elles ce qui leur convient ?*<sup>338</sup>

The Catholics were strongly opposed to the 1884 law because, to them, marriage did not comprise a social contract. It was a sacrament which reflected the relationship of Christ with the Church and therefore it could not be dissolved. Father Louis Baudier claimed that the divorce violated the divine law destroying the family and ruining the essence of marital rights and duties. God is the author of marriage: what He has put together no man shall separate, said this priest.<sup>339</sup> In 1869, Archbishop Dupanloup was also very clear on the matter of indissolubility. He quoted the words of Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, the seventeenth-century bishop, theologian and tutor of the Grand Dauphin, the son of Louis XIV: “*L’amour conjugal n’est plus partagé, une si sainte société n’a pas plus de fin que celle de la vie; la fidélité, la sainteté et le bonheur des mariages sont un intérêt public et une source de félicité pour les États. Cette loi est politique autant que morale religieuse.*”<sup>340</sup> Dupanloup did not fail to remind his readers of the divine and therefore unalterable law: “*Ils seront deux dans une même chair et l’unité entre eux sera si intime, si parfaite, qu’ils seront comme deux en un. Ce n’est pas seulement leurs destinées, c’est leurs natures qui se trouveront intimement unies et presque confondues tant tout sera fait un entre eux, un seul cœur, une seule âme ; un seul corps, une seule vie... Dieu qui les a faits pour lui-même et les a, dans l’œuvre de la création, associés tous deux à sa puissance suprême. Les séparer, les désunir, c’est attenter à l’œuvre divine elle-même, c’est troubler le dessein tout entier du Créateur.*” A pious and united family, said this nineteenth-century French bishop and influential moralist, reflects the divine order. By establishing the indissolubility of marriage Christ created the safeguard of moral sanity. When the conjugal bond is broken, the Catholic prelate asserted, the children’s moral instruction which is the work of both parents is put at risk. The legalisation of divorce, he concluded, would render social unity and stability impossible.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Jacques Bertillon, ‘Notes pour une étude statistique du divorce’, *Annales de démographie internationale*, year 4, 1880), p.460.

<sup>339</sup> Louis Baudier, *La Loi du divorce et la conscience chrétienne* (Paris 1885), p.V, p.1, 2.

<sup>340</sup> Dupanloup, *Le Mariage*, p.29.

<sup>341</sup> Dupanloup, *Le Mariage*, p. 24, 25, 26, 30, 40.

If adultery constitutes an extremely common subject in nineteenth century literature, this is not the case with painting. In the Salon of 1883, Jules-Arsène Garnier exhibited a painting titled *Le flagrant délit* or *Constat d'adultère* (Fig.44) During his career this artist often created and showed smutty subjects like *L'épave* (1873, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Dijon, Musée des Beaux Arts) in the Salon. Conjugal infidelity had also attracted his interest seven years earlier: *Le supplice des adultères* (1878, oil on canvas, 176, 5 x 95, 9 cm, private collection) is situated in the Middle-Ages and represents a crowd attending the pillorying of two persons, who transgressed their marital vows. *Le flagrant délit* is unique because the painter brings the viewer before the moment when a married woman and her lover are caught red-handed. The brutal scene would definitely have a more powerful effect on the contemporary viewer as it is set in the present. The female figure is leaning against the door frame of the closet next to the fireplace. The door of the closet is opened by a man; Eric Hirschler, in his article on the painting, recognises him as the husband because of the wedding ring and of the fact that he is holding a piece of female clothing. On the right, a prosecutor or police inspector is hiding the bed where the illegal couple has slept and receives the aggressive or indignant remarks of the lover who is held by two officers. The incident, possibly takes place in a hotel room and not the couple's house.<sup>342</sup> Nothing is in its right place, since violent scenes have preceded the one we are looking at; everything is about rupture and the disturbance of the hearth. Why would such an image be exhibited in the Salon? Did it serve as a moral lesson to middle-class ladies who cheated their spouses or were planning to do so? Whose side does the artist take? I would argue that Garnier focuses on the humiliation of the woman. The reality of her nakedness is contrasted with the fact that all depicted men are dressed with frockcoats; even her young lover is portrayed his underwear. Her exposed body is an equivalent of the vulnerable legal, moral and social position in which she suddenly finds herself; to the eyes of her contemporaries the shame for this moral transgression would effectively ostracise her. The consequences for the man who had an affair with her would be less grave.

It had been suggested that *Le flagrant délit* illustrates a scene which takes place in Félicien Champsaur's novel, *Dinah Samuel*. According to Hirschler this is wrong, since this book was not published until 1885. A similar scene also takes place in Maupassant's novel *Bel-Ami*, another work of 1885. Garnier, might have painted this theme having some literary

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<sup>342</sup> Éric Hirschler, 'A French Salon painting reconsidered', *Apollo*, June 1985, p.413

source in mind. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that he intended to illustrate an existing law, by which a man could instantly repudiate his wife if he caught her in *flagrant délit* with other witnesses. Anxiety concerning the morality of women had emerged along with a need to control it. Finally, during the late nineteenth century there were some voices asking for a revision of the 1816 *loi de la séparation* and its financial consequences which greatly disadvantaged women.<sup>343</sup> Thus, in 1874 the freemason and journalist Leon Richer professed that a radical change of the law was imperative, because it severely punished female adultery, but was scandalously lenient towards male infidelity. This man, who created the *Ligue française pour le droit des femmes* in 1882 said: “*Que l’adultère du mari soit assimilé à l’adultère de la femme, c’est-à-dire que l’adultère perpétré par le mari en dehors du domicile conjugal, soit aussi criminel que l’adultère accompli dans la maison commune. Que le régime hypocrite de la séparation du corps –qui rompe le mariage sans le dissoudre, sépare les époux sans les désunir et ouvre la porte à de honteux compromis- soit remplacé par le divorce entouré de toutes les garanties légales jugées nécessaires. C’est la loi de la séparation qui détruit la famille puisque il la démoralise. Nous, nous voulons la fortifier.*”<sup>344</sup> Obviously many republicans did not share Richer’s positions. *Le flagrant délit* might have been Garnier’s intentional contribution to the great debate about the legalisation of divorce, which had started in the 1870s. When the work was exhibited in the Salon, the Chamber of Deputies was preparing the legislation; the controversial *loi du divorce* passed the following year.

## 6. *Mariage Civil: Tradition and Novelty.*

Industrialisation brought the social dominance of the bourgeois class, whose members promulgated a secular culture. This latter ruptured with traditional patterns, such as the indissolubility and the sacramental character of marriage. For instance, Debay posited that a conjugal union sanctified by the Church is only a formality which satisfies the girl or her mother.<sup>345</sup> On the other hand, weddings which took place in the *mairies* provoked the indignation of the clergy. Father L. Baudier asserted: “*Il n’y a pas plus de mariage civil qu’il*

<sup>343</sup>Hirschler, ‘A French Salon’ p.414.

<sup>344</sup>Léon Richer, *Le Divorce, projet de loi précédé d’un exposé de motifs et suivi des principaux documents officiels se rattachant à la question* (Paris 1874), p.40.

<sup>345</sup>Debay, *Philosophie*, p.44.

*y a de Messe laïque. C'est le concubinage, pur concubinage autorisé, garanti par la force publique.*" This Jesuit priest claimed that impious people elect and support governments which legitimise sacrilegious ideas such as the civil union. Their establishment, claimed Baudier, constitutes a criminal act of state tyranny imposed on the conscience of good Christians.<sup>346</sup> Léon Richer confirmed that civil wedding, even when it is sanctified by the blessing of a priest, is always considered a violation of divine law by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>347</sup> Although the civil wedding had become obligatory since the French Revolution, the majority of the French would consider it indispensable to receive the blessing of the Church; the procedure of establishing new, secular patterns was very slow. It is interesting that in 1879 Edmond Lepelletier of the *Groupe de la Libre Pensée* deplored the fact that civil ceremonies were often ill-attended because simple people saw them as 'wretched'.<sup>348</sup> Actually, they tended to remain attached to what was familiar to them and were unwilling to embrace novelty. As I have demonstrated in the first chapter where I dealt with girls' First Communion, religious rituals marked the crucial moments of human life and for this reason, despite the modernisation of French society they had preserved their moral and emotional value. This fact explains the current vogue for rustic scenes that recorded local customs and ceremonies.

The 1881 work of the devout Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret (1852-1929) titled *La bénédiction des jeunes époux* (Fig.45) was a major success at the Salon of the following year and was sold to the art dealer Goupil for ten thousand francs. This latter sold it to Sergei Tretiakoff, a wealthy collector from Moscow.<sup>349</sup> A. M. de Belina affirmed that when the painting was exhibited, old and established artists saluted the talent of Dagnan proclaiming him a master: "*Nous nous rappelons l'enthousiasme de Bogoluboff, qui n'est pas prodigue d'éloges, disant à ses amis de l'art: 'un jeune maître est né, un tableau prodigieux a vu le jour'.*"<sup>350</sup> The theme, inspired by Dagnan-Bouveret's own marital union, is an ancient custom of the Franche-Comté, the French department from which his wife Anne-Marie Walter came. The painter's young spouse served as his model for the bride. The ritual takes place just a few

<sup>346</sup> Baudier, *La Loi du divorce*, p.7, 32, 33, 34.

<sup>347</sup> Richer, *Le Divorce*, p.18.

<sup>348</sup> Philip Ward-Jackson, *A sculptor mayor and his family: 'Le mariage civil' by Henri Gervex*", *Sculpture Journal*, vol.14, no.1, December 2005, p.44.

<sup>349</sup> Gabriel Weisberg, *Against the Modern; Dagnan Bouveret and the Transformation of the Academic Tradition*, (New York 2002), p.65.

<sup>350</sup> A. M. De Belina, *Nos Peintres dessinés par eux-mêmes* (Paris 1883), p.185.

moments before the young couple goes to church.<sup>351</sup> Both future spouses are shown kneeling before the girl's parents; her father who holds a candle gives them his blessing while her mother is standing beside him. In 1892, describing the customs of this area of France, Dr Perron asserted that young people learned to show respect to the older members of society and be submissive to their parents.<sup>352</sup> In Dagnan's work, the readiness of the bride and the groom to preserve and conform to ancient traditions, communicate the idea of moral order and continuity within the community. Behind the two elders, we see the bed which symbolises the starting point of a couple's conjugal life. On it marriage is consummated, children are conceived and born; this bed, along with the co-existence of two generations could be interpreted as manifestations of family continuity. The grave expressions of the sitters enhance the solemnity of the scene. The relatives in the background are standing behind the table where they will eat after the wedding; the bread must have a symbolic role associated with the custom. The viewers have the impression that they are attending a ritual as sacred to the participants as the religious sacrament itself. The atmosphere of piety raises this everyday scene to another dimension. Illustrating an old habitual practice lived in the present and sanctified by time, the artist is paying homage to the rural world which stands for its values. In this work many of his aspirations are fulfilled; his will to preserve this moment which was precious to him as well as the desire to keep the memory of this regional custom alive.<sup>353</sup> I would argue that the public's interest in these images was also due to the fact that they represented a world gradually being effaced by modernity. In this context, *Labénédition des jeunes époux* (Fig.45) might have awakened among the viewers a feeling of nostalgia. However, what was most appreciated was the work's meticulous naturalism, manifested in the way Dagnan-Bouveret rendered the effects of sunlight on the dominant white surfaces. "*M. Dagnan-Bouveret ... a su rendre de la façon la plus étonnante le double effet de lumière des cierges allumés dans la grande clarté d'un jour de soleil au milieu d'une pièce où les blancs sont multipliés. Murailles blanches, tables couvertes de nappes blanches, toilettes blanches.*"<sup>354</sup> I would argue that the white colour enhances the sacred character of the moment and underscores the ideas of purity and propriety; we are looking at an honest rural household.

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<sup>351</sup> Peng Chang Ming, *P.A.J. Dagnan-Bouveret, recherche sur la formation d'un langage pictural*, thèse de maîtrise, Université Paris IV, 1990, p.68.

<sup>352</sup> Anne Sohn, *Chrysalides: Femmes dans la vie privée (XIXe-XX siècles)* (Paris 1996), p.80.

<sup>353</sup> Ming, *Dagnan-Bouveret*, p.70.

<sup>354</sup> F. G. Dumas, 'Salon de 1882', *Annuaire Illustré des Beaux Arts, Revue artistique universelle*, 1882, p.227.

Late nineteenth-century art-critics encouraged painters to draw their inspiration from the real, modern world that surrounded them; originality should be sought in the present. “*Combien cet art qui formule d’une façon vive, saisissante, des choses vraies, vues et vécues est supérieur à l’art fade, froid, figé, pauvrement inventé, d’un charme faux, correct, s’il veut et pour tout mérite, d’où procède la Fiancée Romaine de Jules Lefebvre et combien il exige et témoigne une autre activité esthétique. Dans le premier, tout est créé par l’artiste sur l’heure, pour les nécessités du motif, ce motif fait une fois ne sera plus refait. Dans l’autre tout est vu, prévu d’avance, connu comme les pièces d’un jeu de marqueterie auquel suffit le plus mince effort de combinaison.*”<sup>355</sup> Dagnan-Bouveret’s work attracted the viewers’ attention because it was a modern narrative; the painter, unlike his older colleague Jules Lefebvre, did not recycle types that were invented in the past. Finally, with its quality of a photographic ‘*instantané*’, *La bénédiction des jeunes époux* responded to the people’s need for spontaneity.

French art critics received the naturalistic rendering of living, rural customs with outspoken enthusiasm. However they did not always look favourably upon the representation of subjects drawn from everyday life. Thus, if *La Bénédiction des jeunes époux* of the Catholic Dagnan-Bouveret was praised, *Le Mariage civil* (Fig.46) created by the *libre-penseur* Henri Gervex in order to decorate the *Salle des mariages* of the *Mairie du 19<sup>ème</sup> arrondissement* was severely criticised. The work was commissioned by the republican *Ville de Paris*, in an attempt to raise the popularity of the civil wedding among the French people, persuading them that it does not constitute an inescapable triviality but should be valued and revered as much as the Church sacrament. The decoration of the *Salles de mariages* in the *Mairie du 19<sup>ème</sup> arrondissement* was conceived and executed in this context. Henri Gervex, artist of republican convictions, represented the union of a young couple before the sculptor and mayor of the *19<sup>ème</sup>*, Mathurin Moreau. The groom is identified as the latter’s son. The painter raised the tone of this wedding by crowding it with celebrities who would not have attended such an event: Émile Zola, the Tsarevitch, the Prince of Wales and the courtesan Valtesse de la Bigne are identified among them. These impeccably dressed individuals seem to pay little attention to the actual ceremony.<sup>356</sup>

Art critics thought that to depict a provincial custom was original, but to make an ostentatious painting out of a commonplace, boring subject in order satisfy the ambitions of a

<sup>355</sup> Dumas, ‘Salon de 1882’, p. 227.

<sup>356</sup> Ward-Jackson, ‘A sculptor-mayor’, p.45.

patron like the secular French state was inexcusable. The criticism of Paul Mantz, published in the moderate republican newspaper *Le Temps* was scathing; despite his political affiliations, he did not like propaganda in large scale:

*“M. Gervex à qui la modernité fut toujours chère a peint dans des dimensions épiques un Mariage civil: le mariage qui a eu lieu ce matin et qui se renouvellera demain, identique par le cérémonial; différent par les acteurs. (...) D’après le catalogue le Mariage civil serait un panneau décoratif. Je ne vois là qu’un tableau de genre délayé pour emplir un cadre trop vaste. Mais l’élément essentiel du décor n’apparaît pas et lorsque nous aurons suspendu cette toile à la muraille de la mairie du 19<sup>e</sup> arrondissement nous ne serons guère plus heureux, nous qui croyons, à tort où à raison, que l’art est la récréation suprême. Tous nos murs décorés de spectacles quotidiens et vulgaires. La platitude partout et la poésie nulle part. Gervex a du talent. Quand on voit la peinture de l’avenir nous promettre, pour des monuments publics, des ornements d’un réalisme si terre à terre on a des insurrections dans l’âme.”*<sup>357</sup>

In order to reinforce his argument Mantz quoted Edmond About: *“Ne pensez-vous pas qu’il fera double emploi dans le Mairie du 19<sup>e</sup> en répétant les types, les toilettes, les grimaces et les banalités qui défilent trois ou quatre fois par semaine dans ce temple civil?”*<sup>358</sup> Dagnan was praised for his vibrant naturalism but Gervex was accused of creating an inanimate, trivial work which failed to offer aesthetic pleasure, thus elevating people’s spirit. Did Mantz condemn the artistic tendency represented by Gervex? It is possible. However, in my opinion, what scandalised him most is that here, naturalism is misplaced. It does not serve the educative purposes of public art from which people have different and “higher” expectations, nor does it serve a decorative function: simplified forms rendered pleasing to the eye. Allegory or a more obviously decorative arrangement would seem a more appropriate genre in order to decorate the walls of a City Hall, rather than the somewhat heavy-handed and over-descriptive promotion of republican civic values that Gervex and the committee that commissioned him chose.

Also, to exalt a wedding just for taking place in a *mairie* appeared “wrong”. Jacques Buisson, in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, questioned the purpose and the meaning of this work. This art critic, who disliked Gervex for his radical republican convictions, professed his faith to the current regime, saying that he voted for it and would support it more fervently than those who supposedly served it. However, he did not understand the resolution of the Third

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<sup>357</sup> Paul Mantz, ‘Le Salon de 1881’, *Le Temps*, 29 mai 1881.

<sup>358</sup> Mantz, ‘Le Salon de 1881’.

Republic to create “*des enfants civils, des époux civils et des morts civils*”. Buisson wrote an acerbic review. According to him Gervex had failed to stress the difference between this ceremony and a religious one. The only element that distinguishes the depicted event from a village wedding taking place in the church, he asserted, are the orange blossoms on the bride’s head which comprise an insufficient emblem. The painter should have found other means to achieve his purpose. He would have to render the groom conspicuously as a free-thinker and the bride ostensibly convinced that she is really “married” after the ceremony in the *mairie*, without having to stand before the Church’s altar. But this, added Buisson, is very difficult because French people feel the need to receive God’s blessing.<sup>359</sup> Buisson finished his criticism by addressing an advice to the new generation of artists: “*tenez vous loin tant que vous pourrez de ce que M. Thiers (another conservative republican) appelait les ‘bêtises radicales’.*”<sup>360</sup> To this republican but Catholic art critic the representation of a civil ritual which had a very short tradition behind it was meaningless. Naturalism was required and applauded in painting under certain conditions. The work of art had to be inventive, original and morally useful. Artists should leave some space to the viewers’ imagination instead of being content with an impersonal reproduction of reality.

The severe criticism of Buisson and Mantz contains not only an aesthetic judgment, but primarily an ideological position. In their remarks one might trace hostility and disdain for the ‘modern ways’ the new secular regime tried to propagate. In the cultural structures of the past, in rituals, customs and old traditions rendered by artists like Dagnan Bouveret, people possibly reaffirmed their French identity; these images were signs of a deep-seated order which existed before and beyond political regimes. The civil wedding, an aspect of modernity established by the French Revolution, was indifferent to them, even disturbing.

## 7. Conclusion: The Model Wife.

Republicans promoted marriage in the town hall, whereas Catholics believed that only the Church could bless a union. Also, while the first despised celibacy, the second cherished it. Despite their different views in these matters, their expectations from a perfect wife were

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<sup>359</sup> Louis Buisson, ‘Le Salon de 1881’, *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, pér.2, vol.23, 1 June 1881, p.508.

<sup>360</sup> Buisson, ‘Le Salon de 1881’, p.510.



very similar. For Jules Simon, women should not be prepared for public life. An honest spouse is called to rule over the family morals and fight against vice with the force of her virtue. The old politician, who addressed these guidelines to young females from all social classes, invited them to be amiable and reminded them that the honour of their household depended on them. This position explains why female adultery was punished and judged more severely. The only guarantee for a girl's personal happiness is to dedicate herself to the joy of her husband.<sup>361</sup> Louis Delzons, in his 1912 study, argued that a middle-class woman would make her opinion prevail by showing sensitivity, patience and deference to her husband's judgment. Delzons pointed out that the *régime* of a good household reserves for her the role of the adviser and not that of the decision maker; her spouse could give her social status but she would always be inferior to him.<sup>362</sup> The view of this author does not differ very much from that communicated by Jules Simon, twenty years earlier. His use of the word '*régime*' is evocative: the family constitutes the miniature of a well-functioning state.

Catholics, in their turn, emphasised the idea of female submissiveness exalting the value of sacrifice and forbearance. The Church's position on moral questions regarding conjugal life remained largely unaltered during the Third Republic. The archbishop Félix Dupanloup, drew the example of the good Christian wife from the Holy Scripture. Married women are called to be: "*aimables comme Rachel, fidèles comme Sarah, douces et sages comme Rébecca, courageuses et pures comme la femme forte du vieux Testament.*"<sup>363</sup> In 1905, Father Charruau published the correspondence between an old, upper-class woman and her niece in order to instruct future wives on marriage matters. While the girl's letters display her youthful self-indulgence and disclose her focus on the ephemeral joy of worldly things, her aunt's opinions echo Catholic precepts. The elderly lady recommends the young woman not to envisage marriage as a perpetual feast, a pleasure which will never finish.<sup>364</sup> The Christian model of a saintly wife would satisfy not only a pious but also a free-thinking husband; she is called to be an example of "*douceur serène, patience inalterable et gracieuse, complaisance sans limites.*"<sup>365</sup> It is useful to mention that the words *patiente et douce, aimable* and

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<sup>361</sup> Simon, 'Le Choix d'un État', p.193-194 and Simon 'L'éducation des femmes : l'épouse' *Revue de famille*, nouv.série, vol.2, 1 septembre 1889, p.291.

<sup>362</sup> Delzons, 'La Famille bourgeoise', p.515.

<sup>363</sup> Dupanloup, *Le Mariage*, p.21.

<sup>364</sup> Charruau, *Aux jeunes filles*, p.18.

<sup>365</sup> Charruau, *Aux jeunes filles*, p.20.

*serviable*, were widely used to describe female nature.<sup>366</sup> The young woman takes a four-day retreat in a convent where she realises her previous frivolity. “*Je me rends compte que jusqu’à présent j’ai regardé la vie comme une partie de plaisir tandis que Dieu me l’a donnée pour le servir et gagner le Ciel*”, writes the penitent young fiancée. Father Charruau, commenting on the contents of the letters, underlined the importance of a robust faith which renders young women capable of leading a holy conjugal life. Their virtues must derive from an unshakeable religious devotion. “*Que nous sommes ici-bas pour servir Dieu, et sauver notre âme que la vie par conséquent n’est point une partie de plaisir, mais un temps d’épreuves et de combats, qu’elle ne nous a point été donnée pour jouir, mais pour gagner le ciel par le travail et la souffrance.*”<sup>367</sup>

As late as in 1919 the Roman Catholic author Edouard Montier seems to share some of the convictions of Jules Michelet who considered men as their wives’ instructors. Thus, Montier, who was the spiritual director of a religious order in the city of Rouen, posited that within wedlock a woman should be taught her duties by her husband who has an incontestable authority over her. The Church’s position concerning female inferiority is founded on the epistles of Paul who designated women’s submission to their spouse as an obligation. In his book, Montier takes male intellectual superiority for granted. In this context, he affirmed that even if a woman is a practicing Christian and her husband is not, this latter understands the spirit of the faith better. Also, she should not be easily shocked by some words or a gesture that appear vulgar. According to Montier she should attain a certain degree of tolerance towards male brutality by remembering that her ignorance and naivety are for her husband sources of embarrassment. She is thus expected to confront his flaws with tenderness and understanding.<sup>368</sup>

The virtue of chastity interweaves with that of obedience to the spouse. Montier posited that a Christian woman had to remember that in the sexual act only what favours procreation is permitted. Thus, she should never offend God by sacrificing her purity for the sake of her husband. The independence of religious faith constitutes a married female’s irrefutable right which allows her to serve her Creator to whom her life belongs; she is first God’s daughter and then a man’s wife. Thus an honest woman must not reduce herself to her

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<sup>366</sup> Sohn, *Chrysalides*, p. 96.

<sup>367</sup> Charruau, *Aux jeunes filles*, p.24, 43, 44.

<sup>368</sup> Edouard Montier, *L’Amour conjugal et maternel. Lettre à une jeune mère* (Paris 1919), p.1, 8, 9.

spouse's sexual play; she is not expected to cultivate his perversion but to render him chaste as she is. A lady had to satisfy her husband's sensuality, be faithful to him and try to preserve the divine gift of her physical charm which constitutes one of the reasons why she was loved by him.<sup>369</sup> Her beauty and her purity were important because they pleased and reassured the man. The clergy insisted that the woman belonged first to God; it was His will that formed her conscience and His Providence that endowed her with reason. This model inescapably resulted in conflicts between the couple; sometimes wives would have to displease their husband in the most intimate aspects of their common life in order to find salvation. Republicans also claimed that a wife owed obedience to her spouse, although her conscience was supposed to be guided by the voice of reason. The secular model of marital morality they promulgated was unified; its structure did not contain any metaphysical elements nor did it require obedience to a supernatural entity. However, those who aspired to diminish the influence of the Church on the shaping of women's conjugal conduct were few; in the previous chapters it was shown that female devotion was very well-received. The small group of men who believed that priests should not advise their spouses, thought they could thus efface the tensions between husband and wife. In their opinion, it was unlikely that a lady would vacillate between her responsibilities as a spouse and her duty as a Christian. To conclude, sweetness, docility, devotion and patience were the basic virtues anticipated from the French married woman both by Catholics and republicans.

In the works representing themes related to marriage, the notion of female purity which is often associated with piety prevails. Painters who wanted to emphasise the ideal of the virginal spouse preferred a religious context, something which appealed to the art-critics and the public. One cannot assert that artists' choice always corresponded to their Christian devotion. For example, it would be risky to posit that Buland's *Restitution à la Vierge le lendemain du mariage* propagated the superiority of Catholicism over secularism. As it was demonstrated in the analysis of First Communion images, customs which were integrated to sacraments and ecclesiastic rituals were cherished and respected by the people regardless of their religious background, while a Catholic setting conveyed certain ideas more successfully. Thus, Buland's work provided the public with the model of a humble, pure and docile spouse, who would be good both for a pious man and for a free-thinker.

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<sup>369</sup> Montier, *L'Amour*, p.2, 10, 12.

Although the *Restitution à la Vierge le lendemain du mariage* could hardly be considered enigmatic, it did not fail to perplex the art-critic Louis Enault. It must be admitted that, to a certain extent, most of the paintings discussed in this chapter are ambiguous. It is not easy to discern the ideological position of an artist; this latter did not produce a work in order to declare his thesis on a moral issue. The *Constat d'adultère* is shockingly straightforward, but does not permit us to tell with certitude whether Garnier wished to denounce the unfaithful wife, or to criticise those men who, under the cover of the law, pitilessly humiliated her. I would argue that it was sometimes more prudent for an artist to be ambiguous, thus letting the public and the commentators free to make assumptions about a picture's meaning. The total lack of ambiguity did not guarantee a work's success; the negative reception of Gervex's painting *Mariage civil*, created to serve the republican propaganda, proves it.

## FOURTH CHAPTER

### **Towards National Regeneration: Policies for Mothers and Infants.**

#### **1. Depopulation as Source of Anxiety.**

During the early Third Republic, the survival of new-born children and the promulgation of dutiful motherhood were two major concerns of the French state. The reason for this unprecedented anxiety, which motivated illustrious scientists and politicians to assume a paternal role saving the infants and forming responsible mothers, was generated by the depopulation problem. It is characteristic that, between 1881 and 1923, one *116* books and brochures dealing with this issue appear in the catalogue of the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*.<sup>370</sup> In 1978, Angus McLaren noted that the demographic history of France is completely different to those of other western European countries. In the first case, the decline in fertility rates started in the late eighteenth century whereas in the second, the problem was manifested in the 1870s.<sup>371</sup> Furthermore, in 1984 Karen Offen confirmed that between 1850 and 1910 the French population increased only from 35,7 to 39,1 million, while that of its principal enemy: Germany, increased from 33,4 to 58,4 million.<sup>372</sup> More specifically, from 1875 onward there was a rapid decrease in birth rates, while in four consecutive years between 1891 and 1896 the number of deaths in France exceeded that of births.<sup>373</sup> It was then, in 1896, that Zola announced his project to write a book concerning depopulation (*Fécondité*), and Dr Jacques Bertillon, physician, demographer and militant pro-natalist, founded the *Alliance Nationale pour l'Accroissement de la Population Française*.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>370</sup>*Un patriote aux origines de la puériculture Gaston Variot 1855-1930 Médecin et mécène*, Exhibition Catalogue, Simon Dhoulilly, Nicholas Sainte Fare Garnot *et al.*, Paris, Musée de l'assistance publique, May-December 1984, p.7.

<sup>371</sup> Angus McLaren, 'Abortion in France: Women and the Regulation of Family Size 1800-1914', *French Historical Studies*, 10, 3, Spring 1978, p. 461.

<sup>372</sup> Offen Karen, 'Depopulation, nationalism and feminism in fin-de-siècle France', *American Historical Review*, no.3, vol.89, June 1984, p. 651.

<sup>373</sup> Richard Tomlinson, 'The disappearance of France 1896-1940: French politics and the birth rate', *Historical Journal* 28, no.2, 1985, p. 405. and Francis Ronsin, *La Grève des ventres: propagande néo-malthusienne et baisse de la natalité française* (Paris 1980), p.16.

<sup>374</sup> Tomlinson, 'The disappearance', p.405.

The memory of the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war remained vivid for many decades, determining the tendency to see depopulation as a terrible plague. However, the certainty that the population's size comprised an indispensable factor of national prosperity might have other historical reasons. It must be remembered that France was the strongest nation in Europe when it was also the most populous: in the seventeenth century. The "power of large numbers" became a notion propagated by politicians, underscored by moralists and established through statistical analysis. Thus, in 1897, Dr Bertillon, *Chef de travaux statistiques de la Ville de Paris*, drew attention to the phenomenon of low natality figures where he saw the imminent disappearance of France, or, as he dramatically phrased it, the "*Finis Galliae*".<sup>375</sup> In Bertillon's most famous work, published in 1897 under the title *Le Problème de la dépopulation*, arguments were based on the undisputed logic of figures. Since 1891, he remarked, 1,903,160 births had been registered in Germany whereas, for the same time frame (1891- 1897), France numbered only 908,859 births.<sup>376</sup> Lack of future soldiers would make the country an easy prey. Interestingly, as Richard Tomlinson stressed in his article on French politics and the birth rate, people from different ideological backgrounds shared common fears. Thus, the rhetoric of Bertillon, an orthodox republican who foresaw the extinction of his fatherland, does not differ from that of the Marxist leader Jules Guesde exposed in an article titled *La France se meurt*.<sup>377</sup> As far as it concerns the position of the Church, Pius IX, like his predecessors and his successors, promoted the idea of families with many children.<sup>378</sup>

Taking into account the anxieties which were described above, the present chapter will investigate how the exaltation of the responsible, fecund mother interweaved with the virtue of patriotism during the Third Republic and explore whether art contributed to this debate. Does the generalised uneasiness over the imminent death of the nation change the views on the moral and social dimension of motherhood? Is the evolution of the maternal model perceived in painting? How did childcare policies develop and to what extent did painters respond to the contemporary discourse?

Catholics and Republicans who had a solid scientific background and wanted to solve the demographic problem attempted to detect the reasons which made the French unwilling to

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<sup>375</sup> Jacques Bertillon, *Le Problème*, Paris, 1897, p.14.

<sup>376</sup> Bertillon, *Le Problème*, p.9, 10.

<sup>377</sup> Tomlinson, 'The disappearance', p.414.

<sup>378</sup> Ronsin, *La Grève des ventres*, p.25.

procreate, and discover the causes of infant deaths. Hostility to children, the woman's need to work for a living, or her desire to spend more time socialising than nursing her baby, were thought to be behind the restriction of births and the practice of putting infants out to be breastfed. In 1977, George Sussman observed that fertility decline was very present among the upper classes.<sup>379</sup> In 1882, Charles Richet, a young professor at the Faculty of Medicine, attributed this condition to the "voluntary sterility of his compatriots": a euphemism for birth control.<sup>380</sup> Actually, the bourgeoisie had become so accustomed to small families that, sometimes, mothers admonished their sons-in-law when they learned about the arrival of a second or a third child.<sup>381</sup> This behaviour was described in Zola's *Pot-Bouille*. In this novel, Monsieur and Madame Vuillaume, an elderly middle-class couple, boast about having only one child at an advanced age because this way the husband managed to advance professionally and save money. They both voice a Malthusian mentality which favoured the accumulation of capital instead of procreation. "*Voyez-vous Monsieur,*" says M. Vuillaume addressing the young Octave Mouret, "*ce sont les enfants qui sont lourds.*" His wife agrees: "*Si nous en avions eu un second, jamais nous n'aurions pu joindre les deux bouts... Aussi rappelez-vous, Jules,*" she warns her son-in-law, "*ce que j'ai exigé, en vous donnant Marie : un enfant, pas plus, ou nous nous fâcherions ! Les ouvriers seuls pondent des petits comme des poules, sans s'inquiéter de ce que ça coûtera. Il est vrai qu'ils les lâchent sur le pavé, de vrais troupeaux de bêtes, qui m'éccœurent dans les rues.*"<sup>382</sup> The chapter explores the moral and social reaction of those concerned with depopulation to these ideas. What arguments did they use in order to convince the French – and more particularly the middle classes – for the benefits of having many offspring? How was the image of the happy, accomplished mother constructed and promulgated in order to disclose and/or appease these inquietudes?

This chapter widely considers the question of maternal breastfeeding. Where should we attribute the increasing importance it took during Third Republic? This part of the thesis investigates the ideological affiliations of those who advocated it and the political measures which were taken in order to promote it among all social classes. Did the bourgeois woman change her attitude towards breastfeeding and why? How was the wet nurse represented? Doctors concerned with babies' high death rates displayed a great hostility to the wet nursing

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<sup>379</sup> Georges Sussman, The wet-nursing business in nineteenth-century France, *French Historical Studies*, no.2, vol.9, Autumn 1975, p.326.

<sup>380</sup> Offen, 'Depopulation, Nationalism', p.652.

<sup>381</sup> McLaren, 'Abortion in France', p.476.

<sup>382</sup> Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, p.91.

business which was unique in scale in France, and they ventured to moralise it. In 1873, Dr Brochard, daunted by the rise in mortality among children consigned to rural wet nurses, blamed France's population problems on maternal indifference and the incompetence of administrators.<sup>383</sup> His reaction should be understood within the context of a general decrease in public tolerance on the matter of infant deaths. Actually, the mortality of nurslings, affirmed George Sussman, rose sharply in the early 1870s. In 1874, 35% of the new born placed with the municipal *Bureau des Nourrices* in Paris was brought up by dry nurses, poor women who bottle-fed infants, half of whom did not survive. Between 1871 and 1874 the 41, 6 % of all the babies placed by the *Bureau* passed away, while forty years earlier the percentage was only 26, 3 %.<sup>384</sup> One should keep in mind that statistics do not concern the upper social strata, whose members could afford to hire and supervise a *nourrice sur lieu*; only 6% of bourgeois children died in infancy.<sup>385</sup> The Roussel law which was adopted by the *Assemblée Nationale* on December 1874, was the fruit of the state efforts to control the wet-nursing industry: “*Tout enfant âgé de moins de deux ans, qui est placé moyennant salaire en nourrice, en sevrage ou en garde, hors du domicile de ses parents, devient par ce fait l'objet d'une surveillance de l'autorité publique, ayant pour but de protéger sa vie et sa santé.*”<sup>386</sup>

Finally Republicans showed a great concern over the imperiled moral order, manifested in the causes of depopulation. Professor Charles Gide, the protestant director of the *Fédération des Sociétés contre la Pornographie*, denounced the disdain of moral values that lead people to sought satisfaction of their vices, rendered them indifferent to a regular family life and vulnerable to venereal diseases.<sup>387</sup> It may be confirmed that traditional patriarchal values identified with Catholicism were now defended by people who strongly supported the secular regime.<sup>388</sup> This chapter investigates whether Catholics and republicans who struggled to save babies' lives and form competent mothers were ideological allies or antagonists. What were their differences, taking into account that the Church had monopolised the charitable care for mothers and children for centuries? The belief that vices such as illicit sex and alcoholism lead to physical degeneration which is inherited to the next generations,

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<sup>383</sup>Offen, 'Depopulation, nationalism', p.652.

<sup>384</sup>Sussman, 'The wet-nursing business', p.321. (Concerning private bureaus in Paris, the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, the police never kept track of the infants placed with a wet-nurse to know whether they died or returned (Sussman, 'The wet-nursing business' 306)

<sup>385</sup> Piffault, *La Femme de foyer*, p.108

<sup>386</sup>*Un Patriote aux origines*, p.11.

<sup>387</sup> Ronsin, *La Grève des ventres*, p.125.

<sup>388</sup> Offen, 'Depopulation, nationalism', p. 661.



along with the discovery of microbes created an obsession with health and hygiene. Does painting reveal the importance that was given to vigorous infants and the moral dimension cleanliness?

## 2. Charity for Children and Mothers in Third Republic France.

### 2.1. Scientists rally; the pioneers of a social reformation.

In 1870, a few months before the fall of the Second Empire, during a conference organised by the *Société Protectrice de l'Enfance*, Dr. Émile Chauffard, professor of pathology in the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, addressed the attendants with the following words: “*Nous sommes les apôtres résolus d’une réforme que réclament l’humanité, la religion, la morale et les plus grands intérêts de notre race et de notre grandeur national, nous avons foi dans l’avenir de notre mission et nous adressons ici à tous les coeurs généreux un énergique appel, au nom de la plus touchante et de la plus noble des créatures de Dieu.*”<sup>389</sup>

The French physician, a devout Catholic and opponent of materialism, defended his ideas courageously. His students rebelled against him on the count of his religious convictions.<sup>390</sup> Seeking to commence a successful social and moral reformation along with his colleagues, he proudly declared their common willingness to embrace an apostolic role. Furthermore, in the light of the doctor’s idealism, the triumphant tone he adopted reveals a sincere aspiration; he believed that he and his companions were the ambassadors of a salutary social reformation. Émile Chauffard, who would become inspector-general of schools of medicine, was not motivated only by sentiments of Christian charity. His words show him concerned with the grandeur of his fatherland and demonstrate that patriotism did not form an

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<sup>389</sup> *Bulletin de la société protectrice de l’enfant fondée en 1865*, année 6, vol.3 Paris 1870, p.6.

<sup>390</sup> Philippe Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Cambridge Massachusetts and London 1995), p.40. (In 1874, the Minister of Public Instruction Arthur de Cumont, a devout Catholic, attempted to appoint one of Chauffard’s confederates as Dean of the Medical School. The students opposed to this decision. They hailed the materialist histologist Charles Robin crying “hats off before science” while shouting anticlerical slogans at Chauffard. Classes were suspended and when things came back to normal, Chauffard’s lecture hall was nearly empty)

exclusively republican quality. Thus, before the establishment of the anticlerical government in 1879, the physician included the argument of national prosperity in the reasons of this campaign against depopulation and child mortality.

The *Société Protectrice de l'Enfance* constituted one of the first private charity organisations that was not controlled by the Roman Catholic Church. Between 1815 and 1870, this latter had monopolised the assistance to the poor, proselytising people's minds against a secular Republic; many politicians and health activists would sought to undermine this influence.<sup>391</sup> The *Société*, whose humanitarian oeuvre is discussed here, was comprised of physicians and infant health activists with different ideological backgrounds. Therefore, Émile Chauffard's emotional appeal addressed "all the generous hearts" regardless their personal beliefs.

The members of the *Société Protectrice de l' Enfance*, despite their status and determination, were alone in their effort since the few people who comprehended the vital importance of this mission were mainly men of medicine. Thus, Dr Charles Monot, who served as a mayor of a village in the canton of Montsauche (Nièvre) and held various medical offices, praised the new organisation's efficiency in preventing the death of young children by propagating maternal breastfeeding and inspecting the living conditions of infants put with a wet-nurse in the countryside. In places where babies' care was under the uninterrupted supervision of this organisation, he observed, the child mortality was reduced to 12 %.<sup>392</sup> Dr Monot affirmed that the metropolitan society to which his colleague Émile Chauffard belonged was isolated, and encouraged his readers: "*forts de ces résultats, unissons nous, formons des sociétés maternelles, des sociétés protectrices de l'enfance dans tous les départements.*"<sup>393</sup> Like most welfare and other insurance reforms of that era, those designed to protect infants began on a municipal and departmental level, before the passage of national legislation. Could we assert that the *Société Protectrice de l' Enfance* of 1865 became a source of inspiration for the Republican politicians who dealt with matters of childcare over the next three decades?

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<sup>391</sup> Rachel Fuchs, Mary Lynn Stewart, Elinor Accampo (eds.), *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914*, Baltimore 1995 p.101, 102.

<sup>392</sup> Charles Monot, *De la mortalité excessive des enfants* (Paris 1872), p.43.

<sup>393</sup> Monot, *De la mortalité*, p.43, 60.

The *Société Protectrice de l' Enfant* was founded a few years after the notion *puériculture* was coined. This word was first introduced in 1863 in the Dictionary of Littré to signify children's moral education and then, in 1865, it was used by Dr Alfred Caron to define the culture of children *after birth*.<sup>394</sup> The physician used it in a small pamphlet and in the course *L'Instruction des jeunes enfants et la puériculture*, which the *Ministère de l'Instruction Publique* authorised him to teach. Dr Caron was not given permission to speak on *puériculture* at a Paris meeting because, as the presiding officer of the conference suggested, this would cause hilarity among the audience.<sup>395</sup> In the 1860s and the 1870s it was thought that there were other fundamental problems to be solved before the doctors turn their attention to the science of raising children; the fact that infant mortality rates in childbirth were extremely high made the interest in *puériculture* a rather marginal phenomenon.<sup>396</sup>

As already mentioned in the introduction, the French were afraid of being economically and militarily vanquished by the unified and growing Germany, whose politicians also expressed keen awareness of relative demographic issues.<sup>397</sup> Dr Chauffard perceived the child as saviour of the nation and guarantor of the motherland's continuity while Dr Alexandre Mayer, the infant health activist who created the *Société Protectrice de l' Enfant*, posited that children are innocent beings who incarnate the France and the future.<sup>398</sup> In the child's person, both physicians saw a *messianic* figure whose new identity incorporated transcendental qualities which rendered its life priceless. "*L'enfant qui vient de naître*", claimed Dr Charles Monot in his turn, "*appartient à sa famille par les liens du sang, mais il appartient aussi à la patrie, à la grande famille nationale.*"<sup>399</sup> By considering children's life to be national property, Dr Monot put things on a new dimension. The matters which concern a baby's upbringing and unimpeded happiness ceased to constitute private questions. They became political issues on which social hygienists, physicians, demographers, government officials and moral reformers of the early Third Republic focused their attention. An infant's well-being was no more a question of pity but an issue which, primarily, concerned the state.

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<sup>394</sup> Ellis Havelock *Studies in the Psychology of Sex., Sex in Relation to Society*, vol 6 (London 1927), p.67. In Latin *puer* means boy. Nevertheless, the word *puériculture* refers to both genders.

<sup>395</sup> William Schneider, *Quality and Quantity: The Quest for Biological Regeneration in 20th century France*, (New York 1990), p.63.

<sup>396</sup> Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, p.65.

<sup>397</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, 1995, p.83.

<sup>398</sup> *Bulletin de la Société Protectrice*, p.4.

<sup>399</sup> Monot, *De la mortalité*, p. 49.

## 2.2 The republican state becomes a paternal aegis: doctors' contribution.

In the period under study it was believed that from the moment of his birth the infant had a *droit à la vie*. The conviction that French republican governments owed each baby protection so that it could exercise its fundamental right to life derived from the notion of solidarity, according to which every member of society is indebted to all others. Solidarity was the moral imperative to a social reform which united Catholics, Republicans, Protestants and Freemason activists aspiring to transform the country into a vast family, a brotherhood of men.<sup>400</sup> A great advocator of *solidarité* was Paul Strauss (1852-1943), an atheist Frenchman with Jewish background, who held public office from 1883 until 1940 and became one of the leading political figures of his time. While Strauss was childless, his entire career was marked by the ardent desire to save babies' lives. He was convinced that "the future is in the children, these little martyrs", who so often fell victims of abandonment, negligence, ignorance or infanticide.<sup>401</sup> To achieve his purposes he pursued policies to aid, educate and safeguard French mothers.<sup>402</sup>

The idea that it was the state's responsibility and obligation to provide insurance and welfare in order to guarantee the survival of abandoned, ill or orphan infants, became the founding principle of the social welfare programs which were developed in late nineteenth-century France. The political attempt to shift from optional charity to obligatory welfare provided by the government, reached its peak during the 1890s. What is the pictorial evidence that the state introduced a system in order to control the depopulation problem, showing a human face to its unfortunate, underprivileged subjects?<sup>403</sup>

The painting titled *L'Heure de la tétée des enfants débiles a la Maternité* (Fig.47) was exhibited by Ernest-Ange Duez in the SAF in 1895. Inside a spacious room in *La Maternité*, the largest public maternity hospital in Paris, approximately twenty wet-nurses are represented on duty; according to the schedule this was the time of the day when the infirm newborns had to be fed. The image, which is known today from an engraving because the original is lost,

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<sup>400</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.82, 84. The concept of solidarity is analysed in the last chapter.

<sup>401</sup> Paul Feillet, *De l'assistance publique à Paris* (Paris 1888), p.vii

<sup>402</sup> Fuchs, Stewart Accampo, *Gender*, p.82 (interestingly, politicians who were concerned with depopulation had few children: Leroy-Beaulieu had one child and Jacques Bertillon had two. (Fuchs, Stewart Accampo, *Gender*, p.86.)

<sup>403</sup> Fuchs, Stewart Accampo, *Gender*, p.82.

permits us to raise a number of issues concerning the politics of motherhood in France during the late nineteenth century. The sick infants depicted by Duez had to be restored to health because the Republic needed robust citizens who would become competent soldiers and defend their fatherland on the battlefield. To strengthen the newborns' weak constitution, the doctors appointed by the government to run the state-funded *Maternité* ensured that the babies were fed by stout and diligent women; as it will be discussed later, during this period, men of medicine were convinced that through breast-milk, children inherited the physical and spiritual qualities of their nurse.

In his review of the 1895 SAF published in the conservative *Revue des deux mondes*, Georges Lafenestre commented on this work together with Brouillet's *Le Vaccin du croup à l'hôpital Trousseau* which was exhibited in the same Salon and will be discussed later. According to Lafenestre, the essence of *L'Heure de la tétée des enfants débiles à la Maternité* is found in the colour used by Duez:

*“Par des accords divers et délicats de toutes sortes de blancheurs: blancheurs des murs, des rideaux, des draps, des tabliers, des robes, combinées avec les taches rosées ou brunâtres des carnations, visages, poitrines et mains. Cette simple orchestration des blancs plus vive et plus montée, elle répand à la Maternité, sur cette troupe de nounous offrant leurs doubles mamelles à une ribambelle de petits citadins affamés comme Gargantua, je ne sais quel air d'allégresse salubre tout à fait réjouissante. On a le droit de mettre de la bonne humeur dans sa peinture quand la peinture s'en imprègne de telle façon.”*<sup>404</sup>

The “eloquence” of the dominant white communicates the artist's message, because it underscores the idea of cleanliness which should rule in a place where infants dwell. The choice of the art critic's words when he describes his emotions generated from this work is crucial: *allégresse salubre tout à fait réjouissante*. If Lafenestre, child of his era, found a joyful resonance in whiteness, it is because this clinical tone certifies that science has triumphed in this space and, therefore, the babies' safe upbringing was reassured. It was to the Republican leaders' honour that they comprehended and embraced the new medical rules; doctors had rendered them aware of the fact that cleanliness, which forms the subject of another section, was the indispensable precondition for good health.

I would argue that the notion of *égalité* as it was perceived by the Third Republic emerges powerfully from this image. The babies in the painting discussed here do not come

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<sup>404</sup> Georges Lafenestre, ‘Le Salon de 1895’, *Revue des deux mondes*, pér.4, vol.65, 1 juin 1895, p.661.

from bourgeois families; they are working class women's progeny who enjoy the benefits of a proper environment. Many of them are illegitimate and will be abandoned to the state's providence by their mothers, as soon as these leave the hospital. Duez seems to introduce egalitarianism via an impression of uniformity. The babies and the wet-nurses look almost identical; they are not represented as individuals, or as members of a group destined to be considered separately. They form parts of reality portrayed as an achievement of the State and at the same time their figures visualise the republican idea of a role (*nourrice*), a human condition (*enfant débile*) and their interaction.

The painting of Duez is not about maternal tenderness, but regards the providence of an organised, charitable State. Breastfeeding is represented as a good practice exercised by women whose robust body constitutes an impeccably functioning machine. The attentiveness, collective spirit and co-ordination of the persons who are performing their task like workers in a factory are remarkable. The hospital's day-schedule is respected and everything appears to be in order. Because of the former qualities, this breastfeeding scene acquires a nearly industrial character. On the one hand, the fact that each woman nurses two babies at the same time, could signify that the mechanism structured by the government needed to be ultra efficient because there was no time to be wasted. On the other, it basically shows that the *Maternité* suffered from lack of staff due to restricted funding. It should be also pointed out that the wet-nurses portrayed here are controlled by the Republic since they are serving its purpose to control depopulation and grow a generation of healthy citizens. The exigency "*moralisons l'industrie nourricière, elle deviendra meilleure*" appears to have been satisfied.<sup>405</sup> The wet-nursing industry becomes morally sane by being subjected to the nation's democratic leadership.

Surviving thanks to the government's benevolence, the children depicted by Duez are literally brought up on the knees of the Republic. By embracing the orphan and infirm infants in hospices and foundations, the regime had the opportunity to mould their consciences from a tender age, distracting them from the influence of the Catholic Church, where, until recently, nearly all the unfortunate belonged. The children would owe gratitude to the state providence which saved their life and at some point they would be requested to pay their debt. The Republic, which saw its continuity in the newborns, was transformed into a paternal aegis, personified by knowledgeable doctors and childless politicians like Paul Strauss.

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<sup>405</sup>Monot, *De la mortalité*, p.60.

During the 1890s, there was a tremendous medical advance in the care of childbearing mothers and their newborns. In the 1870s the gynaecologist Etienne Tarnier (1828-1897) discovered antiseptic delivery which prevented childbed fever. Furthermore, in 1881, he introduced the first incubators for premature infants in the public hospital *Maternité* in Paris, managing to reduce the death rate among the babies born there up to 28 % within three years.<sup>406</sup> In 1895, a distinguished French obstetrician and Tarnier's student, Dr Adolphe Pinard, revived the word *puériculture* in a talk at the Academy of Medicine and expanded its meaning by applying it to include the culture of children before birth. Furthermore, Paul Strauss, whose theses were discussed above, posited that *puériculture* was an antidote against decreasing population since it protected mothers from sickness, accidents and crimes and it insured the child against the dangers and risks of its life.<sup>407</sup> “*C'est l'oeuvre la plus forte et la plus sûre de la défense nationale, he claimed, et elle est par surcroît un acte d'humanité, une manifestation généreuse d'altruisme et de bonté.*”<sup>408</sup> In 1908 *puériculture* would be defined as the science which has for its end the search for the knowledge relative to the reproduction, the preservation and the amelioration of human race (eugenics).<sup>409</sup> Physicians' ability to save infants lives' with pasteurisation of milk and control of infectious diseases made them precious to the Third Republic. Thanks to their efforts French society started growing more sensitive, altering its past attitudes towards matters which were related to nurslings' care. It was therefore consistent that, during this period, doctors got involved into politics holding seats in the national and municipal governments, or they were programmatic legislators engaged in a sanitary crusade in order to change the babies' environment, whose most important element was milk.<sup>410</sup>

Alcoholic, infirm and syphilitic mothers, who - to the great indignation of the state - were many, should not nurse their babies; animal milk was presented as a solution. Working women who could not afford a *nourrice*, or preferred to keep the new-born at home instead of sending it to be breastfed in the countryside, also used the baby-bottle as a supplement. This new technique whose popularity increased during the 1890s, being far from perfect, often led to illnesses and death; furthermore, young mothers who did not know how to use the bottle

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<sup>406</sup> Brown, 'The Coney island baby laboratory', *Invention and Technology Magazine*, no 2, vol.10, autumn 1994, p.1.

<sup>407</sup> Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, p.69.

<sup>408</sup> Strauss, *Dépopulation*, p.9.

<sup>409</sup> Havelock, *Studies*, p.67.

<sup>410</sup> Fuchs, op.cit., 1995, p.84.

properly violated the rules of hygiene. This situation necessitated the intervention of scrupulous physicians who created foundations in order to assist and instruct these women, thus serving their nation. The *Dispensaire de Belleville* was created in 1892 thanks to the initiative of the pediatrician Gaston Variot. Two years later, it took the name *Goutte de Lait* from a term used by Dr Dufour, the first person who underlined that animal milk, along with the use of the baby bottle, were important because indispensable.<sup>411</sup> Dr Variot's religious beliefs are not known, but we are aware of his political affiliations; he was an enlightened patriot of republican convictions, sincerely worried about France's demographic problem. He had realised that poverty and ignorance of working class mothers was often the reason of infants' demise.<sup>412</sup> The pediatrician spent many decades providing poor mothers with free medical advice about their babies. The importance of his social contribution, his assiduity and the novelty of his initiative which responded to national exigencies lead many artists to represent him in action. These projects were often public commissions; the State wanted to immortalise medical achievements accomplished under the republican aegis.

In 1901, the painter Jean Geoffroy dedicated to Variot's oeuvre a triptych which is now kept in the *Musée de l'Assistance Publique*; the work celebrates the triumph of science, its salutary role in human life and the successful application of *puériculture*. In the left wing of this secular "altarpiece", titled *Le Dispensaire de la Goutte de Lait à Belleville* (Fig.48), the babies are weighed in order to control the results of their nutrition on their constitution. In the central panel, Gaston Variot with an assistant at his side, based on her baby's physical condition, is giving instructions to a mother from the popular milieu. This child's nutrition, like that of most of the infants portrayed in this painting, combines maternal and animal milk; the woman's shirt is unbuttoned because she was nursing, but on the table between her and the doctor there is a baby-bottle. A group of mothers with their offspring are waiting their turn; one of them has undressed a healthy little child, another woman is playing with hers, while a third one is breastfeeding. In the right panel a mother receives free pasteurised milk in a baby bottle. Geoffroy is proclaiming the success of Variot and the assiduity of his colleagues. There are not any sickly children, suffering mothers, or signs of impatience due to the long wait; the work exudes an air of order, contentment and optimism for the future of the

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<sup>411</sup>*Un Patriote aux origines*, p.39.

<sup>412</sup>*Un Patriote aux origines*, p.5.



babies. We see no *infirmières* either; only erudite male physicians teaching working-class females their maternal duties.

As has been pointed out, the Church had monopolised charity for orphan and abandoned children - as well as any other form of aid to destitute families - for centuries. Long before Gaston Variot creates the republican *Dispensaire de Belleville*, the Church ran centres which provided free medical care to those who needed it. Thus, clergymen and nuns strengthened their grip on the people who benefited from Christian philanthropy. In his work *Au dispensaire* created in 1888 (Fig.49), the Catholic artist Pharaon de Winter portrayed a mother with her little daughter sleeping on her lap and her son standing behind her. This family is waiting for the Abbess who directs the *dispensaire* to talk to them. A young nun is bending over the mother superior's desk while this latter is reading a letter that probably confirms the financial situation of this family and the fact that they are entitled to receive help. In Geoffroy's triptych which was discussed earlier, the atmosphere was joyful and excessively optimistic; the artist aspired to serve the republican cause and spread enthusiasm for the regime's achievements; every mother seems satisfied, untroubled and confident. The Catholic de Winter's purposes were different and maybe his rendering was closer to psychological reality; the faces of the two nuns are kind and grave, but the woman's expression reveals fear, fatigue and anxiety. Geoffroy created an idealised portrayal of republican welfare, but it is also possible that the institutional and medical services provided by the state in 1901, were much better than those offered by a Catholic *dispensaire* in 1888.

Paul Strauss, a devoted son of the secular Third Republic, envisaged the predominance of state welfare over private charity. Secular France was preparing itself to replace the absent parents. Public providence should take care of the orphan infant who would grow in the paternal, charitable hands of male bureaucrats, health inspectors and politicians. However, Strauss was aware of the fact that public funds were not enough to sponsor his ambitious programmes. He knew that state social care was still in its cradle and reasonably encouraged private, secular philanthropy and tolerated religious citizens' benevolence. More specifically, he assured Catholics that private charity would not disappear because poverty affected such large parts of the French population.<sup>413</sup> Since new-born children's salvation was a national priority, the co-operation among persons with different ideological backgrounds on the basis of childcare was unavoidable; this was the very essence of *solidarité*. The Church and the

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<sup>413</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.89.

clergy were the rivals of the Third Republic but Catholic citizens as private individuals could act as the regime's associates in a common cause.

### 3. Moral Questions and Social Regulation

#### 3.1 *La mère ouvrière*

In the painting *A la crèche* of 1897 (Fig.50), Jean Geoffroy represented a microcosm of childcare facilities in France. The space he represented constitutes one of the small centres located in urban areas, destined to receive children during the absence of the mother who was forced to work. Founded by Firmin Mirbeau in 1845, during the 1880s the crèches were still considered insalubrious and unsafe; until the end of the 1870s there were only thirty of them in Paris and fourteen in the suburbs.<sup>414</sup> Gaston Variot had also castigated them as unhygienic. Over the next decades, aspiring to improve these centres and render them trustworthy, Paul Strauss attempted to persuade the government to introduce an effective system for their mandatory supervision. Thus, in 1897, in private sessions of the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Assistance Publique* he urged the enactment of regulations enabling doctors to inspect both public and private crèches regularly.<sup>415</sup> In the same the year – and perhaps not coincidentally - Geoffroy painted his image; three cradles are placed in the room which is bathed in daylight and, once again, the bright white colour of the curtains and the bed-sheets accentuates the idea of immaculate cleanliness. An art-critic found the work: “*clair, lumineux, transparent, d’expression délicatement nuancée. Charmant dans son enveloppe de lumière blanche qui filtre à travers les rideaux, elle est charmante par le calme et le silence qui règne charmante par les finesses du dessin qui en relèvent la grâce.*”<sup>416</sup> Geoffroy's painting, an instrument of republican propaganda, communicated the regime's humanitarian work. His picture affirms the amelioration of the crèches' function; calm environment, propriety and order render them trustworthy.

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<sup>414</sup> *Un patriote aux origines*, p.10.

<sup>415</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.100.

<sup>416</sup> Louis Gonse, 'Les Salons de 1897', p.62.

In *A la crèche*, an attentive young female is portrayed putting a sleeping baby to bed next to another infant. Her unbuttoned blouse allows the viewer to deduce that she has just breastfed the child. The fact that she is not wearing a uniform like the women in *L'Heure de la tétée des enfants débiles à la Maternité*, renders her status different to that of a professional wet-nurse. I would argue that the way the artist represented this working-class female sitter looking at the baby and holding it in her arms underscores her tenderness rather than her assiduity. Actually, Paul Strauss supported the creation of more municipal crèches, as well as other inexpensive infant day-care facilities which would serve as a further means to educate mothers and encourage them to continue breastfeeding both at home and at the facility. As a passionate advocate of maternal nursing, he thought this latter was indispensable for the health of a baby and suggested it should be practiced regardless the mothers' undernourished condition and their need to work out of home.<sup>417</sup> In the painting discussed here, Geoffroy depicted the realisation of Strauss' vision; a dutiful *ouvrière* and mother nurses her infant in the *crèche* before going to work. The success of his work and the need for this kind of images may be proved from the fact that the artist created another version of the same theme in 1899. There he added the figure of a little girl, lovingly kissing her baby brother's foot. It is interesting that like the atheist Paul Strauss, the Catholic obstetrician Émile Chauffard suggested that maternal breastfeeding, as the most important aspect of *puériculture*, should become obligatory and urged the French state to consolidate its right to take a baby under its protection if its closest relative abandons its care to a stranger. According to Chauffard, an indifferent mother loses her natural right to be her child's exclusive guardian.<sup>418</sup> Of course, the state to which the Catholic physician entrusted the rejected infant was not the anticlerical Third Republic but Napoleon's Second Empire.

### 3.2 *La fille – mère*

Depopulation and the desire to save infant lives were so overwhelming, that certain politicians turned a blind eye to extra-marital sexual activity which was condemned by the old moral code. The resolved leaders of this ambitious child-centred social campaign realised that

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<sup>417</sup>Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.91, 94.

<sup>418</sup>*Bulletin de la Société Protectrice*, 1870, p. 6.

severe state treatment of women who had a child outside wedlock, added to their inevitable social stigmatisation, would lead them to get rid of their offspring, depriving the country of its future strength. It was necessary for the French government to appear indulgent, where society would not. For instance, Strauss was not profoundly concerned with the sexuality of working-class females; to him it was of a greater urgency that a mother would not abandon or kill her offspring. Therefore, not only did he initiate and support programs aspiring to encourage single mothers to keep and nurse their babies but also founded refuge-workshops for homeless pregnant women.<sup>419</sup>

It is worthy to mention that Paul Strauss's permissive attitude was in accordance with the ideas expressed by Dr Charles Monot who, in 1872, had criticised the social hypocrisy and intolerance that led unmarried mothers to despair and infanticide:

*“Et nous nous enorgueillissons de la civilisation du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, de ce siècle de lumière, où sans pitié nous condamnons à mort cette pauvre fille-mère qui a égorgé son pauvre petit enfant, par cet unique motif qu'elle ne pouvait ou elle n'osait l'élever, parce qu'étant l'objet du mépris, de la réprobation générale, isolée, repoussée de tous, éperdue, désespérée, folle de douleur, elle a sacrifié son enfant à son honneur, et nous laissons exercer une industrie (nourricière) qui tue froidement, souvent par calcul et d'une façon barbare un bien plus grand nombre des enfants.”*<sup>420</sup>

Before Strauss and his associates commenced this social reform, Monot had insinuated that the crime of killing one's own child was less grave than denying to breastfeed it and trusting this sacred duty to a wet-nurse. If citizens condemned an act of despair how could they absolve indifference, he asked?

The legislation Strauss enacted illustrates an altered view of the family in late nineteenth century France; unmarried females would receive an amount of money so that they could stay home and nurse their infant. Thus, the one-parent household comprised only of the mother and her child was made possible through limited public welfare. Such policies faced the hostility of conservative moralists. These latter observed that programmes of financial aid for maternal breastfeeding endorsed corruption by favouring the *filles-mères* instead of encouraging women to be honest. They expressed their indignation for the fact that a married mother was deprived of public assistance only because she had a husband. Astonishingly, they observed, a decent lady received less from her local welfare bureau than did a single mother

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<sup>419</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.87.

<sup>420</sup> Monot, *De la mortalité*, p.37.

from the public assistance, although the second's conduct was disgraceful. However, the Third Republic's indulgence did not spring only from the legislators' humanity, compassion or understanding; even more, national leadership did not become advocator of women's sexual liberation. These men's stance was above all realistic. The French State ignored the woman's moral conduct which could not be controlled, and ventured to secure the survival of her child: a plausible target. Nevertheless, Strauss and his associates who tolerated the existence of one-parent households, always thought that the defense of the nuclear family was a decisive factor of moral order and thus, essentially, an affair of the state.<sup>421</sup>

As late as in 1912, in a speech before the *Assemblée Générale*, Paul Strauss, quoting Dr Adolph Pinard, head of the Baudelocque clinic, claimed that one month of rest was indispensable both before and after child-birth. Due to his profession and position, Dr Pinard was in close, everyday contact with working-class mothers, especially single ones. Thus, he had a better comprehension of their problems and needs than Strauss and could see things in their real dimension; for the physician maternity leaves were above all a question of humanity.<sup>422</sup> On the other hand, Strauss, who referred to the famous gynaecologist's statement in order to support his arguments, considered maternity leaves a question of patriotism; if a woman miscarried out of fatigue the Republic would lose a citizen. By 1893, thanks to Strauss and his associates, all public hospitals in Paris had to admit and provide free medical care to women who, abandoned by their family or lover, had no place to refuge and sought to spend the last month of pregnancy in safety.<sup>423</sup> In 1896, Jeanne Schmahl described the short period of peace the *filles-mères* could enjoy during their stay at the hospital; a peace that was unavoidably mixed with sadness. Most of them would leave their offspring never to see it again.

*“Le séjour à l’hôpital est, pour beaucoup de ces mères sans foyer, une halte bénie; cet ordre, cette paix dans l’agencement de la vie ressemble en quelque chose à la vie de famille dont elles sont privées cet instant d’apaisement, elles ne peuvent pas pleinement en jouir ; car il y a l’enfant, et plus ces femmes sont mères, plus elles auront à souffrir soit qu’elles refusent d’allaiter “de peur de s’attacher au petit” soit qu’elles n’aient pas ce cruel courage et qu’elles quittent l’hôpital en gardant l’enfant.”*<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.104.

<sup>422</sup> Louis Marin et Paul Strauss, *La Protection de la maternité ouvrière* (Paris 1912), p. 58, 75, 85.

<sup>423</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p. 98.

<sup>424</sup> Schmahl, *L’Avenir*, p.13.

The work of Albert Demarest titled *Devant la Maternité* (Fig.51) and painted in 1892, constituted an answer to the burning issue of child abandonment and, hence, to the moral problem generated by free unions and their illegitimate fruits. This way, the artist corresponded to two great social anxieties. Demarest represented the entrance of Baudeloque maternity clinic, situated in the boulevard du Port-Royal and inaugurated in 1890.<sup>425</sup> In a gloomy winter's day, a young mother is represented crossing the road in order to leave her infant in the *Hospice des Enfants Assistés* in rue d'Enfer, which was perpendicular to the boulevard Port Royal. While implementing programmes in order to assist poor mothers bring up their illegitimate offspring, Strauss supported regulations that made abandonment easier. Thus, in 1885, the *Conseil Général du Département de la Seine* decided that a woman could deposit her infant at the *Hospice des Enfants Assistés* any hour during the day or night, remaining anonymous. She was not obliged to provide a name or birth certificate for the child she abandoned either.<sup>426</sup> The portrayed woman's terrible decision was facilitated by the state which lightened the burden of her shame; the political authorities displayed deference aiming to save the new-born. In the work discussed here the part of the road which leads from the maternity clinic to the "*Enfants Assistés*" has been traversed so many times that the snow has melted; Demarest is informing the viewer that, within a few hours many women did the same thing. The young sitter's black dress is probably the one she was wearing before entering the hospital, most likely in order to disguise her pregnancy. Her sad figure brings to mind the compassionate words of the republican author Jeanne Schmahl who was cited above:

*"Il faut avoir vu ces délaissées héroïques pâles de la pâleur des nouvelles accouchées, il faut les voir revêtues de pauvres vêtements, maintenant flottants partir – non pas vers l'inconnu, mais vers la misère certaine, si elles ne consentent à recommencer un nouvel acte du drame de leur pitoyable existence – chargées de ce petit fardeau si lourd à leur visible faiblesse, pour comprendre la barbarie de l'union libre."*<sup>427</sup>

The moral "mistake" of the mother had serious repercussions on her and the child. More importantly, to have an illegitimate offspring meant to "*amoindrir la race.*"<sup>428</sup> The anxiety expressed by Schmahl and the link between health and morality are going to be analysed later.

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<sup>425</sup> Albert-Guillaume Demarest. *La morosité délectable: avec onze lettres d'André Gide à Demarest*, Exhibition Catalogue, Salomé Laurent, Jean-François Minot, Marie-Claude Courdet, Rouen, Musée des Beaux Arts 2 March - 13 May 2007, p.56.

<sup>426</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.97.

<sup>427</sup> Schmahl, *L'Avenir*, p.14.

<sup>428</sup> Schmahl, *L'Avenir*, p.14.

In the work of Demarest, the baby is confided to the charity of the State; on its swaddling clothes we discern the blue ribbons of the *Assistance Publique*.<sup>429</sup> The weather conditions give this scene its appropriate tone; the snow and the gray sky underscore the sadness and solitude of the woman as well as the idea of her inevitable social marginalisation. *Devant la maternité* is an emotionally charged image; instead of taking a distance, the artist who followed the naturalist tradition seems to sympathise with the single mother's tragedy.<sup>430</sup> Depicting this uncomfortable theme, he bestowed it with the qualities of a memorable image. Shown at the SAF in 1892, *Devant la Maternité* would be exhibited many times during the following years; it was also reproduced in order to illustrate books and journals. In 1894, Edouard Simon, former engineer, philanthropist and friend of Demarest bought the work and donated it to the city of Paris; later it was placed in the *Musée de l'Assistance Publique-Hôpitaux de Paris*.<sup>431</sup> It appears that this painter did not want such a painting being favourably judged only due to its anecdotal character: "*Edouard (Simon) feint de s'intéresser à ce que je fais mais c'est par affection pour moi; au fond il ne comprend que ce qui est utile,*" he complained.<sup>432</sup> He ventured to be socially useful through his work, communicating a message of great importance to his contemporaries; even if adult misery is going to be perpetuated, the child had to be saved.

An article published in 1882 in *L' Illustration*, described the way the charity institution where Demarest's woman is going to abandon her baby functioned. This article was written by André Theuriet, a devout Catholic author and journalist with conservative ideas, who served as *fonctionnaire publique* for the Ministry of Finance. The *Enfants Assistés*, opened in 1814, was an improvement of the old Paris foundling hospital which, back in the 1770s, constituted an "*effective infanticide agency*"; at that time, out of the seven thousand abandoned children admitted there each year only a few hundred survived.<sup>433</sup> Subsidised by the French State even under the early Third Republic, it was directed by the Sisters of Charity. It was Saint Vincent de Paul, the founder of their order who first had the idea of creating a *hospice des enfants trouvés* in 1638. Waiting to enter the convent with the yellow façade, Theuriet wrote down his reflections on the drama of desperate mothers, who were lead there

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<sup>429</sup> *Albert-Guillaume Démarest*, p. 33

<sup>430</sup> Maybe Demarest also referred to the birth of his illegitimate daughter and to the difficult situation of his long-time companion after this event. *Albert-Guillaume Démarest*, p.33.

<sup>431</sup> *Albert-Guillaume Démarest*, p.13, 33.

<sup>432</sup> *Albert-Guillaume Démarest*, p.56.

<sup>433</sup> David Coward, Dumas Alexandre, *The Count of Montechristo*, (Oxford University Press 2008) p.1096.

due to poverty and shame: “*en tirant le petit bouton de cuivre luisant, encastré dans le mur, on ne peut s’empêcher de penser à toutes ces mains qui l’ont agité nuit et jour,- mains rendues tremblantes par la misère, la honte ou les remords ; mains défaillantes de douleur ou endurcies par le vice.*”<sup>434</sup>

The drawings of Charles Baude which illustrate the article are based on Theuriet’s descriptions. Due to his religious convictions, this journalist was well-disposed towards this Church-run foundation and gave the readers a quite positive account of what he saw. In the first image, titled *Aux enfants trouvés: l’abandon* (Fig.52), the mother’s gaze is focused on the wet-nurse who takes her baby away, while looking at it affectionately. The young woman’s expression betrays her pain and frustration; she will never see her child again but will occasionally receive a note informing her whether it is alive or not. Furthermore, her disgraceful situation is exposed since she is standing before the man’s bureau having already answered his questions. In 1882, women had to disclose their personal data and declare whether their infant was legitimate or not, because, as it was mentioned before, the law only changed in 1885 thanks to the republicans’ initiative. According to the man in the *accueil*, when a female overwhelmed by emotion is asked whether she is willing to take the infant back, she always answers negatively. André Theuriet wrote that the person who interrogated the mothers was a former military officer, who posited that 98 % of these women abandon their offspring because they are vicious, lazy and selfish and they lack courage. Strangely, extreme poverty does not seem to occur to him as a reason. Here, it should not be pointed out that the army’s had a strong ideological affiliation with the Church since it was the latter’s longtime ally. The former officer, most probably a Catholic, pronounced a severe and unsympathetic judgment, indicative of an attitude which differed to that of the republicans; the latter without approving extra marital relationships, showed themselves more tolerant as regards to sensitive moral issues. However, the officer too saw the child’s survival as an ultimate duty and priority; he professed that a baby had the right to life. The objectives of the specific Church-run institution were clearly stated: “*faire de lui un être honnête et utile à la société qui l’a adopté.*” If abandonment was the worst option for Strauss who helped single mothers to breastfeed and keep their offspring, the case was not the same for Catholics who regarded the moral question as central. Such mothers are not worthy to keep the baby, insinuated the ex-officer described in Theuriet’s account; an innocent soul has to be preserved

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<sup>434</sup> André Theuriet, *Les Enfants assistés : Les bureaux et la crèche*, *L’Illustration*, vol.59, 25 March 1882, p.199.



from the corrupted environment where it would grow had it stayed with his vicious mother: a “fallen” woman.<sup>435</sup>

Theuriet described the silence, propriety and cleanliness of the place where the infants were fed and changed. According to the author, in this religious establishment rules of hygiene were respected; nothing was repugnant, everything smelled good and the young maids were also clean, pious, competent and diligent. The second drawing which accompanied this article is titled *Aux enfants assistés: le change* (Fig.53) There, some women are standing one next to the other before a long table and swaddle the infants. The image resembles the work of Duez *L'Heure de la tétée des enfants débiles à la Maternité*. The illustrator did not portray individuals but roles; young nurses who are taking care of orphan infants; those who provide charity and those who receive it. The sisters supervised the young maids, who admitted that they did not get emotionally attached to the children. “*Elles les aiment du mieux qu’elles peuvent en filles dévouées et accomplissant pieusement leur devoir*”; the children’s care was to them a duty which had to be performed and no further intimacy was developed between them. Finally, Therieut noticed something self-evident: “*la charité chrétienne la plus fervente ne remplacera jamais pour l’enfant la chaleur de la tendresse maternelle.*”<sup>436</sup>

Healthy babies stayed as little as possible in the institution; within a few days they were confided to women recruited by health inspectors in the provinces. Most of these wet-nurses came from the Nièvre, Pas-de-Calais and Allier; they adopted the infants which grew together with their own offspring. The expenses for the upbringing of these orphans were covered by the state until the children turned twelve years old, an age they could work to compensate their adoptive parents and contribute to the family income. In 1882, in the *Enfants Assistés*, they used the baby-bottle, although it was still untrustworthy and dangerous; also, due to the large number of abandoned new-borns the method was not sufficient and the nuns were obliged to hire wet-nurses who lived in the establishment. *Le Pesage aux enfants assistés* (Fig.54) a work exhibited by Timoléon Lobrion at the SNBA in 1895, thirteen years after Theuriet’s article was published, shows a group of young *nourrices* who bring the children to be weighed by an elderly woman. It is almost certain that this method, which controlled both the baby’s physical development and the competence of the wet-nurse, was

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<sup>435</sup> Theuriet, ‘Les Enfants assistés : Les bureaux et la crèche’, p.199.

<sup>436</sup> André Theuriet, ‘Les Enfants assistés : Les bureaux et la crèche’, p.199.

introduced in the Institution very recently, after the example of the *Goutte de Lait* founded by Dr Variot in 1892. Some of the infants, said Theuriet, suffered from venereal diseases and in their case the human breast was replaced with that of an animal.<sup>437</sup> Indeed, Professor Parrot had the idea to install in the *Enfants Assistés* a *nourricière d'ânesses*, a space where syphilitic babies would be breastfed from female donkeys. The system was introduced in 1881, in order to be abolished twelve years later due to its very poor results.<sup>438</sup>

#### **4. The Cult of the Healthy Body: Hygiene and Degeneration.**

##### **4.1 To form a healthy nation: efforts on a state level.**

In his article Theuriet did not adopt an enthusiastic tone, but his personal account forms a rather idealised version of how things functioned within this charitable institution. For instance, infant mortality, so common a problem, is omitted. However, the journalist raised the problem of syphilitic children; in Paris almost three quarters of all deaths from this disease were among infants who had inherited it from their parents.<sup>439</sup> The prominent position of good ethics and hygiene in the social agenda is connected to the concern over the transmission of venereal diseases, which lead to physical and mental degeneration. In Third Republic France, morality and good health were rendered inextricably linked to each other, a fact which might explain why late nineteenth-century physicians zealously espoused a moralist's role. Medical science, they professed, ventured to teach the people the rules of *social hygiene* which would dominate the world of tomorrow.<sup>440</sup>

The emphasis put on hygiene as an indispensable precondition to develop healthy and vigorous men and women should be largely attributed to Louis Pasteur's discoveries on microbes. However the fear of degeneration increased dramatically due to another scientific discovery; doctors now knew that heredity played a crucial role, and that sickly, morally

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<sup>437</sup> André Theuriet, "Les Enfants assistés. Les nourrices, l'infirmerie, les petites sevrés", *L'Illustration*, vol.59, 1 April 1882, p. 210.

<sup>438</sup> *Un patriote aux origines*, p.14.

<sup>439</sup> *Un patriote aux origines*, p.14.

<sup>440</sup> Strauss, *Dépopulation*, p.8.

perverted parents (i.e. alcoholics) would probably bring to the world weak children. “Evil” – the birth of a degenerated human being - should be prevented before the child was conceived in the woman’s womb and during the period of gestation, otherwise it could be impossible to amend it. “*Pénétrés du principe de l’hérédité, frappés du déchet considérable de la natalité en un siècle de névroses, d’alcoolisme, de syphilis et de tuberculose, les savants ont montré que l’avenir de la race est ‘en grande partie sous la dépendance de la puériculture avant la procréation’*”, wrote Piffault in 1910.<sup>441</sup> This author cited parts of a lecture given by Dr Pinard in November 1898, and published in the *Bulletin Médical* three months later.

“*Je suis absolument convaincu aujourd’hui, que tout état pathologique, toute dépression physique et morale, toute déchéance physiologique en un mot, de l’un des générateurs ou des deux a une influence manifeste sur le produit de la conception et sur son développement futur. Car ce n’est pas seulement l’hérédité dite constitutionnelle qui se transmet, mais l’état dans lequel se trouvent les éléments cellulaires au moment accidentel de la procréation. Qui ne connaît des fruits de maternités souillées par les tares alcooliques, pauvres êtres déformés par les convulsions, destinés aux névroses, à la scrofule, au rachitisme, à la tuberculose, parfois à l’imbécillité ou à l’idiotie, toujours à la dégénérescence ? En faisant la prophylaxie, (puériculture avant la naissance), on arrivera à diminuer le nombre de déchets sociaux des infirmes, des idiots et des dégénérés. Avant la conception la santé du fœtus est intimement liée à celle de la mère.*”<sup>442</sup>

The fears generated by low natality, high infant death-rates and sickly new-borns, led to an obsession with strong babies which became an object of cult; the French “bowed” before the robust infants whose figures incarnated the dream-image of the nation’s future. A text titled *Le Concours de bébés*, which appeared in *Le Monde illustré* of 1886 along with a drawing made by David Estroppey (Fig.55) illustrates an aspect of this new “religion” which venerated physical strength. The author of the article Edouard Hubert, posited that the idea of organising a baby “beauty contest” was borrowed from the Anglo-Saxon, letting us deduce that the obsession with robust children was not exclusively French. The *Concours de bébés* were not state-funded; an individual named Ruel took the initiative and this rather original event took place at his private property, a casino, situated rue du Cloître Notre-Dame. In Estroppey’s illustration, mothers and wet-nurses are presenting their babies - whose standing position reminds us of Renaissance putti - before a committee of doctors. These men would judge whether the children’s constitution responded to their criteria. Maternal tenderness and

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<sup>441</sup> Piffault, *La Femme de foyer*, p.100

<sup>442</sup> Piffault, *La Femme de foyer*, p.102, 104.

the desire to satisfy their vanity made the contest successful, claimed Hubert: “*peu des mères résisteront à faire publiquement constater la supériorité de leur rejeton sur tous les jeunes candidats qui briguent l’honneur de la prime.*”<sup>443</sup> The prettiest infant would gain a golden medal or, if the parents chose otherwise, one thousand francs. A medal or five hundred francs would be awarded to the strongest child. Would the possibility of gaining some money push mothers to take better care of their babies? In 1903, the senator Edmé Piot introduced the old Roman notion of state-awarded medals for motherhood and suggested that women should be “bribed” in order to be devoted mothers.<sup>444</sup>

In the *Concours de bébés*, Hubert made an interesting point confirming that it was the “*modernité curieuse*” of the amusing baby beauty-contest which inspired the illustrator.<sup>445</sup> Naturalist painters, responding to a need in the French society, considered it their duty to represent events related to contemporary life or phenomena that testified to social, scientific and moral evolution. In the 1890s, they turned their interest to medical progress. Thus in 1895, in the journal *Le Monde moderne* an art-critic commented on André Brouillet’s painting *Le Vaccin du croup*, (Fig.56) noting that such an important discovery “*devait avoir son contre-coup au Salon; c’était inévitable.*”<sup>446</sup> At first Brouillet’s theme seems trivial; a little boy, lying on a hospital bed and surrounded by doctors and nurses, is being vaccinated. However, the art-critic praised the painter for grasping and rendering the subject’s philosophical dimension: “*Heureusement la chose est tombée entre les mains d’un peintre respectueux de la vérité, habile à saisir le sens philosophique d’un sujet et à en dégager le résultat pittoresque.*”<sup>447</sup> The message of the image is found in the fact that the child’s well-being becomes the concern of eight attentive adults; the nineteenth-century viewer’s comfort comes from the certainty that, like this young boy, other people shall be saved from the disease. Georges Lafenestre observed that “*il suffit de cette simple orchestration de blancs, plus sourde et plus calme à l’hôpital Trousseau, pour donner une gravité touchante aux opérateurs et aux infirmiers qui regardent avec anxiété le petit malade.*”<sup>448</sup> Colour and light along with the realistic rendering enhance the work’s optimistic message; medicine is the safeguard of the future; victorious over illness and death, it saves the French youth.

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<sup>443</sup>Édouard Hubert, ‘Les Concours des bébés’, *Le Monde illustré*, vol.58, 8 mai 1886, p.294.

<sup>444</sup> Edmé Piot, ‘Une décoration pour les mères de familles’, *Revue philanthropique*, no.13, 1903, p. 273, 274.

<sup>445</sup> Hubert ‘Les Concours des bébés’, p.294.

<sup>446</sup> Gonse, ‘Les Salons de 1895’, *Le Monde moderne*, vol.1, June 1895, p.928.

<sup>447</sup> Gonse, ‘Les Salons de 1895’, p.928.

<sup>448</sup> Lafenestre, ‘Le Salon de 1895’, p.661.

Brouillet responded to what art critics and the public expected from an image of this kind. “*La composition est bien en page, qu’elle reste simple et expressive, sans affectation. Elle ne verse pas non plus dans l’odieuse précision photographique dont on se plaît à abuser aujourd’hui. Les personnages vivent, ils sont attentifs à suivre la marche de l’opération. Toutes les figures sont d’excellents portraits, enlevés sur nature, d’une exécution large, un peu sommaire et qui convient parfaitement au caractère du sujet*” said the journalist in *Le Monde moderne*.<sup>449</sup> The vigilant, dutiful sitters incarnate the triumphant scientific ideal.

Paul Strauss professed that the new “Bible” which men of medicine bequeathed to mankind was one which taught obedience to scientific principles.<sup>450</sup> The doctors’ precepts were the “ten commandments” of the modern world and should be religiously followed. Based on these views, Rachel Fuchs suggested that for political reformers of the late nineteenth-century France, the model of behaviour structured on the basis of ethical and cultural imperatives was increasingly replaced by the materialistic medical model.<sup>451</sup>

Love for France whose future is incarnated in the children, alleged Strauss, rendered hygiene a fundamental human right which lay beyond the idea of class-struggle, social status and religious convictions.<sup>452</sup> Since 1883, health care was provided freely to everyone, because, as it has been already pointed out, every French was thought to have a right to life. In a drawing created in 1890 by Jules Scalbert and published in *L’Illustration* under the title *La Vaccination gratuite à Paris: Mairie du Panthéon* (Fig.57), some working-class women are gathered to get their babies vaccinated. The procedure takes place in the City Hall, in a spacious, luminous room in the ground floor. From the open door we see the yard, where a man is taking milk from a female donkey to distribute it to some mothers.

The egalitarian health system established under the Third Republic is considered in Geoffroy’s work of 1889 titled *Jour de visite à l’hôpital* (Fig.58). A working-class father is seated on a chair beside his son’s sickbed; as usual, the idea of cleanliness is introduced through the little boy’s immaculately white blanket, sheets, and bed-curtains. The fatigue drawn on the face of the boy, his lowered gaze, his calm expression, his thin hands resting on the bed-sheets and his abandonment bestow this work an emotional tone. A crucial element

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<sup>449</sup> Gonse, ‘Les Salons de 1895’, p.928, 929.

<sup>450</sup> Strauss, *Dépopulation*, p. 8.

<sup>451</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.92.

<sup>452</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p. 90.

emerging from the image seems to be the attitude of the lower classes towards cleanliness. I would argue that Geoffroy rendered the man's body language as a sign of his embarrassment. This worker, whose face we cannot see, is not used to such a clean environment. His dark, worn-out clothes betray his poverty and are strongly contrasted to the clinical whiteness of the room. Holding his hat with one hand, he is nervously clasping his knee with the other and the position of his legs gives us the impression that he is about to get up and leave any minute now. Unaccustomed to hygiene and ignoring its rules, poor parents like him could not offer its benefits to their offspring; the French state could and did so. Geoffroy, as well as Brouillet and Duez, demonstrated the Third Republic's fascination with health and cleanliness. Their images conveyed the young regime's aspiration to teach the vital importance of these new moral values to the financially underprivileged. The propriety of public spaces such as hospitals and maternities was instructive; it set an example that every citizen was invited to follow.

#### **4.2 The baby's bath: domestic hygiene and intimacy.**

In 1872, Dr Monot argued that it is in the cradle that one should take the child in order to make it a robust and vigorous person; during infancy women have the power to modify their offspring's constitution if it is vice-ridden, he claimed. Monot warned mothers that ignorance of the laws of hygiene might prove fatal, undermining the nation's future.<sup>453</sup> Using the term *vice* in order to describe a human being's physical make-up, the doctor disclosed once again the moral dimension hidden behind the questions concerning the preservation of health and the acquisition of a strong body. Three years later, in 1875, Dr François Baranger asserted that a physician's role consists in instructing and educating French mothers. Like his colleague Dr Monot, this physician posited that proper maternal care could grant all new-born children the priceless gift of health. Without a sound body, Baranger professed, young boys and girls were not expected to experience an enduring happiness in their lifetime.<sup>454</sup> The country's prosperity depended on the infant which was always exposed to danger; the two

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<sup>453</sup> Monot, *De la mortalité*, p.37.

<sup>454</sup> François Baranger, *Régénération de l'enfant par la mère. Ouvrage dédié aux mères* (Paris 1875), p.12, 27, 28.

parents, as well as the wet-nurse and the servants, could infect the new-born “*qui appartient à tout le monde et sa bouche s’ouvre de toutes parts aux baisers.*”<sup>455</sup> The baby had to be protected and grow in an immaculate domestic environment; the mother was expected to bear the burdens of this duty.

Representations of nurslings and toddlers bathed by their middle-class mothers should be related to the new “theology” of the healthy body and the raise of *puériculture*. The three works which will be discussed here were created within a period of seven years (1889-1896) and show how the ethics of children’s hygiene were adopted by the upper and middle-classes. The naturalist artist Edouard Dantan exhibited *La Toilette* at the SAF in 1892 (Fig.59). The painter represented his wife who has just bathed the baby and put it on her knees in order to dress it in clean clothes. A very young maid tries to facilitate her mistress’s task by distracting the infant’s attention and keeping it calm. Quite obviously, one of the major issues which emerge from this work is the important place of cleanliness in children’s upbringing. This idea is not conveyed only through the subject Edouard Dantan represented, but once again, it is underscored by the colours he used. Thus, the image forms a “symphony in white”; the mother’s dress, the piece of fabric she is about to envelop the child with, the towel hanging on the left side of the table before her, the window-curtains, the maid’s apron and bonnet and finally the small puddle, are rendered in different shades of the same colour. Milky, snowy and alabaster tones are combined to accentuate an impression of immaculate cleanliness. *La Toilette* is one among many public images which were created during the 1890s and depict young children before, during or after their bath. *Le Petit Bain* of the obscure artist Edmond Alphonse Defonté for instance, was exhibited in the SAF of 1896 (Fig.60). His work represents a bourgeois interior where a mother is squeezing a sponge to pour water on her playful toddler son. The round metal tub is placed before the burning fireplace and covered with a white piece of fabric; this time too, the colour, lightened by the fire in the hearth, becomes suggestive of the artist’s idea regarding the significance of cleanliness. Finally, in Norbert Goeunette’s work *La Toilette de Jean Guérard* of 1889 (Fig.61) a middle-class mother is kneeling before her son, washing his feet with a sponge. The naked blonde boy is seated on a sofa which is covered with a white sheet in order to remain clean and dry. The pillow suggests that the sofa was used as a bed for the child; its shape indicates that he has been recently lying there. Could the child be a convalescent? The idea of luxury is clearly

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<sup>455</sup>Baranger, *Régénération de l’enfant*, p.177.

introduced by Goeneutte; a crystal bowl containing two soaps and a bottle which is filled with perfumed bath-oil are placed on the carpeted floor next to the woman. The leftovers of the boy's lunch – oranges - are placed on a silver plate. The three artists represented chubby, beautiful children and their attentive bourgeois mothers, manifestations of physical robustness. Their charm and vigour appears to result from a healthy personal existence. The atmosphere is the same in all three works; intimacy, affection, peace, propriety, order and the *chaleur* of the domestic environment which is accentuated by the maternal presence. I would argue that the painters underline the importance of the mother's participation in her child's care, despite these women's social class. The babies represented by Dantan, Defonte and Goeunette have either abandoned themselves in the safety of the maternal lap, or rejoice in the warmth of her attentive presence. I would suggest that these painters communicated how physical proximity becomes a crucial factor in the establishment of a close, trusting relationship with one's offspring.

Already during the Second Empire, in his book titled *La Femme* (1860), Jules Michelet had compared infants to the creatures that inhabit the oceans in the sense that they both dwell in a "fertile" and "sweet" place: the maternal atmosphere. The French historian described this latter as a "sea of milk" where the young child perpetually resides in order to grow healthy.<sup>456</sup> From the moment of conception until an early age, Michelet maintained, the *ambiance maternelle* envelops the human being with its priceless qualities; first it takes the form of the water in the womb, then it becomes the milk which nourishes the infant and after that, for many years, it is embodied in the caresses that a mother administers to her child. For every new-born, this author stated, "*l'échange délicieux de la vie entre sa mère et lui continue... l'enfant la donne et la reçoit, absorbant sa mère...comme lait, comme chaleur et comme lumière.*"<sup>457</sup> More than a decade later, during the Third Republic, Dr Charles Monot reminded French women that the care and attention of the most diligent wet-nurse can never substitute those provided by the mother herself. "*Souvenez vous, que les soins rémunérés que vous ferez donner même sous vos yeux à votre enfant, ne remplaceront jamais ceux qu'inspire l'amour maternel éclairé par l'éducation, par cette tendresse et cette sollicitude qui ne se supplée pas. Souvenez vous que ce petit bébé est destina à entretenir au foyer domestique les*

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<sup>456</sup> Michelet, *La Femme* (Paris 1860), p.81. Marine Bethlenfalvay, *Les Visages de l'enfant dans la littérature française du XIXe siècle esquisse d'une typologie* (Genève 1979), p. 96

<sup>457</sup>Michelet, *La Femme*, p.81.



*douceurs de la vie familiale*”<sup>458</sup>, professed the physician. Looking at the domestic world represented in these three paintings in terms of social history, we might deduce that during the late nineteenth century, in bourgeois households, intimacy emerged as a moral necessity.<sup>459</sup> Comprehended as a natural law, togetherness rose above the notions of social status. Like cleanliness, it became a sacred concept widely propagated and dressed with a range of arguments.

## 5. Bourgeois Mothers and the Wet Nursing Question.

Since educating mothers became a key to nineteenth century scientific childcare, it was indispensable that working women should get acquainted with bourgeois methods of child rearing.<sup>460</sup> French demographers and physicians knew that their ideas could mainly influence the middle-classes where they belonged themselves. Members of the lower strata had neither the luxury of time, nor the education which would permit them to contemplate over their moral responsibilities as parents. Almost certainly they would not read books written by moralists like Dr Monot. Therefore, Paul Strauss encouraged middle-class ladies to serve as paid or volunteer social workers, as inspectors, and finally as teachers who should promulgate the rules of proper hygiene among impoverished or proletarian females.<sup>461</sup> A hierarchy of *dames visiteuses* would control poor women’s morality and ensure that these latter would nurse their own babies.

The *bourgeoise* was invited to become a model of maternity; her life and comportment should set an instructive example for the underprivileged. I would suggest that Edouard Dantan’s work *La Toilette* which was discussed in the previous section provides us with the ideal of the domesticated middle-class mother. First, the artist demonstrated the spirit of harmony and co-operation between the maid and Madame Dantan in the most straightforward manner; the two female sitters work together for the child’s upbringing in an atmosphere of intimacy and familiarity. The most striking element in this representation is the way the

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<sup>458</sup>Monot, *De la mortalité*, p.20, 21

<sup>459</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women* (London 1998), p.181.

<sup>460</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.93.

<sup>461</sup>Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.100.

painter rendered the status of his spouse. He deliberately undermined the external signs which are crucial in order to identify her social position; her casual, humble appearance, the modest clothes and the skill she displays in dressing the baby, contradict the concept of bourgeois female identity as it was usually visualised. I would argue that, probably, in this image we are confronted with a woman who has little interest to luxury and has grown estranged to coquettishness which was regarded appropriate to her class and gender. The mother whom Dantan rendered completely absorbed by her role in *La Toilette* embodies a model of femininity which is the opposite from the one Jules Simon disdained. The elderly politician had professed his deep contempt for the ladies who kept their salon open aspiring to impress other men either by showing off their beauty or, even worse, their intelligence. “*La mondaine, avec l’importance qu’elle donne à des futilités, me paraît le type achevé de la nullité humaine.*” he said. «*Elle n’est rien, ne fait rien, ne sert à rien et, par-dessus ce triple malheur, elle prend elle-même en sérieux. La femme d’affaires n’est pas une femme; c’est un spéculateur en jupe de velours ou de satin avec lequel il faut jouer serré*”, he concluded.<sup>462</sup> Since the painting discussed here was destined to be exhibited in public, we may suggest that Dantan created it trying to offer a moral lesson. Therefore, he illustrated both an aspect of reality and the envisagement of an ideal concerning female modesty and dutiful maternity. The maid assists the mother, but does not replace her.

One of the most essential and historically interesting facts during the early Third Republic is the new attitude of bourgeois women towards breastfeeding. It should be underlined that this social phenomenon emerged many decades before the establishment of the republican regime. According to statistics, in 1780 Paris, 95 out of 100 infants were put with wet-nurses in the countryside; within the next twenty years things changed dramatically. It is not unlikely that the views of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on this matter had gradually exercised some influence on people’s mentality. In 1762, this philosopher would be the first to profess that maternal breastfeeding had a redemptive, messianic power: “*Mais que les mères daignent nourrir leurs enfants, les mœurs vont se réformer d’elles-mêmes, les sentiments de la nature se réveiller dans tous les cœurs, l’État va se repeupler; ce premier point, ce point seul va tout réunir.*”<sup>463</sup> By 1802, half of the new-born babies in the capital would be breastfed by

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<sup>462</sup> Simon, ‘Le Choix d’un État’, p.194. (In the essay of Rachel Fuchs it is mentioned that primarily the Protestants were against vanity, pride and love of luxury which lead to family limitation among the bourgeois Fuchs, Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.84.

<sup>463</sup> Rousseau, *Émile*, p.31.

their mother, a percentage which increased considerably in the following decades reaching almost 60 % in 1869. In 1870, the shift in maternal attitudes was confirmed by certain doctors. In his article on the decline of the wet-nursing business in France, George Sussman quoted the Parisian gynaecologist Dr Briquet who, at a meeting of the *Académie de Médecine* on 18 January 1870, had argued that rich families only trust their children's care to a wet-nurse, if it is physically impossible to do otherwise." At the same time, from Le Havre, Dr Adolphe-Aimé Lecadre observed that in the upper classes of society, the current practice was for women to offer their breast to their children.<sup>464</sup> Fortunately, posited the physician Paul Chauffard in 1870, a number of young French couples did not avoid the demands of breastfeeding in order to preserve their independence and indulge into pleasurable pursuits that a sterile, selfish mentality would dictate. Instead both husband and wife surrendered to the profound, enduring satisfaction which emerges from the accomplishment of this sacred task.<sup>465</sup> So by the beginning of the Third Republic it was increasingly common for middle-class mothers to breastfeed their babies. How did this pattern develop and how was it represented in visual culture?

Large in scale, the *industrie nourricière* in France underwent an internal crisis which roused the latent hostility of middle-class against it. There were numerous wet-nurses in France, but the services many of them offered were of dubious quality. Women who exercised this profession became the scapegoat for moralists and demographers. Thus, in the period under study, an important number of bourgeois were repulsed by the idea of a hired woman replacing the mother.<sup>466</sup> However, as Colin Heywood showed in his book titled *Growing up in France*, even if the wet-nursing business was dying out among its traditional, upper-class clientele, it attracted customers from the ranks of shopkeepers, artisans and domestic servants in urban France.<sup>467</sup> Actually, in 1860, in Paris and other urban centres of the Empire there was an unprecedented demand for wet-nurses among the petite bourgeoisie, because the female working population had increased dramatically.<sup>468</sup> For those people, commercial breastfeeding was not the ideal solution but a necessity.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>464</sup>Sussman, 'The wet-nursing business', p.307, 308, 310-312.

<sup>465</sup>*Bulletin de la Société Protectrice*, p.6, 7.

<sup>466</sup>Sussman, 'The wet-nursing business', p. 322, 326.

<sup>467</sup>Heywood, *Growing up in France*, p.128.

<sup>468</sup>Sussman, 'The wet-nursing business', p.313.

<sup>469</sup>Heywood, *Growing up in France*, p.129.

In the work of 1886 titled *Avant le bal* (Fig.62), Edouard Debat-Ponsan, an established painter, depicted a young *bourgeoise* in a ball-gown nursing her infant. Her husband, who is the artist himself, appears standing by the fireplace in a typical evening dress while a maid behind his spouse's seat is waiting to take the baby and put it to sleep. Debat-Ponsan portrayed the behaviour of an attentive and practical modern mother, who nourishes her daughter just before she leaves the house, making sure that the baby will not be hungry during her absence. Dr Monot posited that people's social position should not be used as an excuse in order to avoid doing their duty. Like other health activists, he aimed to monitor the baby's physical environment, making the mother's milk its most important component. Admonishing bourgeois women for their arrogance, he reminded them that in the past all French mothers, regardless their status, considered themselves honoured and privileged to give their milk to their children. The same physician, trying to reinforce his argument, used the example of Blanche de Castille, the mother of Saint Louis, who allegedly refused to hire a wet nurse for the dauphin even when she was gravely ill. How could a middle-class female be so impertinent to ignore a natural law to which even a queen had conformed? Furthermore, Monot encouraged the conscientious *bourgeoises* to breastfeed their infants making an appeal to their patriotism: "*Non vous ne voudrez pas rester insensible à ces abominables sacrifices humains, vous ne voudrez pas que l'enfant du pauvre paye plus longtemps de sa vie l'allaitement rétribué que vous ferez donner par sa mère à votre propre enfant; vous ne voudrez pas que la sève nationale s'épuise en pure perte, alors que notre chère patrie a besoin de tant de bras, de toutes ses forces.*"<sup>470</sup> The middle-class mother should have compassion for the child whom the wet-nurse is forced to leave behind. This nursling is either the future soldier and citizen or the mother and wife of tomorrow; the privileges deriving from a woman's social status do not entitle her to put the nation's prosperity in peril. Of course, the data provided by the painting *Avant le bal*, do not allow us deduce whether Madame Debat-Ponsan decided to breastfeed her daughter under the influence of the views which were described above. However, the question which emerges from the image remains; why did she not hire a *nourrice sur lieu* since, as we may deduce by the presence of the maid and the luxurious drawing room, she could afford the expenses?

The conviction that "milk is modified blood" and "forms the primary essence of existence" was promulgated by late nineteenth century doctors. More specifically, Dr

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<sup>470</sup> Monot, *De la mortalité*, p.22-24.

Despaulx-Ader, obstetrician and president of the medical committee of the *Crèche de la Madeleine* in Paris, maintained that mother's milk constitutes a fundamental part of the infant's education and moulds its personality. In this context, this spiritual son of Rousseau asserted, the physical, ethical and intellectual force of a nation, along with its moral development and predominance, are based on maternal breastfeeding.<sup>471</sup> In his turn, in 1868, Dr Brochard advocated similar theories. Venturing to draw attention to the danger of class contamination, the physician posited that wet-nursing interrupted and distorted the hereditary material, tainting the child and diluting the bloodline. This fear alone, he claimed, should make all these women who confide their newborn to a paid nurse tremble. I would argue that this concept among all others might have had the greatest psychological effect on the middle classes. The possibility of moral exposure to the proletariat could arouse parental anxieties regarding family and class purity and make many bourgeois, like the lady in *Avant le bal*, feel profoundly concerned. Despite his aversion to commercial breastfeeding, Dr Brochard insisted that in the case of marriages between two close relatives another person should nurse the child in order to diminish the hereditary influence of the mother with the foreign milk, instead of increasing it with lactation.<sup>472</sup>

Another essential argument, which had been broadly utilised in this moral crusade for the redefinition of mother's role and the propagation of maternal breastfeeding, maintained that the woman who refused to breastfeed her child would lose the privilege to claim the exclusivity of its love. Charles Monot warned the middle-class female: "*N'oubliez pas Madame, que les premières caresses de votre enfant, que les premières mots qu'il bégaye, sont pour une autre que pour vous, pour sa nourrice et que ce n'est qu'à force de temps et de travail que vous transplanterez, que vous grefferez pour ainsi dire dans son âme cet amour filial qu'il aurait dû puiser dans votre sein.*"<sup>473</sup> We might assume that the lady in Debat-Ponsan's *Avant le bal* was not willing to cede her rights and share this natural exchange of love feelings between her and the new-born baby with a stranger. It is on her chest her daughter's hand rests, and in her arms the half-naked little body lies; this is a cherished experience she zealously guards.

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<sup>471</sup> Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics and Gender in 19<sup>th</sup> century France* (London 2000), p.166.

<sup>472</sup> Brochard, *Régénération de l'enfant*, p.23, 126.

<sup>473</sup> Monot, *De la mortalité*, p.23

The powerful relationship established between the *nourrice* and the infant, along with the latter's inevitable alienation from the parents was already underscored in eighteenth-century paintings. For instance, in the work *Adieux à la nourrice* (1777, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Williamstown, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute), Etienne Aubry represented a crying baby boy squirming to get out of the arms of his aristocratic mother into those of his wet-nurse. The moral of this painting is quite obvious; the good and dutiful parents keep their children at home. In the period under study, the possibility of becoming a stranger to your own offspring was represented by Antoine-Émile Plassan (1817-1903). This mediocre artist exhibited the *Retour de la nourrice* (Fig.63) in the Salon of 1870. The scene is situated in a seventeenth-century interior and the sitters wear costumes of that era. Alfred de Lostalot, commenting on the image in the journal *L'Illustration* noted: “*Le sujet n’a pas besoin d’être développé; tout le monde a été témoin des scènes de cette nature ; l’hésitation du bébé en présence de sa nouvelle famille est bien rendue. L’enfant s’accroche à sa nourrice; n’a-t-elle pas été jusqu’à ce jour sa seule, sa vraie mère?*”<sup>474</sup>

The young mother's serene expression in the painting *Avant le bal* renders her perfectly contented, as any woman engaged in this task would be expected to look. In the late nineteenth century French physicians and moralists communicated the conviction that every mother had to embrace the burdens of her duty with happiness instead of resisting to her predestined roles as nurse and procreator.<sup>475</sup> More specifically, the practice of breastfeeding one's offspring - as it will be extensively discussed in the following section of this chapter - was identified with the essence of nature; to see in every woman a being which finds joy in submission to natural laws, was a commonplace concept of femininity. Dr Brochard posited that in placing the organs of lactation on the front of a woman's chest God wanted the child to begin its apprenticeship for life in the arms of his mother, cheered and reassured by her benevolent smile.<sup>476</sup> The physician argued that while a woman is feeding her baby, a woman converses with it through her gaze and by this silent and loving language she excites and develops its' intelligence. He claimed that since the breast is located in the pre-cordial region,

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<sup>474</sup> Lostalot, 1870, p. 442.

<sup>475</sup> Dr Baranger wrote “L’allaitement maternel est commandé par la nature et c’est pour la mère un bonheur, (Baranger, *Régénération de l’enfant*, p. 47)

<sup>476</sup> It might be worth mentioning that, as early as in 1803, Dr. F. N. Guerbois in the *Essai sur la nostalgie, appelée vulgairement maladie du pays* (Paris, 1803) urged mothers to breastfeed their own children because this would preserve them from early sorrow and they assured, at least for their tender years, a happiness which would be unclouded. Quoted in Suzanne Nash *Home and its Dislocations in 19<sup>th</sup> century France*, (New York 1993), p.28.

a mother cannot nurse the infant without pressing it to her heart, without teaching him to know and to love her.<sup>477</sup>

In the image discussed here, the middle-class lady's task absorbs her attention; her gaze is tenderly focused on the nursing infant. She and her child seem engaged in the uninterrupted, silent dialogue physicians described as a field where affection and intimacy flourish. However, I would suggest that this scene taken from middle-class family life does not evoke the ideological context within which Dr Despaulx-Ader and Dr Brochard used the terms "utility" and "organs of lactation". Actually, in this portrait the viewer is invited to admire a conscientious mother, who is also an elegant *femme du monde*. *Avant le bal* could be interpreted as the painter's personal concept of conjugal life or, more specifically, as an expression of the way he perceived a man's relationship to his new-born child. Without being sentimentally detached, or overwhelmed by emotion, Debat-Ponsan rendered himself the dutiful figure of a father who is watching his wife nursing their daughter.

In the *Avant le bal*, the nursing scene is depicted in a domestic interior next to the burning fireplace. Thus, it literally takes place *by the hearth*. Did the artist intend to add a symbolic dimension to his image? Whatever the answer may be, the bourgeois lady does not incarnate the traditional concept of the domesticated woman, in the sense that she is clearly not confined to her maternal duties, but promptly responds to the social obligations of the class she belongs to. Is this idea compatible with the doctrine of the *bonne mère* that the Third Republic governments aspired to disseminate?

As already mentioned, French moralists like Simon admonished the female taste for expensive clothes and useless commodities, while they relentlessly criticised the life-attitude of women who frequented social gatherings. Furthermore, baptising the nineteenth century "age of egoism", moralists formulated an accusation which primarily burdened the woman. Arsène Dumont (1849–1902), a French lawyer who dedicated his life to the study of the depopulation problem, castigated the degenerate bourgeois females who are incapable of understanding the obligations of their social class. According to Dumont, the enemy who is susceptible to self absorption and surrenders to a culture of leisure and individualism, resides in the hearth; she is the frivolous woman, who threatens to ruin bourgeois society.<sup>478</sup> Equally,

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<sup>477</sup> Brochard, *De l'allaitement*, p.13.

<sup>478</sup> Dumont, *Dépopulation et civilisation*, 1890, p.300.

in 1870, Dr Chauffard scourged those who advocated female “independence”, because he comprehended it as an ideal which allows vanity and selfishness to thrive. Only the accomplishment of maternal duties, he claimed, offers a profound satisfaction which can be enduring, whereas the pleasures of *la vie mondaine* are ephemeral.<sup>479</sup> Dumont and Chauffard’s monolithic perception of maternity was denying the perspective of a balanced life to the woman who supposedly cannot be a good mother and a *femme du monde* at the same time; Debat-Ponsan’s picture imparts a more progressive outlook on femininity. He rendered the nursing procedure integrated with ordinary life and envisioned it within the frame of the modern Parisian society and its demanding rhythms. The painting informs the viewer that the sitter’s indulging in worldly pleasures did not prevent her from behaving as a loving and responsible mother. Debat-Ponsan’s *Avant le bal* does not seem to have been shown in public. Therefore we cannot maintain that the artist created it venturing to make a statement or propagate ideals fostered by moralists. Had an image showing a middle-class woman breastfeeding been exhibited, would the art-critics have focused on the sitter’s maternal attitude praising it as something exemplary or extraordinary?

Georges Moreau de Tours participated in the Salon of 1887 with the *Portrait de Mme et Mlle X* (Fig.64). In this work, a bourgeois woman is sitting on a stone garden bench under the shadow of a tree, breastfeeding her daughter. The infant’s position on the woman’s lap vividly reminds us that of the sleeping Christ in Parmigiannino’s *Madonna with a long neck* (1535-1540, oil on canvas, 216 x 132cm Uffizi, Florence). The art-critic François Bournand was enchanted by the perfection of this Salon painting. He regarded it as a masterpiece that younger artists should imitate: “*Moreau de Tours expose un nouveau tableau qui est une œuvre d’art ou plutôt un chef-d’œuvre, si vous voulez bien le permettre, digne des plus grands maîtres de la Renaissance italienne. Je ne sais trop comment parler de cette œuvre admirable, comment peindre ma sincère et enthousiaste admiration. Heureux les modèles qui ont été immortalisés par le pinceau d’un grand maître. C’est devant une œuvre semblable, jeunes artistes que je voudrais vous voir arrêtés en admiration, car elle est digne d’être un modèle.*”<sup>480</sup> In some ways the picture is quite original. First, the young mother, instead of looking at the baby as we would naturally expect her to do, is fixing the viewer with her gaze. Second, the child’s *female* gender is unreservedly exposed, something which usually occurs

<sup>479</sup> *Bulletin de la Société Protectrice*, p.6.

<sup>480</sup> François Bournand, *Paris-Salon 1887*(Paris 1887), p.16.



only in paintings where the infant is a boy. Although the work was presented as the portrait of two upper middle-class individuals, to Bournand's eyes it possessed an emblematic character, modestly concealed under its title. The fact that the scene's setting is not a wealthy interior, but the corner of a garden enhances its symbolic quality: "*Il a intitulé ce chef d'œuvre modestement avec le mot portraits. On pourrait mettre cette toile au Louvre à côté de la Charité d'André del Sarto.*"<sup>481</sup> Not only did the critic hint the perfection of Moreau de Tours' image by comparing it with one created by a sixteenth century master known as *Andrea senza errori*, but also suggested that a more "ambitious" title would enshrine the painting's meaning better. Bournand probably thought that *Maternité* or *Charité* would be more appropriate names for this work.

In terms of social history, the fact that a lady of the sitter's rank deigns to breastfeed her child seemed ordinary to the art-critic, who did not make any comments on the matter. This bourgeois woman, who is not related to the painter, asked to be portrayed as a nursing mother proudly identifying herself with this role. In his turn, Moreau de Tours did not give the first letter of the sitter's surname as it was customary, wanting to preserve their anonymity. Why would he decide, or be asked to do that?

Although we can encounter a vast number of paintings representing bourgeois women tenderly holding their babies in their arms, works such as these created by Debat-Ponsan and Moreau de Tours are not common. Mary Cassatt, who represented middle-class ladies breastfeeding their children, was an American female artist who is not included in this thesis where I am dealing exclusively with French painters and illustrators. As a woman, Cassatt would be allowed to attend this private moment; for evident reasons a male painter was almost certainly deprived from this right unless the person he wanted to portray was his own wife. Furthermore, it is possible that American bourgeois showed another degree of reserve concerning the representation of nursing women of their own social rank. The French Berthe Morisot, daughter of a highly paid government official, created a great number of maternity images without ever depicting an upper middle-class woman breastfeeding her offspring; not even her two sisters who, like herself, had probably hired a *nourrice-sur-lieu* to perform this task.

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<sup>481</sup> Bournand, *Paris-Salon 1887*, p.16.

If nineteenth-century doctors and moralists exalted maternal nursing, their views were not unanimously adopted; actually, in the beginning of the Third Republic a lot of people resisted their opinions. Linda Nochlin has argued that many mothers in aristocratic and *haute bourgeoisie* circles continued to consider breastfeeding below dignity.<sup>482</sup> Works of art testify that – at least during the 1870s – the upper classes preferred the employment of a woman who would stay with the family and nourish the new-born child, to breastfeeding performed by the mother herself. Images portraying wet-nurses offering their breast to babies in private gardens and public spaces are abundant. Degas depicted this subject several times, while for Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot the same theme was central in their career.

What was the social background of these professional *secondes mères*? Contemporary authors maintained that girls from poor peasant families chose this occupation for its considerable advantages: excellent living conditions and a decent salary which allowed them to assist the family they left behind. The baby's parents were invited to be particularly kind and indulging with this category of employees, because the slightest stress or sorrow could make their breast-milk turn bad. It was to their child's interest that she would remain happy and contented.<sup>483</sup> A poem titled *Les commandements de la nourrice*, written in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century by an unknown author, describes the obligations and the privileges of wet-nurses who had the chance to work for wealthy families.

“Ton rejeton tu sèvreras/ Sans hésiter aucunement/ Ta campagne tu quitteras pour la ville au grand mouvement/ un p'tit bourgeois dorloteras/ comme si il était ton enfant /de bons mets tu profiteras/ pour avoir du lait épatant/chaque jour tu promèneras/pour le nourrisson soi- disant/ mais au rendez-vous tu te rendras d'un troupiier très fidèlement/ à ce régime tu vivras/très heureuse certainement/ à ta campagne reviendras/ ayant gagné beaucoup d'argent.”<sup>484</sup>

The constant supervision of the moral conduct of a *nourrice* was considered indispensable. It has already been mentioned that breast-milk was invested with metaphysical qualities. Therefore, the wet-nurses' role was pivotal within society. This is confirmed by the large number of manuals written on the successful choice of the *nourrice*, either by the doctor or the baby's parents. The moral qualities of the person who would be judged appropriate for such a task, were diligently described by Dr Friedrich von Ammon, a German physician

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<sup>482</sup> Linda Nochlin (ed.), *Women Art and Power and Other Essays* (New York 1988), p.129.

<sup>483</sup> Renault, *Nourrices de Morvan* (Varenes, Vauzelle 2007), p.3.

<sup>484</sup> Renault, *Nourrices*, p.2.

whose book was translated in French, since apparently the same issue preoccupied other nations. Dr von Ammon suggested that a wet-nurse must not have passions, or an inclination to debauchery, indolence and alcohol. If, during the course of her employment her morality becomes reproachable she must be rejected without hesitation. No mother should hire a girl without examining her family environment, or without asking from the local community to provide her with good references concerning her prudence, sincerity and impeccable way of life.<sup>485</sup> Again, the great emphasis put on the morality of the woman who was going to nourish the infant becomes intelligible once we connect it with the aforementioned public concern over the transmission of venereal diseases.

In the 1880, in her work *Nourrice et bébé* (Fig.65), Berthe Morisot represented her daughter being fed by her wet-nurse in a sundrenched garden. The infant and the woman form a clear triangle ascribed in the rectangular shape of the canvas, but the brushstrokes nearly dissolve the figures, making it impossible to discern the personal features and the age of the adult sitter. Morisot was an impressionist experimenting with the effects of the daylight on the figures, but her painting further discloses her attitude towards her employee. Although the models are situated in the foreground, they are observed from a distance, as if an invisible obstacle has been placed between the painter and the servant who is holding the child in her arms. The upper middle-class Morisot confronts the woman she has hired to substitute her in the nursing of her daughter; the apron and the bonnet define the female sitter's social status, but her face is reduced to caricature. The title *Nourrice et bébé* is also eloquent; the artist focuses on the profession, the role of the person who is standing opposite her; the individual, the personal identity of this woman, does not interest her.

Well-fed, the *nourrice* might receive expensive gifts like pieces of jewellery and, since she always accompanied the family, she would even have the opportunity to travel. Nevertheless, Linda Nochlin argued, even if the *nourrice sur lieu* was the most "spoiled" servant of the house, her status was never more elevated than that of an ordinary *domestique*.<sup>486</sup> Morisot treated her model according to the rules and etiquette of the social class she belonged to; the wet-nurse portrayed here could be loved by the child, but she would never integrate into the bourgeois milieu.

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<sup>485</sup> Von Ammon, *Le Livre d'or*, p.117.

<sup>486</sup> Nochlin, *Women*, p.45.

When her daughter came into the world, Morisot was already thirty-seven years old and she admitted feeling exhausted after this late pregnancy. It is possible that she was physically unable to nurse her baby; but would she choose to do otherwise if she were younger and stronger? I would suggest that in her work *Nourrice et bébé*, the artist who after childbirth sarcastically wrote to her sister Edma: “*hé bien, je suis comme tout le monde*”, took a distance from the breastfeeding procedure.<sup>487</sup> Morisot observes this infant which is flesh of her flesh suckling her wet-nurse, but does not seem emotionally involved to the spectacle. Despite the warm colours and the light, the image conveys the detachment of a French middle-class woman before the performance of the particular task. Berthe Morisot cherished her only daughter whom she portrayed numerous times. With a spirit of self-abnegation she took care of the teenage Julie when this latter was gravely ill from influenza; the young girl recovered but the dutiful mother contracted the disease and passed away.<sup>488</sup> However, the idea of exposing her bare breast and letting this “life-giving” but smelly and clinging liquid leak from her body, although an ordinary task, must have been more than unappealing to Morisot; she simply did not perceive this as her maternal obligation.

## 6. The Nursing Woman as Eternal Mother.

In order to serve their purposes and consolidate their authority, the representatives of the Third Republic realised that the necessity to control the social body came before all other exigencies.<sup>489</sup> As will be discussed in the last chapter of this thesis, politicians and moralists who supported the regime attempted to achieve their goal by disseminating an idealised vision of the family; this differed from the old family model which neglected the child and put emphasis on paternal authority. They understood that there was another set of relations which needed to be safeguarded: that between the mother and her progeny. Demographers and doctors extolled the virtues and joys of motherhood because infants’ survival largely depended on the state’s success in its mission to moralise women by propagating breastfeeding as a maternal pleasure.<sup>490</sup> Once again, the idea that a woman’s self-

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<sup>487</sup>Dorianna Comerlati, *Berthe Morisot. Regards pluriels* (Lodève 2006), p.34.

<sup>488</sup>Nochlin, *Women*, p.43.

<sup>489</sup>Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers*, p.178.

<sup>490</sup>*Bulletin de la Société Protectrice*, p.5.

accomplishment is found in domesticity and dutiful maternity can be traced back to the writings of Jean- Jacques Rousseau.<sup>491</sup> This philosopher, in his novel *La Nouvelle Éloïse* (1761) claimed that girls' fancies had to be crushed very early so that they would become docile. The female had to be psychologically trained for a role which was her only true vocation.<sup>492</sup>

The state excluded its female subjects from the republican concept of individual liberty, with the excuse that freedom could be an impediment to child development, preeminent matter in the social agenda.<sup>493</sup> Late nineteenth-century moralists disseminated the idea that, whenever women are concerned, the term "individual" was actually unrealistic. Dr Alexander Mayer endeavoured to communicate an official view of the mother-infant relationship. The mother's body, he asserted in the work *Des rapports conjugaux considérés sous le triple point de vue de la population, de la santé et de la morale publique* in 1860, exists for and belongs to the child. Venturing to establish his argument about the woman's predestined role as nurse and procreator, Dr Mayer underlined her gender's affiliation with nature. The woman, he posited, was primarily placed into the world in order to perpetuate the species, and then to contribute, in the sphere determined by nature, to social life. Her intelligence, he maintained, is less developed than her instincts. Being mastered by her genital apparatus she is not in full possession of herself and is subject to a periodic function capable of modifying her moral being completely, he concluded.<sup>494</sup> It is interesting to observe how another physician's description of the female body can make the reader envisage it almost as a machine. In the 1860s Dr Despaulx-Ader claimed that a woman carries on her chest the organs of milk, which nature has given her less as ornaments of embellishment than for utility. His theses echo those of his contemporary Dr Brochard.<sup>495</sup> In the 1890s, Dr Pinard's slogan: "the mother's milk belongs to the infant" would be posted on the walls of Baudelocque clinic.<sup>496</sup> In this ideological context, the maternal body emerges as something which has no integrity of its own and the woman is rendered as a being deprived of

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<sup>491</sup> Carol Duncan, 'Happy mothers and other new ideas in French Art', *Art Bulletin*, no.4, vol. 55, December 1973, p.570.

<sup>492</sup> Heywood, *Growing up in France*, p.119.

<sup>493</sup> Fuchs, Stewart, Accampo, *Gender*, p.105.

<sup>494</sup> Alexandre Mayer, *Des rapports conjugaux considérés sous le triple point de vue de la population, de la santé et de la morale publique* (Paris 1860), p.253.

<sup>495</sup> Brochard, *De l'allaitement*, p.8, 9.

<sup>496</sup> Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, p.65.

individuality. The child, property of the nation, possessed the mother who, in her turn, was subjected to both her offspring and the state.

Like Dr Alexander Mayer, the painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir saw girls and women as animal-like creatures which lived impulsively, guided by their instincts.<sup>497</sup> It was in the mid-1880s when, enchanted by the spectacle of his new-born son in the arms of his companion Aline Charigot, he portrayed them together repeatedly. In one of the first images treating this specific subject in 1886 (Fig.66), his future spouse is depicted dressed in the modest clothes of a country girl; she gives the breast to a chubby baby boy turning her smiling face to the spectator. Situating the nursing scene in the countryside, the artist underscored its natural character; the wooden chair where the stout young woman is seated is placed on the grass, under the shadow of a tree. Jean, Renoir's youngest son, affirmed that his father surrendered himself to the charm emanating from female submission to natural laws, as this latter was manifested in maternal breastfeeding.<sup>498</sup> In this context, the cat illustrated next to Renoir's companion in this work should not be interpreted as a colourful detail. I would argue that the pet's serene presence functions as a signifier of nature and responds to the uninterrupted bliss of the nursling's mother. It could be suggested that the artist ventured to exalt breastfeeding as a practice which, in its simplicity and ordinary character, interweaves with the universe where beasts dwell; thus, he paralleled it with the cats' habit to clean their fur with their tongue. Cats were mammals and breastfed like human beings. It must be pointed out that the idea of juxtaposing a woman and her child with an animal and its young was not exclusively French. The American-born Elisabeth Jane Gardner, student and future wife of William Bouguereau, in her work *Les Deux Mères de famille* (oil on canvas, dimensions and location unknown) exhibited in the Paris Salon in 1888, situated the figures of a mother and her baby together with a hen and its little chickens. Also, the Italian painter Giovanni Segantini, in his image *Two mothers* (1889, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Milan, Civica Galleria d'Arte moderna) placed the two sitters in a stable next to a cow and its new-born calf.<sup>499</sup>

In the *Maternité* of 1886, Renoir ventured to show that motherhood has transformed Aline. He professed that procreation and maternal duties modified his companion's "moral being" and restored her to her appropriate place, leading her femininity to perfection. The

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<sup>497</sup>Peter Feist, *Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)* (Köln 1992), p.89.

<sup>498</sup>Jean Renoir, *Renoir, My Father*, (Boston 1958), p.250.

<sup>499</sup>Tamar Garb, 'Renoir and the Natural Woman', *Oxford Art Journal*, no.2, vol.8, 1985, p.11.

sitter's humanity is mastered by the biological qualities of her gender, which have erased the traces of her former, "modern" self; apart from her blooming youth, nothing in Charigot's figure reminds us of the lively *Parisienne* who, five years earlier, in the *Déjeuner des Canotiers* (1881, oil on canvas, 129, 9x172, 7 cm Washington, Philips Collection), is depicted playing with her griffon-terrier. Michel Florisoone suggested Aline Charigot's metamorphosis renders her a "daughter of Nature."<sup>500</sup> I would argue that, endowed like every mother with the wisdom of animals who instinctively know how to take care of their young, Aline is also revealed as part of the overwhelming nature which surrounds her. In the unchangeable, eternal Arcadia where Pierre's breastfeeding takes place, this female finds self-accomplishment. Tamar Garb, analysing the painting, noted that the sexual identity of the infant is proudly displayed; with this visual advocacy of maternal breastfeeding, she argued, the artist also celebrated the birth of his son.<sup>501</sup> Renoir was delighted because his male child guaranteed his continuity. Nevertheless, his pride and happiness were kept for himself because his new family was not legitimate; when the bourgeois Berthe Morisot visited him, he showed her the painting without mentioning that the sitters were his partner and offspring. If this man sang praises to maternity which is beyond the reach of human laws, he felt bound to the rules of nineteenth century French society.

Renoir would not be the only painter to represent a woman and a nursing infant, aiming to underscore the female gender's uninterrupted relationship with nature. In Alfred Roll's painting *Louise Cattell nourrice* (Fig.67), the baby's breastfeeding also takes place in the countryside. The imposing figure of the woman with the baby in her arms is portrayed standing, adjusted to the vertical space of the canvas. Like in Renoir's *Maternité*, in Roll's work of 1892 nature is dominant; the green, blooming earth and the smiling breastfeeding sitter comprise two manifestations of fertility and abundance which reduce the human dwelling in the background to a trifling sign. Louise seems to have emerged from the earth which envelops her, as she envelops the child in her bosom.

In Roll's and Renoir's works, breastfeeding is also connected with ideas of health and vigour. Both the wet-nurse Louise Cattell, a *seconde mère*, and Aline Charigot, the real mother, are robust, with round contours and rosy complexion. These two images have an affiliation with the professed beliefs of Doctor Baranger, according to whom breastfeeding

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<sup>500</sup> Michael Florisoone, *Renoir*, (Paris 1937) p.24.

<sup>501</sup> Garb, 'Renoir and the Natural Woman', p.13.

protects both the newborn and the woman from various diseases. The physical constitution of a mother who nourishes her offspring with her own milk, this physician maintained, becomes more stable because her health is armoured against the infections which afflict the rest of the women.<sup>502</sup> As we have seen, during this period the notions of infirmity and degeneration converged; therefore, a woman who refused to nurse her child was a *mère dénaturée*, both sickly and perverted. People who propagated maternal breastfeeding as a vital necessity used Louis Pasteur's conclusions in order to validate a doctrine which promulgated submission to nature as a precondition to acquiring a sound body: the one which would nurture the future body of the nation, that of the soldiers and fathers, the mothers and wives to be.

The sexuality of the *natural*, nursing woman is another dimension that needs to be considered in this category of images. In Renoir's statement that "a child should bury its nose in its mother's breast, nuzzle it and knead it with its chubby hands", many art-historians detected a conspicuous erotic element.<sup>503</sup> They posited that this eroticism emanated from Renoir's maternity paintings and that it was defined by the ideal of "natural", submissive femininity these works promulgated. I would suggest that through the bare-breasted, corpulent figures which served as models of maternity and womanhood, artists emphasised the ideas of fecundity and procreation which are necessarily linked to sexuality. Nevertheless, their representations are hardly erotic. In Renoir's work the woman who nourishes a child is set up as an emphatic and memorable image; Roll did something similar. The fact that both works were exhibited in public spaces permits us to suggest that their authors endeavoured to produce instructive icons.<sup>504</sup> Aline Charigot and Louise Cattell incarnated a reassuring, comforting and desirable model of femininity.

In 1907, the Catholic André Bayard whose views have already been discussed, maintained that self-absorption and vanity had conquered the French middle classes and rendered women unwilling to procreate.<sup>505</sup> Many among his compatriots, like Dr Chauffard, were of the same opinion. Babies formed an obstacle between adults and their unimpeded enjoyment of material comforts; the superficial, he deplored, had triumphed over the

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<sup>502</sup> Baranger, *Régénération de l'enfant*, p.46.

<sup>503</sup> Renoir, *Renoir*, p.285 (Jean Renoir quoted his father's words in English)

<sup>504</sup> Roll's Louise Cattell was exhibited in the SNBA of 1896, while Mary Cassatt saw the portrait of Pierre and Aline in the Gallery Georges Petit in June 1886 under the title *Enfant au sein*.

*Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, Exhibition Catalogue, Judith Barter, Erica Hirshler *et al.*, Chicago, The Art Institute 10 October 1998-10 January 1999, Boston, Museum of fine arts 14 February-9 May 1999, Washington, National Gallery of art 6 June-6 September 1999, p.130.

<sup>505</sup> Bayard, *La Peur*, p.13.



indispensable: the nation's well-being.<sup>506</sup> During the late nineteenth century, the icon of the eternal mother became bearer of another crucial, cherished and highly promulgated idea: that of self-sacrifice. Actually, there is an unprecedented need to link this notion to maternity. In the works Eugène Carrière created between 1880 and 1905, the woman incarnates the widely promulgated quality of self-sacrifice which was thought to originate from the female gender's nature.

In 1897, Eugène Carrière was entrusted with the task of decorating the *Salle des Fêtes* of the *Mairie du 12<sup>ème</sup> arrondissement*, but his work remained unfinished due to his premature death. One of the four large canvases he managed to complete between 1903 and 1905 is titled *Nativité* (Fig.68). The artist started focusing on the subject of motherhood in 1878, when Elisabeth, the first of his six children, was born. From that time onward, the motif of the woman breastfeeding her child became central in his imagery; his close friend and prolific writer Edmond de Goncourt characterised him as *peintre de l'allaitement*.<sup>507</sup> Interestingly, Carrière's limited palette, the figures' vague contours and the timeless quality of his images, form an artistic idiom which is dramatically different from Roll's naturalism that the Third Republic favoured.

In the *Nativité*, every element of the composition converges on the centre, where a young mother gives her breast to her child. The other figures depicted on the canvas surround and envelop the woman who has just given birth, while their gazes focus on her and the baby. Zimmerman posited that the artist narrated the child's infinite need for tenderness which is satisfied when the mother responds immediately to it, as if the infant's exigency forms a part of her own yearning.<sup>508</sup> Here, the mother with her undifferentiated facial features does not constitute a recognisable individual. Carrière's contemporaries were aware of the fact that it was his wife Sophie Desmousseaux, source of his inspiration, who usually served as his model. However, they also knew it was never her likeness the artist wished to render, since in the world he envisaged the woman functioned as an archetype he aspired to perpetuate. The philosopher Gabriel Séailles claimed that the idea his friend's images imparted, derived from the fact that the figures of the mother and the child are rendered in a single form, which contains them as the organs of the same natural being. Actually, Carrière attempted to capture

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<sup>506</sup> *Bulletin de la Société Protectrice*, p.6.

<sup>507</sup> *Eugène Carrière 1849- 1906*, Exhibition Catalogue, Rodolphe Rapetti, Marie Jeanne Geyer, Pierre Salé et al, Musées de Strasbourg, October 1996- February 1997, p.142.

<sup>508</sup> *Eugène Carrière*, Rapetti, p.42.

the moment when, as Séailles perceptively put it, the body and the soul of the baby are fused with those of the mother.<sup>509</sup> As her person is inextricably linked to that of her baby, she appears to lead a selfless existence; the centre of her interest and her greatest desire is to serve her offspring. Possibly, the painter communicated the conviction that, when the woman embraces her true nature and becomes the “creator of life”, she denies individualism: a true mother does not belong to herself.<sup>510</sup>

During the course of his career, the artist tried to reproduce a model of femininity which he profoundly admired and in which he firmly believed. Considering his own mother’s role in his life, he said that “*jamais femme ne fut plus généreuse, plus résignée.*”<sup>511</sup> The message that his public painting disclosed must have been regarded as convincing and opportune by the Republic. Creating images which transcend the notions of class and time, Carrière visualised the concept of female altruism that was addressed to every citizen who would enter the Salle des Fêtes of the Mairie. In this framework, the lesson he offered to French people through his *Nativité* hit the targets of the Third Republic’s moralists - both anticlerical and Catholics.

Three months after the artist’s death, Paul Desjardins claimed that Eugène Carrière, with his images and aesthetic method, structured a moral ideal.<sup>512</sup> The moral beauty Desjardins perceived in Carrière’s message lay within the technique employed by this latter; his organic style unfolded the ethical aspects of artistic creation. Carrière invented a visual language that aimed to regenerate the doctrine of dutiful motherhood, the revival of which coincided with the Third Republic’s aspirations. Octave Mirbeau, journalist and art critic, observed that in the paintings of Carrière maternity is not a condition of unimpeded happiness, but coexists with physical distress and pain. Therefore, in order for someone to reach the *holy* figure of the mother in this painter’s work, he has to traverse suffering.<sup>513</sup> Indeed, in the *Nativité* the woman who offers her breast to the new-born baby bears the signs of pain caused by the recent childbirth. Thus, the painter exalted the sacred character of motherhood, which is established through the idea of self-sacrifice. Maternity is bound to the female’s capacity to endure suffering and involves her humble, unconditional surrendering to

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<sup>509</sup> Gabriel Séailles, *Eugène Carrière, Essai de biographie psychologique*, (Paris 1911), p.128.

<sup>510</sup> Martin-Fugier, *La Bourgeoise*, p.251

<sup>511</sup> Cappella, *Moi Carrière*, p.32.

<sup>512</sup> Desjardins, 1July 1907, p.24.

<sup>513</sup> Cappella, *Moi Carrière*, p.104.

that suffering. Once again, Jules Simon dealt with the notion of female in 1890.<sup>514</sup> With a paternal tone, the former Prime Minister advised young French women: “*Grandis-toi, grandis-les (les enfants) par l’amour et le sacrifice. Il n’y a que le sacrifice qui soit grand. Il n’y a que l’amour qui soit fort.*”<sup>515</sup> I would suggest that Simon’s statement and Carrière’s work communicate the same message. During the Third Republic and particularly before the First World War, observed Anne Sohn, the idea that a mother must sacrifice herself was a very persistent one.<sup>516</sup>

In 1891 the French journalist Adrien Remacle wrote that in front of Carrière’s breastfeeding images one becomes overwhelmed with respect for a humanity which appears *holy*, serene and grave; this humanity is incarnated in the figure of Carrière’s eternal mother.<sup>517</sup> In his turn, Mirbeau exalted the way Carrière rendered the *chaste* character of the *physical* contact between a mother and her baby.<sup>518</sup> As mentioned above, Mirbeau also used the word *sainte* in order to describe the figure of the suffering mother in this prolific artist’s works. The conviction that sanctity can be achieved through pain and self-sacrifice originates from a Christian concept. Nevertheless, this idea’s religious connotations were gradually integrated to the secular moral system of the modern world. Carrière, posited George Rodenbach, disclosed the revered, sacred character of maternity, and in doing so “*il tire le divin du fond de l’homme, ou plutôt il découvre que le divin n’est que le plus humain.*”<sup>519</sup> Thus, the painter created the sacred, idealised version of the secular family in Third Republic France. Analysing his *Nativité* in this light, the breastfeeding scene visualises a moral practice; this way, it acquires the status of a noble and natural function which is the symbol of motherhood *par excellence*. The mother who carried the child in her womb is once again transmitting life through her breast-milk. Representing the woman who feeds her infant just after bringing it to the world as the centre of Creation, Carrière disclosed maternity as a condition close to divinity. However his concept is not an original one: during the same era, in a significant number of writings, the dutiful mother “*qui a l’air simplement de se déshabiller*

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<sup>514</sup> Jules Simon clarified the meaning of his article’s title in the very first sentence: the choice of a human state is, for the woman, the choice of a husband. Simon, ‘Le Choix d’un état’, p.193.

<sup>515</sup> Jules Simon, ‘L’éducation des filles’, *Revue de famille*, nouv. série, vol.2, 1 July 1889, p.297.

<sup>516</sup> Sohn, *Chrysalides*, p. 220

<sup>517</sup> Cappella, *Moi Carrière*, p.119.

<sup>518</sup> Cappella, *Moi Carrière*, p.104.

<sup>519</sup> Georges Rodenbach, *L’Élite: Écrivains, orateurs sacrés, peintres, sculpteurs* (Paris 1899), p.241.

*de la vie et de rentrer dans la nature*” is described by the term *collaboratrice de Dieu*, thus affirming her affiliation with the divine.<sup>520</sup>

The God Carrière believed in was that of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*. For these latter and for their spiritual children, breastfeeding was a triumph of the natural woman who finds her life purpose in maternity. Did the “icon” of the nursing mother have a different dimension for the Catholics? Ralph Gibson cited some French nineteenth century religious authors who described God’s attitude towards men as that of an affectionate mother who is breastfeeding her offspring.<sup>521</sup> François de Sales (1567-1622) was among the first theologians who used the image of the infant at the mother’s breast in order to evoke the believer’s relationship to God. The passage can be found in the famous *Traité de l’amour de Dieu* (1616), a book which contained guidelines for a pious everyday life.<sup>522</sup> Gibson noted that the loving side of God was rarely promoted during the 1700s, but De Sales’s parallelism would prove to be a very attractive one to the French believers of the next century. His image conformed to the excessively sentimental aspect of Catholic religion which was favoured and promulgated in the country after the 1789 Revolution; a time when the Church was struggling to defend itself against the primacy of Reason, religious indifference, loss of faith and certain forms of persecution which lead to its marginalisation. Thus, in 1829, Abbé Philippe Gerbet (1798-1864) posited that as the child inhales streams of life and by natural instinct clings to the maternal bosom before it has opened its eyes to the daylight, this way man is nourished by the bosom of God before he can behold him face to face.<sup>523</sup> Furthermore, in his journal of July 1894, the Catholic author Leon Bloy quoted the words of his wife: “*Nous vivons du sein de Dieu comme l’enfant vit du sein de sa mère. Nous sommes suspendus à ce sein, avidement, les yeux fermés, sans même savoir qu’un peu au dessus, tout près de nous, la Face nous*

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<sup>520</sup>Rodenbach, *L’Élite*, p.245.

<sup>521</sup>Gibson, *A Social History*, p. 82,83.

<sup>522</sup>*Nous serons là (au Ciel) comme des enfants très heureux de la divinité, ayant l’honneur d’être nourris de la propre substance divine, reçue en notre âme par la bouche de notre entendement; et, ce qui surpasse toute douceur, c’est que comme les mères ne se contentent pas de nourrir leurs poupons de leur lait, qui est leur propre substance, si elles-mêmes ne leur mettent le sein dans la bouche, afin qu’ils reçoivent leur substance, non en une cuiller ou autre instrument, ainsi en leur propre substance et par leur propre substance; en sorte que cette substance maternelle serve de tuyau, aussi bien que de nourriture, pour être reçue du bien-aimé petit enfant; ainsi Dieu notre père ne se contente pas de faire recevoir sa propre substance en notre entendement, c’est-à-dire de nous faire voir sa divinité; mais par un abîme de sa douceur, il appliquera lui-même sa substance à notre esprit.* François de Sales, *Traité de l’amour de Dieu*, book III, chapter XI, Paris 1616, p.161. in [http://jesusmarie.free.fr/francois\\_de\\_sales\\_traite\\_amour\\_de\\_dieu.html](http://jesusmarie.free.fr/francois_de_sales_traite_amour_de_dieu.html)

<sup>523</sup> Philippe Gerbet, *Considérations sur le dogme générateur de la piété catholique*, (Paris 1829), p.52.

*regarde.*”<sup>524</sup> During the course of the nineteenth century, God’s tenderness was compared to that of a nursing mother; the supernatural, sacred and ineffable was explained in natural terms in order to be understood. This is not astonishing since, according to the Christian doctrine, the creator of man deigned to reduce himself to the condition of his creature. The comparison of God’s *agape* with breastfeeding as the ultimate expression of maternal affection proves that this ordinary act was bestowed with the dignity of the divine. Nursing was the manifestation of the perfect, self-donating, compassionate love, appropriate to describe the nature of God’s charity.

In his work *La Maternité* of 1881 (Fig.69), the pious painter Fernand Pelez, represented an impoverished, dirty and disordered interior where a blissful and healthy mother breastfeeds her baby boy while turning to embrace and kiss her other son. It is difficult to say whether the oldest child, sitting on the floor by the woman’s feet, is worried about his rugged clothes or jealous for not receiving the maternal caresses like his brother. The composition and the title of the work allow us to deduce that, like Renoir, the Catholic Pelez set up maternity as an icon. The seated mother, situated in a frontal position in the middle of the canvas with a footstool under her left foot, recalls the type of the Virgin in a “Sacred Conversation”, which, in this case, takes place in a hovel. It could also be argued that the shape of the ceiling above her slightly evokes the pointed form of early Italian altarpieces, or the arch under which Renaissance masters like Bellini placed the throne of Christ’s mother. The painter’s allusion to the Virgin as maternal model par excellence is explicit; a cheap reproduction of *La belle jardinière* (1507, oil on panel, 122 x 80cm Louvre, Paris), which represents Mary with Child and young St John the Baptist, is hanging from the wall. The refined figure of Raphael’s Virgin Mary is of course different from this humble mother whose rough hands tenderly envelop her children. However, the two paintings carry the same message; both the Renaissance master who secularised the ancient theme of Virgin and Child and the modern painter made a statement on ideal maternity and its fruits. Pelez, who focused on the life of the underprivileged, had already represented poor women breastfeeding their babies. In the work analysed here, he overemphasised the idea of poverty and untidiness through a mass of details; some socks are left to dry from a string above the family’s heads, the children’s toys are hanging from the wall next to the cutlery, while some soup from the bowl is spilt on the floor. Everything is broken and worn out. However, he does not make a

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<sup>524</sup> Léon Bloy, *Le Mendiant ingrat*, *Journal de l’auteur 1892-1895*, Paris 1898, p. 244.

judgment against social injustice, or the woman's untidiness. He probably accumulated these signs of poverty in order to show that the eternal, dutiful motherhood transcends the temporal: material destitution.

Triumphant sign of her proper nature, epitome of maternity and manifestation of altruism which was presented as an inextricable trait of female gender, the breastfeeding woman was also used in a moral context in order to incarnate great Christian values. Adolphe William Bouguereau, a popular, staunchly academic Catholic artist, following a long iconographic tradition, utilised this theme as a symbol of self-donating love in his painting *Charité* (Fig.70). Breastfeeding as ultimate act of charity comprised a concept which came from pagan Rome, but it was christianised during the Early Renaissance.<sup>525</sup> Thus, in the first half of the fourteenth century, the nursing woman appeared in Italian art as *Caritas*, the most important of the three Theological Virtues alongside Faith and Hope. According to Dr Golda Balass, Charity was usually depicted with two suckling children, under the influence of the type of *Virgo Lactans* who, having fed Christ with her milk, was also regarded as the nurse of the whole mankind.<sup>526</sup> Bouguereau's *Charité* is a beautiful young woman seated on a throne and flanked by a small crowd of infants. One of them, satiated, has fallen asleep on her lap, while two more infants are taken into her bosom to be nursed; another child finds refuge by her feet and next to him, a fifth little boy's places his finger on the word *Evangelium* (gospel) which is written on a piece of paper. The artist, who found in Catholicism consolation for the loss of his wife and two children and excelled in religious subjects, rendered Caritas as a Madonna-like figure: veiled, virginal, youthful, and with a downward gaze. Charity, a beauty whose nudity is modestly hidden behind the infant bodies, is not incarnated as an ideal, fecund mother but as the model nurse whose bosom is a shelter and her breast an inexhaustible source of comfort for the weak and the hungry. The idea of alms-giving is underscored by the presence of a vase upon which the foot of Caritas rests, and from where coins are versed abundantly like the milk from the woman's breast. The American Earl Shinn praised the image's highly polished style which was generally thought to be a defect of Bouguereau art: "Mr Drexel's (New York art collector) largest object is Bouguereau's serene,

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<sup>525</sup> According to a Roman myth, a young woman named Pero secretly breastfed her imprisoned father Cimon, who was condemned to die of starvation. The jailers found out the daughter's deed and impressed by her filial devotion, they set the old man free. Her selfless act was considered to be one of incomparable virtue. It was frequently represented in antiquity and favoured by artists from Renaissance onward.

<sup>526</sup> *Allegory/Allegro (Non Troppo)*, Exhibition Catalogue, Boaz Tal, Golda Ballass et al, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2001, 105-109.

*tranquil, gracious picture of Charity, one of the most highly finished pieces of sculpture with brush ever achieved even by this magister emeritus of elegance and grace. With a theme like this the adamantine surface becomes an assistant of the impression: it makes charity seem invulnerable as she should be.*"<sup>527</sup>

Five years later, in *Alma parens* (Fig.71) Bouguereau used the breastfeeding woman as an allegory for France, elevating one more time the act of nursing to the realm of ideas. In the painter's biography written by Marius Vachon in 1900 we read that Bouguereau, a patriot, despised politics: "*toute sa vie, il a désiré et a entendu rester un simple citoyen, ardemment passionné pour la prospérité du pays, partisan de l'ordre et de la paix dans la rue et dans les esprits, afin que chacun puisse travailler et puisse jouir des fruits de son travail.*"<sup>528</sup> Therefore, it would be wrong to attribute any political undertones to this work; the young woman has no affiliation with the current or any other regime, but incarnates the soul of eternal France who nourishes and succours her sons and daughters. In the painting, the incarnation of motherland is as also hieratic and her throne is situated in the countryside, possible reference to the French landscape. Nine children surround her; unlike *Caritas*, *Alma Parens* exposes her breast and shows it to the French spectator whom she fixes with her gaze. Her presence forms a sign of concord and fraternity; she is nurse and mother at the same time. The infants who circle her embrace each other with the exception of two, who, having turned their back to her, are fighting. The work contains no religious connotations apart from one detail; a little boy dressed like John the Baptist is standing in a praying position beside the nursing *patria*, rendering her an object of adoration. The breastfeeding woman, as manifestation of an ideal, is eternal and therefore invulnerable.

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<sup>527</sup> Fronia Wissmann, *Bouguereau* (San Francisco 1996), p.69.

<sup>528</sup> Marius Vachon, *William Bouguereau* (Paris 1900), p.26.

## 7. Conclusion.

In 1892, Jules Simon posited that, whereas one is entitled to talk about good and bad wives, there are no bad mothers. Such a thing, the elderly politician professed, is incomprehensible if not utterly absurd, because it contradicts a fundamental natural law.<sup>529</sup> Nevertheless, only three years before these views were published, Simon and his republican colleagues in the *Assemblée Nationale* attempted to enact a legislation which would allow the “*Administration de l’Assistance publique*” to take under its protection children abandoned by their parents. The old politician was aware of the social reality but he was also motivated by an urge to serve his cause. With his book, he intended to promote the ideal of a society where the woman could exist only as a devoted mother. It is also important to note that like Simon, Alexander Mayer, whose opinions have been presented above, also used another language when he addressed the physicians who fought for the same cause as he. The following words are taken from the speech he gave in a conference organised by the *Société Protectrice de l’Enfance* in 1870: “*Sans doute il est contre nature qu’une mère fasse ou souhaite du mal à son enfant. Mais la civilisation n’est pas l’état de nature et l’homme n’est pas seulement un animal. Chez lui l’intelligence domine les instincts et le libre arbitre dirige ses déterminations.*”<sup>530</sup> On this occasion, the rhetoric of propaganda is not necessary; the woman is identified as part of the civilised world; her affiliation with nature is not over-emphasised and her intelligence presides over her instincts.

According to the historian Angus McLaren, the belief that control of family size was possible and the inducement of miscarriage could be safely performed, along with the idea that a woman had the right to choose not to bear her child, surfaced in the later half the nineteenth century.<sup>531</sup> During this period, Neo-Malthusians – as well as certain feminists and anarchists - openly encouraged sexual liberation and the voluntary limitation of births.<sup>532</sup> The number of abortions, posited Dr Brochard in 1876, was *incalculable*. Interruption of pregnancy, claimed this physician, was not considered a crime; unfortunately it had become a

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<sup>529</sup> Jules Simon, *La Femme du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle* (Paris 1892), p.189.

<sup>530</sup> *Bulletin de la Société Protectrice*, p.11.

<sup>531</sup> McLaren, ‘Abortion in France’, p.463.

<sup>532</sup> Ronsin, *La Grève des ventres*, p.16.



social practice.<sup>533</sup> According to Dr Bertillon, at least fifty abortionists were advertising their services in Paris papers. Interestingly enough, up to the middle decades of the nineteenth century the popular image of the female who wanted an abortion was that of the unmarried girl; from the 1880s on, it was that of the married woman seeking to control the size of her family.<sup>534</sup> However, even if this practice was common, representations referring to it do not seem to exist. By contrast, as we have seen, there are plenty of images which illustrate babies receiving the care of state or Church charity institutions. Among underprivileged women, abandonment might have been a more obvious or less risky choice than interruption of pregnancy; besides, the nature of this latter formed a taboo subject we do not expect to see represented.

The social identity and financial status of the *bad* mother who would put her infant with an unknown wet-nurse, become apparent once we follow the moralists' course of reasoning. According to Dr Chauffard, the authorities could not interfere if the wet-nurse resided under the same roof as the child's parents, because the hearth is inviolable. In this case, he claimed, a mother's choice, right or wrong, is hers and nobody else's.<sup>535</sup> Obviously, only a bourgeois woman could afford a *nourrice sur lieu* and it was her dwelling's privacy which was sacred. The State was more severe and demanding towards those who benefited from its benevolence. French national leadership, comprised of financially privileged men, regulated poor women's bodies and interfered to their private lives, because they were pregnant or young mothers and sought assistance. The female working population had to be kept under control for the fear of social uprisings. The memories of the Parisian Commune were still fresh; to an extent, anxiety about these events dictated the late nineteenth-century politics of motherhood and lead to the obsessive promulgation of the domesticated female. Politicians and doctors knew that they could not control the maternal conduct of working women by admonishing them, or by appealing to their conscience, but tried to do so by imposing laws and providing practical support. The doctrine of dutiful maternity was fostered by bourgeois men with a solid scholar background, who ventured to "spread the word" to every stratum of society. Investigating the arguments which Catholic and Republican doctors and politicians used in order to meet their purposes, we may confirm that, in fundamental matters, their opinions largely coincided.

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<sup>533</sup> André-Théodore Brochard, *La Vérité sur les enfants trouvés* (Paris 1876), p.98-100.

<sup>534</sup> McLaren, 'Abortion in France', p.472.

<sup>535</sup> *Bulletin de la Société Protectrice*, p.7.

An important number of images discussed in this chapter of the dissertation portray bourgeois women bathing their babies or breastfeeding. The works of Debat-Ponsan, Dantan, Moreau de Tours, Defonte and Goeunette, affirm that late nineteenth-century artists contributed to the great debate on the social and national necessity for a new maternal model; this latter was gradually adopted by the middle-classes. The subject matter of paintings like the *Petit bain* (Fig.60) and the *Toilette de Jean Guérard* (Fig.61), do not only promote the ideal of devoted motherhood; they communicate the importance of cleanliness - a major issue in the doctors' discourse -, convey the evolution which had occurred in certain aspects of childcare and demonstrate the significant position of children in society. For republicans, practicing hygiene under specific medical precepts had become the heart of a moral code, which determined the policies for the newborn babies' welfare. The comments of Lafenestre concerning the predominance of white colour in Duez's *L'Heure de la têtée des enfants débiles à la Maternité* (Fig.47) allow us to deduce that art critics recognised painters' participation to the hygiene debate. Finally images representing subjects related to scientific discoveries were very common and anticipated in the Salon, since artists and illustrators shared the general fascination about medical progress which saved children lives and gave them the opportunity to become vigorous citizens.

## FIFTH CHAPTER

### ***'La famille modèle' in the early Third Republic.***

#### **1. Introduction.**

*“La famille est l’association des personnes issues du même sang et vivant ensemble sous le même toit”*: this definition, found in Pierre Larousse’s dictionary of 1872, renders the notions of “*descendance*” and cohabitation as the family’s two fundamental components.<sup>536</sup> In the period under study, the domestic environment was seen as the space where individuals could legitimately pursue happiness and self-accomplishment. Parental, fraternal, conjugal and filial relationships constituted the site where people received moral instruction, found emotional comfort and attained social maturity. The last chapter of the thesis explores these crucial concepts through paintings, illustrations, novels and books of etiquette which provided the French readers with moral guidance. Michelle Perrot posited that for the liberal school of thought established after the French Revolution, family was the key both for the public good and for the happiness of the individual. On the other hand, the same scholar observed, for traditionalist Catholics like Vicomte de Bonald who envisaged the restoration of the *Ancien Régime*, family formed in itself a “*monarchie paternelle*”; a society which guaranteed stability and continuity.<sup>537</sup> I will attempt to answer whether there was a split among republicans and Catholics in their respective concept of the family and whether these differences can be perceived in painting.

In 2007, Anna Green wrote that for illustrious thinkers “family was perceived as the most effective and increasingly affective cell of society”. Thus, the historian Jules Michelet asserted that family was the City of God, whereas in 1855, the French philosopher Paul Janet, claimed that “*la famille complète et perpétue notre être; elle l’étend dans l’espace et dans la durée.*”<sup>538</sup> Family fashioned life-models and ethicised all the aspects of human existence; it

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<sup>536</sup> Pierre Larousse (ed.) *Grand dictionnaire*, vol.8 (Paris 1872), p.72.

<sup>537</sup> Ariès Perrot, Duby (eds), *Histoire de la vie privée*, p.85, 87.

<sup>538</sup> Anna Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence 1848-1886* (London 2007), p.7 and Paul Janet, *La Famille: Leçons de philosophie morale* (Paris 1855), p.15.

was the site where sexuality could be restrained and controlled and the path to treat social ailments. In the last decades of the century, the family, a social and moral entity with complex structure, the indisputable foundation of the modern State, became an inexhaustible source of inspiration for French artists. More than ever before, the children, who incarnated the parents' continuity and the country's future, comprised the family's centre.<sup>539</sup> The specific fact is directly related to the social and national importance of fertility, a notion which was also discussed in the previous part of the thesis. This chapter examines the importance attached to the fecund couple and their responsibility towards themselves and their motherland.

A *foyer* was essentially believed to guarantee the good functioning of democratic institutions and hence the survival of the nation and the stability of the political regime: “*creuset de la conscience nationale, elle transmet les valeurs symboliques et la mémoire fondatrice. Elle est creatrice de citoyenneté autant que de civilité.*”<sup>540</sup> From the 1870s, and particularly in the two decades after 1879 as the Third Republic got into its reforming stride, family allegories became a common theme in the paintings which covered the walls of the *mairies* in Paris and other cities, as an important aspect of the Republic's ideological drive to propagate civic and moral values.<sup>541</sup> This subject is going to be discussed below. Furthermore, the final part of the dissertation ventures to answer to what extent was the concept of fraternity carried over into the Republic's understanding of the family, and how this concept is manifested in public works of art. The way the republican system of values emerges from bourgeois family portraits and the fact that the image of the peasant family was often preferred in order to articulate moral ideals for the urban middle class, comprise two issues which will also be explored. Finally, the period under study provides us with a considerable number of portraits of men who display their paternal affection, disclosing an intimate relationship to their children. *Alphonse Daudet et sa fille* and *Gabriel Seailles et sa fille* by Eugène Carrière, as well as *Pasteur et sa petite fille* by Leon Bonnat, constitute three examples which will be analysed in an attempt to investigate the image of the loving father, so intensely projected during the early Third Republic.

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<sup>539</sup>Green, *French Paintings*, p.134.

<sup>540</sup>Ariès, Duby, Perrot, *Histoire de la vie privée*, p.93.

<sup>541</sup>André Michel, ‘Le Salon de 1888’, *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, vol.37, Juin 1888, p.444.

## 2. The Bourgeois Family Ideal: Republican versus Catholic Position.

The way family life was understood, had been determined by the overwhelming fear of depopulation. As this thesis has already demonstrated, republican demographers, men of letters and politicians, were alarmed before the face of the moral danger manifested in the unwillingness of people to procreate. Actually, the thoroughly discussed problem of low birthrates, which was believed to threaten national stability and became a marking trait of republican politics during the early Third Republic, occupied the thought of some sons of the Enlightenment even before the outbreak of the 1789 Revolution. In 1890, in an article mentioned earlier in my thesis, Georges de Dubor cited the ominous prediction made by Jérôme Pétion de la Villeneuve in 1785. This revolutionary, who served as mayor of Paris, had prophesied that in fifty years France would number two million souls less than before, and maintained that this terrifying prospect should preoccupy every conscientious patriot. The situation in late eighteenth century, argued Dubor, was frightfully similar to the one the country experienced in the present. He and his spiritual ancestor were convinced that people's aversion to family life had its' roots in the abandonment of moral values: "*Pétion déplore la société de son époque, les poèmes consacrés au libertinage et les romans qui gâtent le cœur et l'esprit ; ne croirait-on pas entendre un prédicateur de nos jours tonner contre les vices de la Babylone moderne ? Ils nous paraissent tout aussi fin de siècle que vous, vos pères de 1785.*"<sup>542</sup> There is an almost religious undertone in the discourse and phraseology of both men who, despite their anticlericalism, showed themselves extremely sensitive concerning debauchery: Pétion that of the court of Louis XVI and Dubor that of the *fin du siècle*.

The necessity of family life was also underscored during the short-lived Second Republic. In 1849, in his book *la Philosophie du mariage*, Alexandre Debay asserted that an individual becomes man or woman by marriage. Two honest, sane persons, he posited, must not walk alone on this earth and the aim of every marriage is procreation.<sup>543</sup> The Catholic position concerning the basic purpose of conjugal union was very similar to that of their ideological opponents, although the first had children primarily for the glory of God and the transmission of the faith, and the second for the sake of national prosperity. Nevertheless, there was a capital difference; according to the official republican thesis the qualities of

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<sup>542</sup>Dubor, 'La Dépopulation', p.149, 151.

<sup>543</sup>Debay, *Philosophie*, p.20, 37.

spouse and parent defined a human being; these two roles bestowed a person with dignity and rendered him conscious of his gender. Catholics did not see the creation of a family as the only legitimate way to lead one's life; to them it was not an obligation, but a vocation. Defending this conviction in 1907, the pious moralist Émile Bayard, said that France needed: "*moins de mariages mais plus féconds*" and that: "*L'Église a des prêtres et des religieuses pour laisser place aux époux et donner au monde le parfait modèle de la chasteté.*"<sup>544</sup> On the one hand, moralists who adhered to the principles of the secular state ventured to bring citizens before their responsibilities, forcing them to choose between family and marginalisation; they could either be parents or outcasts. On the other hand, Catholics, who rejected debauchery, not only emphasised the utility of celibacy but, based the example of Christ and the letters of Saint Paul, they affirmed that consecrated life was superior to family life.

In 1888, in an attempt to reinforce the weakened family spirit which generated moral decadence, Jules Simon launched the journal *Revue de famille*. In the preface of the first issue titled *Le péril moral*, Simon argued that while piety was becoming out-of-date, unfortunately, materialism was gaining ground among young people. "*Je conviens que la religion catholique ou plutôt l'église catholique nous a cruellement mordus. Comme elle s'imposait par la force elle a eu contre elle les revendications de la liberté qui sont invincibles.*"<sup>545</sup> *Un homme ou un peuple qui ne croit en rien est quelque chose comme un corps sans âme; il n'est rien. Et pour cette raison, je défends le retour à l'esprit de la famille, à la vie de famille.*"<sup>546</sup> A loving foyer was proposed as an antidote to the moral crisis.

Jules Simon asked Alexandre Dumas  *fils*, prolific novelist and free-thinker, to write short, instructive stories for the *Revue de famille*. The author declined this proposition; in the letter published in 1888 in this journal, he explained that any attempt to reestablish the reign of family values through didactic stories would be futile:

*"Le but ou le rêve de ce journal est sans doute de fortifier en France le sentiment familial, de le ranimer même, car d'aucuns prétendent qu'il va s'affaiblissant et s'altérant de plus en plus. Je suis de l'avis de ceux-là, et je vois très bien le mal; j'en vois moins le remède, je ne le vois même pas du tout. Vous le trouverez peut-être. A mon avis la littérature, l'éloquence les conseils, les*

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<sup>544</sup> Bayard, *La Peur*, p.16.

<sup>545</sup> Jules Simon, 'Le péril moral', *Revue de famille*, vol.1, 15 May 1888, p.5.

<sup>546</sup> Simon, 'Le péril moral', p.7.

*leçons n'ont rien à faire là-dedans. Il y a dans l'humanité un instinct d'évolution contre lequel rien ne prévaut*".<sup>547</sup>

Dumas conveyed a less idealised view of the family than the one held by Jules Simon: "elle ne peut pas avoir toutes les propriétés toutes les vertus qu'on lui prête qu'elle n'est le plus souvent qu'une mise en commun d'égoïsmes individuels protégés et glorifiés sous une étiquette sentimentale."<sup>548</sup> But, like the politician, Dumas asserted that the family's moral degeneration can be detected in the prevalence of Malthusian spirit which prompted young couples to have only one or two children: "Il n'y a plus guère d'amour dans les mariages, les mariages diminuent et Malthus y est plus souvent convoqué que Lucine", argued the writer.<sup>549</sup>

Alexandre Dumas, republican himself, argued that the creation of family constitutes the main purpose of human life, the only path leading to happiness, the fundamental "raison d'être":

*"Le sentiment le plus profond, le plus inné, le premier qui s'impose et le dernier qui persiste, le seul qui crée une éternité sur la terre et donne une espérance au-delà est le sentiment de la famille. Si l'homme a été créé pour un état défini, permanent, contenant la plus grande somme de bonheur possible, il semble que ce soit l'état de famille. Sa vie physique, morale, sociale, paraît ne devoir être que le développement non interrompu de cet état premier. Il reçoit une famille en entrant dans la vie, et s'il accomplit la loi naturelle il en laisse une autre greffée sur la première en sortant. Tous les grands esprits consciemment ou inconsciemment travaillent à la réalisation de cet idéal, l'humanité ne formant plus qu'une seule famille. Et si le Christianisme doit triompher de toutes les autres doctrines religieuses c'est parce que il a pour base ce principe, cette raison d'être de l'humanité."*<sup>550</sup>

In a period of thriving anticlericalism, Dumas acknowledged that the ideals which inspired republicans and the values that shaped the Christian vision of humanity were the same. Non-believers could identify themselves with fundamental Christian principles, and regarded religious faith as an ally in the attempt to revive the love for an orderly domestic existence among the people. Faith was often seen as an antidote to the contempt of traditional ideals. As early as in 1869, the respected girls' educator Ernest Legouvé, a deist who did not adhere to the Catholic doctrines, admitted that he brought up his son religiously because, like Simon, he despised and feared materialism, which swamped the French society.<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> Dumas, 'La Famille moderne', *Revue de famille*, vol.1, 15 May 1888, p.11.

<sup>548</sup> Dumas, 'La Famille moderne' p.16.

<sup>549</sup> Dumas, 'La Famille moderne' p.17.

<sup>550</sup> Dumas, 'La Famille moderne', p.12,13.

<sup>551</sup> Legouvé, *Les Pères et les enfants*, p.80.

Furthermore, Simon held the form of *laïcité*, which was enforced by the State and applauded by the radical republicans, responsible for France's moral decline. In his opinion, the secularisation of the state was necessary but the way it was applied was perilous. He actually opposed the anticlerical policy of the government which abolished catechism from schools and was against the establishment of the divorce law (1884).<sup>552</sup> The reason for this ideological position was that Simon, who had been a deputy during the Second Republic, was imbued with the spirit of the 1848 Revolution; a spirit of reconciliation between the representatives of the Church and the revolutionaries. These latter did not shut down places of worship, nor did they destroy sacred objects, while the priests, since March 1848, blessed the flags of the National Guard and the trees which were planted in public places in Paris as symbols of liberty.<sup>553</sup>

Third Republic politicians and moralists believed that social order was the fruit of family order and responsible citizenship should be taught by the parents. They also insisted on the continuity established between the love for the family and the love for the country. Thus, Jules Simon posited that the more a man is attached to his wife, offspring, or siblings, the more willing he is to die for his country; the family is the cradle of human virtues and patriotism.<sup>554</sup> As early as in 1855, this politician confirmed that family forms a school, where one is taught to sacrifice for the other: "*l'amour de la famille, s'unissant pour un même but à l'amour de la patrie, en centuple la force. L'amour de la patrie est l'extension de l'amour de la famille et l'amour de l'humanité est une extension de l'amour de la patrie*", he claimed.<sup>555</sup> These ideas are closely related to the iconography of the French town halls, which will be examined later.

An emblematic image of the bourgeois family was painted by the republican Marcel Baschet (1862-1941) two years before the end of the century. It was exhibited in the Salon of 1899 under the title *Ma famille* (Fig.72). I would argue that the choice of subject constitutes a concrete statement of affection and devotion through which Baschet advertised his talent. The author of the work disclosed that his family formed not only the centre of his life, but also a source of inspiration. In the 1942 monograph dedicated to Marcel Baschet, his youngest

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<sup>552</sup> Simon claimed: *On pourra laïciser l'école que je déplore, on ne laïciser pas la mère*, and also *vous arrachez Dieu quand vous arrachez les crucifix* was referring to the Écoles laïques des jeunes filles where the future secular-minded mothers of future voters would be educated. Simon, (Le Peril moral), p.7.

<sup>553</sup> Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, p.608.

<sup>554</sup> Simon, 'Le Peril moral', p.4.

<sup>555</sup> Jules Simon, *Le Devoir* (Paris 1855), p.178, 182.



brother Jacques affirmed that the family spirit had become the doctrine of the painter and his kin. Actually, Marcel and his other brother René had married the sisters Jeanne and Margueritte Guillemeteau; according to Jacques Baschet, the intimacy and affection among the two couples, as well as their common interests, lead them to the decision to live together under the same roof. Each month one of the sisters would take over the direction of the household.<sup>556</sup> This image, which could serve as an illustration for the sermons of moralists who preached the Republic's secular, domestic religion, is quite unique; it does not portray a typical nuclear family comprised of two parents and the children, but represents two families as one.

In *Ma famille*, the female, domestic sphere, which is represented by Marcel's mother-in-law, his daughter, his wife and her sister, occupies the centre of the canvas. The male domain, comprised of the artist, his first-born son and his nephew, is portrayed in the background and on the left side. Interestingly, the texture of the ladies' clothes and hair is meticulously rendered, while Marcel's figure appears slightly hazier. By arranging the composition like this, Baschet probably ventured to underline the importance of the woman as mother and spouse; she constituted the *dépositaire d'honneur du foyer* and *maîtresse des mœurs*.<sup>557</sup> Jeanne, Margueritte and the young girl form a triangle which envelops the artist's mother-in-law, an imposing matron and the oldest represented family member, along with the new-born son of René Baschet, who is sitting on her lap. The elderly lady and the infant who embody the past and the future of the family are rendered the focus of attention for the female sitters and the viewer. The baby exists because of the grandmother; thus the idea of lineage is underscored. Madame Guillemeteau's black dress, juxtaposed with little René-Pierre's bright white robe, enhances the contrast between old age and childhood. A portrait of Ludovic Baschet (1834-1909), father of the artist and founder of the journal *Revue illustrée*, is hanging on the wall, further emphasising the value of continuity among the bourgeois classes.<sup>558</sup> The work's large size discloses the artist's intention to present himself as a skillful portrait painter to the Salon viewers in order to get new commissions. Eager to stress his professional excellence, Marcel copies the stance of Diego Velázquez in *Las Meninas*. The ostentatious

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<sup>556</sup> Jacques Baschet, *Marcel Baschet : sa vie, son œuvre* (Bellegarde 1942), p.80, 194.

<sup>557</sup> Simon, 'L'éducation des femmes', p.291.

<sup>558</sup> Jean-Paul Perrin, 'De Ludovic Baschet au Louis Baschet: une famille au service de la presse et de l'édition de l'art', *L'Illustration*, 2010 ([http://www.lillustration.com/De-Ludovic-Baschet-a-Louis-Baschet-une-famille-au-service-de-la-presse-et-de-l-edition-d-art\\_a174.html](http://www.lillustration.com/De-Ludovic-Baschet-a-Louis-Baschet-une-famille-au-service-de-la-presse-et-de-l-edition-d-art_a174.html)).

size, which in the seventeenth century served in order to immortalise a royal family, is chosen to depict the triumph of the bourgeois household which was the basis of the egalitarian Republic. The criticism of Léonce Bénédite, published in the journal *Art et décoration*, confirms that the painter wished to be regarded as a continuator of the French artistic tradition and not as an innovator. “*Le même esprit d'autrefois, dans une réelle distinction de tons bruns, orangés, blancs et noirs jouant dans les gris, caractérise la grande toile familiale de M. Marcel Baschet, si intelligemment disposée en grand panneau de décoration intérieure, dans le goût des beaux portraits de famille du XVIIIe siècle.*”<sup>559</sup>

It should be kept in mind that representing children with both their parents was not very common in French portraiture.<sup>560</sup> This is possibly why the only male adult in the painting discussed here is Marcel Baschet, who rendered himself more as the artist and observer rather than as the engaging father and spouse. We could suggest that his brother René is present through his sons and especially the younger one, situated in the centre of the canvas. According to Jacques Baschet, the children lived in a fraternal atmosphere; at school, the two older boys introduced themselves as brothers and not as cousins.<sup>561</sup> In *Ma famille*, the affection between the two youths is manifested through their pose, the physical proximity and their identical costume. The fact that they pose as students in their uniform hints at the idea of diligence and learning, which was pivotal for their gender and the role they would later have to assume as active members of the bourgeois society. Separate from the female circle and closer to Marcel who is shown exercising his profession, the boys are rendered as two independent individuals. Finally, it is not unlikely that the fondness between the two youths reflects something of the strong liaison between the artist and his absent brother. *Ma famille* is a positive, constructive image, which audibly proclaims the noble republican principles. The ideals of unity, brotherhood, undisturbed harmony and orderly family life had to be extended from the private to the public sphere. Baschet adopted and communicated the secular doctrine of the dominant middle class to which he belonged. His stratum aspired to set a model of morality for the entire social body.

What family ideal did illustrious members of the Church hierarchy advocate? In 1869 the bishop Félix Dupanloup voiced the official Catholic position, praising the family as a

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<sup>559</sup> Léonce Bénédite, ‘La peinture décorative au Salon de 1899’, *Art et décoration*, vol.5, January-June 1899, p.183.

<sup>560</sup> Thomas, *Impressionist Children*, p.161.

<sup>561</sup> Baschet, *Marcel Baschet*, p.194.

sacred and eternal institution whose spiritual treasures derived from God. The fruits of Christian family life were filial piety and parental devotion, together with the joy and consolation which result from these forms of pure, disinterested love. From his discourse one realises that the Catholic and the republican views did not contradict:

*“La famille, sanctuaire auguste de l’autorité qui crée, de l’Éducation qui élève, de la Providence qui perpétue. Foyer vivant et inextinguible des deux plus nobles sentiments qui soient dans les cœurs des enfants des hommes, la reconnaissance et le respect. La famille, objet immortel, premier et dernier but des sollicitudes du ciel et des lois divines, comme elle doit être aussi des sollicitudes de la terre et des législations sociales. La famille, le nom le plus doux à l’oreille de l’homme: un père, une mère, un fils, un frère, une fille, une sœur; les affections les plus pures; les premières amitiés de la vie; les joies les plus confiantes et les plus naïves; les vertus les plus aimables.”*<sup>562</sup>

Felix Dupanloup and Jules Simon, like nearly every moralist, did not describe a predominant reality. They imparted some moral precepts, and communicated a bourgeois ideal that could be realised under certain conditions, within families which were not dysfunctional.

If the models that secularists and devout Christians promulgated resembled each other, the paths which lead into the creation of a perfect family were not similar. For each one, the achievement of their ideal resulted from their level of attachment to different, though not necessarily opposing, values such as patriotism and religious faith. Thus, while those who struggled for a secular state made an appeal to the citizens’ love for the country, their ideological opponents focused on men’s duty towards God. They were both appalled by debauchery but, according to each side, the reasons which lead to moral degeneration differed. For instance, if Jacques Bertillon, the famous republican demographer, thought that the legalisation of divorce was beneficial for society, every pious moralist regarded marriage as indissoluble. For the first, family was the result of a civil contract between two adults, whereas for the second, the sovereign origin of the family was beyond question; it was the fruit of a sacrament subject to ecclesiastical authority.<sup>563</sup> Finally, the Catholics thought that family was the site of religious instruction, through which the children and hence the nation would receive salvation.

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<sup>562</sup> Dupanloup, *Le Mariage*, p.17.

<sup>563</sup> Jedin et Dolan (eds), *History of the Church*, p.208.

Are there images representing ostensibly Catholic *foyers*? Can a viewer be sure of the devotion of the individuals represented in family portraits? Henri Brispot, a now obscure painter of bourgeois genre scenes, provided us a useful example of how ambiguous things could be. In his work *Le Repas de baptême* (Fig.73) exhibited in the Salon of 1884, he illustrated a happy upper-middle class family gathered to celebrate a baby's baptism. Louis Enault, in his review of the Salon confirmed the popularity of the subject among the public: "*Le repas de baptême, très regardé et très remarqué à l'Exposition de 1884. Nous sommes chez les bons bourgeois, et l'on devine tout de suite qu'ils mettent plus de sel gaulois que de sel attique dans leur potage. L'idée de la nourrice qui renouvelle les constatations de l'état civil de façon à permettre aux convives de s'assurer que le garçon n'est pas une fille amène sur ces larges faces un gros rire que j'entends d'ici et qui ne fait de mal à personne.*"<sup>564</sup> Three generations and two social strata are united around a table: the mother who is still recovering from childbirth, the father next to his spouse, both grandfathers who incarnate the bourgeois *bon-viveurs*, the maid and the wet-nurse. The fact that the *nourrice* is seated at the table with her masters, discloses the fact that people of her position enjoyed a privileged status compared to other servants; at the same time it seems to communicate an egalitarian idea. One might surmise that Brispot, whose political affiliations and religious convictions are unknown, introduced a value cherished by the Third Republic in a painting with a Christian context. The scene imbues a jovial and informal atmosphere. The crying baby is lifted up in order to be seen and admired by all the family members: with a sense of humour which made his mediocre work very popular, Henri Brispot referred to the ancient custom of presenting the new-born heir to the throne to his subjects. An interesting point, which further interprets the success of this anecdotal painting, may be found in Enault's phrase: *sel gaulois*. The art-critic detected a particularly French quality, which emerges from this image and, possibly, made it even more attractive. Brispot, unlike academic artists such as William Bouguereau or Gustave Boulanger, did not use Greco-Roman forms in order to render his subject but bestowed it with a national 'colour'. Besides, as it will be shown later, the predominant style of public decorations in the 1880s proves that classicism was becoming out-of-date. Furthermore, the taste of Brispot's "salt" might be related to the temperament of the sitters and their social rank. These upper middle-class people are representatives of a period when the bourgeois family triumphed. The artist suggested that the portrayed persons are inheritors of the Gallo-

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<sup>564</sup>Enault, *Le Salon de 1884* (Paris 1884), no page number.

Roman tradition: high-spirited, outgoing, *rieurs* and *gourmands* who seize the present moment like their ancestors. Finally, the *sel gaulois* could also be linked to the protagonists' attachment to traditions, which had shaped the French society over centuries.

The *Repas de baptême* was created at a time which coincided with the new regime's radically anticlerical phase. Nevertheless, the portrayed individuals have gathered in order to celebrate the christening of their son and grandson who becomes a member of the Church, like they also did years before. Does this constitute an evidence of piety? Enault did not make any remarks concerning the Christian aspect of the work, possibly because this latter appeared rather superficial. In the previous chapters of the thesis, it has been mentioned that the French people, even when they were not pious, were largely attached to the Catholic rites, which formed an integral part of the national culture.<sup>565</sup> Brispot's sitters could be republican and devout at the same time, or just respectful to old traditions. Ideological ambiguity of genre scenes such as the *Répas de baptême* is not intended to perplex the viewer. We are not allowed to differentiate Catholic from republican attitudes because they were often interchangeable. What seems to matter most in this image is that the models are manifestly bourgeois and family people. Finally, the work analysed here, discloses an aspect of the new cult of childhood among the upper classes; the protagonist is indubitably the baby.

Eight years later, Brispot created a variation of the subject he treated in the *Repas de baptême*. In his painting *Le Roi boit* of 1892 (Fig.74) the "king" is a toddler who is standing on the table of the dining room drinking something from a cup: his parents and their visitors seem amused with the spectacle. The artist represented a traditional Christmas ceremony performed by the youngest member of the family. Once again, the social milieu is manifestly bourgeois, a stratum whose members are concerned with keeping time-honoured customs alive, reassuring their continuity. The French cultural profile is perpetuated thanks to their attitude. The prominent place of children in the world of adults illustrated in the two works of Brispot, further indicates the radical change in the social position of minors during the Third Republic. In the art of this period infants appear as a source of gladness for married couples and their parents. Through this little being, which is deified and becomes the centre of attention, different generations establish their unity and may live in harmony. Finally, the family adds to its civic value by providing future citizens.

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<sup>565</sup>Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Les Débuts de la Troisième République 1871-1898* (Paris 1973), p.135.

The infallible sign of a healthy and virtuous domestic life was fecundity. Modern practices followed by spouses who refused to procreate were judged as self-destructive and suicidal: the idea of family was inconceivable without offspring. The depopulation anxiety, which was so intense among republicans, had also overwhelmed Catholics. Bonjean invited his contemporaries to join a cult of the family in order to fight against the country's decadence, since without families there is no prosperity or happiness.<sup>566</sup> The pious Émile Bayard animated his theoretical study *La Peur de l'enfant* with the short story of a young father of five who faces people's hostility and contempt. The maid makes negative comments and expresses her wish to abandon them in order to work for a "chic", childless couple. The concierge is scandalised in the spectacle of so many children: "*Ils ne sont donc pas honteux d'avoir tant d'enfants qui salissent mes escaliers et avec cela on me rogne sur mes étrennes ?*"<sup>567</sup> The man consoles his wife by affirming that even if everyone is against them, Heaven is on their side: "*Que veux-tu, ma chérie, c'est l'éternelle ligue contre l'enfance. Nous avons contre nous famille, domestique, concierge, propriétaire, État, gens du monde et commis voyageurs jusqu'aux sacristains, tous, hors Dieu. C'est donc nous qui avons la vérité.*"<sup>568</sup> Fertility reflects a person's obedience to the divine Law; it is the triumph of morality against debauchery. According to Bayard, the egocentric *esprit du temps* has perverted human conscience. In the same context the author asserted that "*la vraie solution chrétienne de la famille il faut aller la chercher ailleurs dans le département du Nord, du Pas-de-Calais au sein de la grande industrie aussi bien que dans les plaines monotones des Flandres.*" There the rich and the poor procreated obeying the same moral law.<sup>569</sup> The regions brought up as an example by Bayard, were inhabited by a population largely formed by practicing Catholics given to producing large families, as Bonnie Smith has discussed in her study on the *bourgeoises du Nord*.<sup>570</sup> Actually, Smith pointed out that the women of the Nord tended to see their reproductivity – especially due to the dangers and difficulties repeated pregnancies involved- as a redemptive act.<sup>571</sup> On occasion Catholic commentary on depopulation became hyperbolic in its rhetoric. For example, in 1901, the pious author D. M. Couturier claimed the voluntary sterility of the French would lead to the tragic death of the

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<sup>566</sup> Georges Bonjean, *Enfants révoltés et parents coupables: Étude sur la désorganisation de la famille et ses conséquences sociales* (Paris 1895), p.407.

<sup>567</sup> Bayard, *La Peur*, p.7.

<sup>568</sup> Bayard, *La Peur*, p.8,9.

<sup>569</sup> Bayard, *La Peur*, p.23.

<sup>570</sup> Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, p.62.

<sup>571</sup> Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, p.107.

nation since it formed its premeditated suicide. He described his compatriots' attitude as egoism substituting divine will.<sup>572</sup> Finally in Anne Cova's book we read that Emile Cheysson, member of the *Alliance Nationale pour l'Accroissement de la Population Française* believed that only the restoration of Christian values would solve the depopulation problem: Catholics saw faith as the most efficient remedy to the decreasing number of births.<sup>573</sup>

The atheist Émile Zola's last work (1898-1901) formed a cycle comprised of four novels he called "*Les Quatres évangiles*". These "gospels", which were titled *Fécondité*, *Travail*, *Vérité* and *Justice*, were conceived as a republican "Holy Scripture". The author died before writing the last one. An alternative title for his *Fécondité* of 1898 could be the biblical commandment "*be fruitful and multiply*". In the novel, through the mouth of doctor Boutan, Zola argued that the reasons for the depopulation problem lay in human selfishness, which violates the natural law. Like the author, his hero is an *apôtre convaincu des familles nombreuses*: a militant for the natality cause.<sup>574</sup> Boutan, as man of medicine and representative of modern science, voices his strong opposition to contraception. The doctor is extremely judgmental towards those who avoid having more than one child in order to preserve their property from being fragmented: "*Vous avez un enfant*", he says to the industrialist Beauchêne, "*vous êtes un mauvais patriote.*"<sup>575</sup> The aim of sexuality is procreation: when one tries to cheat nature he should expect that it will revenge him. Voluntary sterility is a perverted mentality out of which nothing good can come; the only son of Bauchêne is a sickly and miserable boy. The views of Boutan were also expressed in 1849 by Alexandre Debay, who castigated the Malthusianism of the upper classes.<sup>576</sup> In the *Fécondité*, the *famille nombreuse* and therefore *famille modèle* and *trionphante* is that of Matthieu and Marianne, a poor but fertile couple. Zola did not bother to conceal his propaganda; the young mother is a symbol. Named after the female incarnation of the Republic, she is rendered optimistic, dutiful and very fertile; through her many offspring she has conquered immortality. Like Marianne who is predestined to be happy, the new political system will naturally triumph. The power of the nation lay in large numbers. "*Grâce à la famille nombreuse, à la poussée fatale du nombre, ils avaient fini par tout envahir, par tout posséder. La fécondité était la souveraine, l'invincible conquérante. Et ils étaient la main*

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<sup>572</sup> Couturier, *La Dépopulation de la France, craintes et espérances* (Paris 1901), p.x.

<sup>573</sup> Cova, '*Au service de l'église*', p.35.

<sup>574</sup> Émile Zola, *Fécondité* (Paris 1899), p.14.

<sup>575</sup> Zola, *Fécondité*, p.15.

<sup>576</sup> Debay, *Philosophie*, p.71.

*dans la main devant leur œuvre tels que des admirables héros, glorieux d'avoir été bons et forts, d'avoir beaucoup enfanté, beaucoup créé, donné au monde beaucoup de joie, de santé, d'espoir.*"<sup>577</sup> The rhetoric of Zola is the same as that of Jacques Bertillon. Only two years earlier, in 1897, the prolific demographer underlined the power of large numbers dismissing other views as hypocritical: "*Soit disent quelques optimistes entêtés: 'mais la qualité des hommes vaut mieux que la quantité. Les Français sont de moins en moins nombreux mais ils valent plus que les autres.'* Quelle pretention exorbitante et insoutenable!"<sup>578</sup>

France had entered the period of the Ralliement several years before Zola's novel and Bertillon's study were published. The Church and the secular state were trying to reconcile and cure the wounds that ideological division had caused to the nation, particularly during the 1880s. Although the governments of the next decade did not demonstrate such aggressively anticlerical sentiments as those of the 1880s, renascent Catholicism had never ceased to worry them. Like its opponents, the Republic knew that its survival depended on its ability to prevail in this conflict of ideas. They knew that devout citizens had many children to whom they transmitted the faith. It could be argued that the two authors' advocacy of large families formed a response to the Church's long-standing commitment to them. Catholics had more children than anybody else, including Protestants.<sup>579</sup> Republicans were urged to outnumber devout, fertile couples.

### **3. Family and Propaganda: Decoration of the *Mairies*.**

The great decorative compositions which cover the walls of the *mairies* in Paris and other French cities, convey the ideological convictions and promulgate the civic and moral virtues of the Third Republic.<sup>580</sup> These public works of art should be considered as part of the new regime's struggle to teach the people their duties towards the nation, implant in their conscience sound, secular principles and convince them that they should adhere to them. The paintings' subjects were supposed to illustrate the teachings of *an'évangile laïque*; they were

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<sup>577</sup>Zola, *Fécondité*, p.725.

<sup>578</sup>Bertillon, *Le Problème*, p.7.

<sup>579</sup>Cova, '*Au service de l'église*', p. 27.

<sup>580</sup>*Le Triomphe des mairies: grands décors républicains à Paris 1870-1914* Thérèse Burolet, Daniel Imbert, Frank Folliot *et al*, Paris Musée du Petit-Palais 8 November 1986-18 January 1987, p.35.



the artistic manifestations of the republican catechism whose precepts ventured to replace the Catholic one. The State claimed the role of the instructor and moraliser which – until recently - belonged to the Church. In order to appeal to populations attached to the Catholic faith, republicans did not invent a doctrine but updated and secularised that of their ideological opponents. They promulgated fraternity and solidarity among the people and proclaimed that every citizen had sacred responsibilities: the country's defence, hard work, marriage, procreation, as well as active participation to politics by his vote. The Republic did not wish to be identified only with a political regime, but with the nation itself; the figure of Marianne encompassed France and the Republic. The iconography of the *mairies* was adapted to this ambition and often took the tone of a sermon; respect to the elders and diligence, maternity, conjugal love, patriotism and family life were the main themes.<sup>581</sup>

The State, through images of family life, was particularly eager to teach citizens the importance of continuity and unity; the Republic's survival depended upon these two values. As mentioned previously, the fact that family was the school of public virtue had been emphasised by republicans since at least the 1850s. In 1855 Jules Simon wrote the following lines: "*Il faut s'appliquer à entretenir et à fortifier tous les sentiments de la famille si l'on veut faire régner dans le monde la justice, la paix et la concorde. Agir au dehors en bon citoyen et n'être au-dedans ni père, ni époux, ni fils c'est jouer la comédie de la vertu. Les vertus civiques si elles n'ont pas leur origine et leur consécration dans les vertus privées ne sont que des vertus de théâtre.*"<sup>582</sup> The Republic had a collective ideal: fraternity, which was first developed within the family in order to be extended to the nation and to the whole humanity.

The sources of artists' inspiration and their style changed as republican ideology evolved. During the 1870s artists trained at the *École des Beaux-Arts* found it natural to convey republican values under the form of allegory. Established painters such as Gustave Boulanger borrowed the artistic forms of classical antiquity whose cultural codes were familiar to the well-educated bourgeoisie. The aesthetically conservative *Beaux-Arts* administration during the 1870s, under Charles Blanc and Philippe de Chennevières, favoured classicism and regarded it as the most appropriate, even evident idiom for public art, which communicated great ideals to the citizens. As the Third Republic was making its first steps,

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<sup>581</sup> *Le Triomphe des mairies*, p.36, 37.

<sup>582</sup> Simon, *Le Devoir*, p.173.

the reference to antiquity was thought indispensable for the regime's attempt to underline its affiliation with the Roman Republic and the civilisation that modern French people inherited from their Gallo-Roman ancestors. In 1877 Boulanger decorated the *mairie* of the 13<sup>ème</sup> *arrondissement* with murals under the Latin titles *Matrimonium*, *Patria*, *Paternitas*, *Uxor esto* and *Vir esto* (Fig.75) The artist who received the commission to represent the civic virtues under the ultra-conservative government of McMahon, treated his themes in a diligently academic style; the idealised figures are deliberately rendered in order to resemble those which were sculpted on the friezes of ancient temples. The scenes are situated in a fictive Gallo-Roman city, the foundation of contemporary France.<sup>583</sup> These paintings epitomise the continuity of the notions contained in the titles.

When Opportunist republicans came to power after 1879, the municipal authorities stressed the egalitarian necessity for the mural paintings to be understood by members of the lower social strata. Artists should therefore use a language which would not be burdened with references to the antiquity; they were invited to find their inspiration in modern, everyday life, rendering their message legible to a vast public and not only to the educated elite.<sup>584</sup> This conviction was first revealed in the debate concerning the decoration of the *Hôtel de Ville*, initially destined to be covered with allegorical representations. Paul Strauss, who held public office from 1883 until 1940, expressed his opposition, believing that painting should always convey the spirit of its time. Edouard Vaillant, who served in the Conseil municipal from 1884 until 1893, shared Strauss's opinions:

*“Nous ne voulons pas que l'Hôtel de Ville soit livré à l'expression d'un art idéaliste...qu'il soit couvert d'allégories, c'est-à-dire de sujets qui ne correspondent plus à l'idée contemporaine de l'art. La décoration de l'hôtel de Ville n'aura de valeur artistique et historique qu'à condition d'être avant tout le tableau réel et vrai de la vie politique économique et sociale du peuple actuel de Paris dans le milieu où il s'agite et travaille. Au degré de civilisation où nous sommes parvenus toute œuvre d'art doit être l'expression directe de la nature dégagée de tous voiles mystiques et allégoriques, défroque usée du passé.”*<sup>585</sup>

Maurice Chabas's murals for the *Salle de Mariages* of the *mairie du 14<sup>ème</sup>* seem to be a response to this call from radical republicans who rejected the elitism of allegorical painting. These decorations titled *Le Repas de noces* (Fig.76) and *La Famille* (Fig.77) were commissioned in 1889 and completed in 1891. They comprise the pragmatic rendering of

<sup>583</sup>*Le Triomphe des Mairies*, p.37.

<sup>584</sup>*Le Triomphe des Mairies*, p.60.

<sup>585</sup>*Le Triomphe des Mairies*, p. 67,68.

ordinary activities of contemporary people and are stripped of any references to the past. The messages that these images communicate do not have to be decoded. Everything is clear and legible; Chabas deliberately addressed citizens who did not have the privilege of higher education. He made sure that the uncultured, working-class individuals who visited the *mairie* would identify themselves with the models and their way of life. Thus, in *La Famille* he represented the serene moments of Sunday leisure experienced by a working-class family in the Parisian suburbs. The people who are having a picnic are randomly scattered in the sun-drenched landscape; the father is entertaining his child by lifting it in the air, the mother is breastfeeding her baby, the grandmother is knitting, a young woman is watching the family scene while, on a white tablecloth on the grass we see what is left of the meal these people have shared. The work gives the impression of a snapshot, which bestows the image with a spontaneous, unpretentious quality. Thus, the painter Albert Besnard commented favourably on the work of his younger colleague: “*Ce jeune homme a choisi pour thème de ses compositions la vie de nos faubourgs. Il a fait la lumière décorative. Il a pris tous les détails et les incidents de notre vie de citadins et les a fait concourir à l’intérêt décoratif de ses sujets dans une majesté banale, sans philosophie larmoyante et en gardant à ses compositions un intérêt qui attirera le regard et fera penser peut-être que le soleil et la lumière qui font pousser les plantes et font les lointains si délicieusement brumeux sont une de plus belles récompenses de travailleurs.*”<sup>586</sup>

If, for those who voiced the republican ideology, the mural decoration of the *mairies* rendered Chabas an original modernist, conservatives found the triviality of his wall-paintings shockingly vulgar. Shortly after this public commission, the young artist converted to the ideas of the author and occultist Joseph Péladan, the man who founded the Salons *Rose + Croix* in order to promote a new form of idealism and express his opposition to realist tendencies. Chabas would participate in these Salons from 1892 to 1897 and establish himself as a symbolist. Journalists like Alphonse Germain thought that the change of style was an attempt of Chabas to expiate his past: “*abandonnant la peinture photographique des plus vulgaires de ses contemporains (sans doute pour se faire pardonner certaine décoration de Mairie).*” Concerning the painting *La Famille* of the *Mairie du 14<sup>ème</sup>*, Péladan, who was not

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<sup>586</sup>*Le Triomphe des Mairies*, p.211.

yet acquainted with Chabas, observed that the artist gave this title to the “*personnages d’Assommoir endimanchés et vautrés sur l’herbe rare de fortifs.*”<sup>587</sup>

Maurice Chabas’s case is evocative of how style was adapted in order to serve an ideology. In 1907, the artist spoke about his public work: “*Pour les peintures murales j’ai obéi à la logique immédiate des circonstances et des milieux en essayant qu’elles participent à la décoration architecturale de la salle, en employant le nu ou la draperie, ne datant pas du moins autant que j’ai eu la liberté de la faire. Mais il n’y a rien d’absolu à ce sujet, convaincu que je suis que nous pouvons styliser les scènes modernes, et les présenter sans crainte de ridicule pour l’avenir, dans de belles harmonies colorées.*” Chabas stressed the importance of colour which, for him, representing a healthy and robust art, communicated the optimism of the young Republic.<sup>588</sup>

After the aggressive anticlericalism of the 1880s, the republican regime decided to adopt a politics of reconciliation between the liberal secularists and the conservative Catholics. More specifically, in 1895 republicans started reconsidering the heritage of the French Revolution in the light of the theory of Solidarism, which was systematised by the prime minister, philosopher and sociologist Léon Bourgeois. For him, each member of society is indebted to all others; every human being has a moral obligation towards his ancestors, his contemporaries and his descendants:

*“Dans la société de fait où le place sa qualité d’homme, chacun de nous avons-nous dit, est nécessairement le débiteur de tous. C’est la charge de la liberté.... La connaissance des lois de la solidarité des êtres vivants (...) a établi que, pour déterminer complètement sa situation naturelle et morale, il était indispensable de tenir compte du lien qui le rattache à ses ancêtres et à ses descendants. L’homme ne devient pas seulement, au cours de sa vie, le débiteur de ses contemporains; dès le jour même de sa naissance il est un obligé. L’homme naît débiteur de l’association humaine (...) Tout homme au lendemain de sa naissance en entrant en possession de cet état d’humanité meilleur que lui ont préparé ses ancêtres, contracte à moins de faillir à la loi d’évolution qui est la loi même de sa vie personnelle et de la vie de son espèce, l’obligation de concourir, par son propre effort, non seulement au maintien de la civilisation dont il va prendre sa part, mais encore au développement ultérieur de cette civilisation.”*<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> Myriam de Palma, *Maurice Chabas, peintre et messenger spirituel (1862-1847)* (Paris 2009), p.17, 29, 30, 105.

<sup>588</sup> Palma, *Maurice Chabas*, p.104

<sup>589</sup> Léon Bourgeois, *Solidarité*, (Paris 1897 (1896)), p.115, 116, 128, 129.

According to Bourgeois, only if individuals acknowledged this debt and assumed their responsibilities could society evolve. They belonged to the same body; they were the cells of the same organism and their well-being depended on their co-operation. Solidarism, which would appease ideological turbulence and restore peace, was addressed both to the representatives of the right and the left wing. Actually Bourgeois rejected socialism and envisaged a Republic which would reconcile liberal individualism and social collectivism. His theories had a great impact on the thought of his contemporaries.

During the same period the art critic and *inspecteur des Beaux-Arts* Roger Marx developed certain ideas concerning the purposes that public art should serve. This influential and broadly read art-critic who worked for the republican journal *Le Voltaire*, warmly advocated the equality among all forms of visual arts and saluted the progress that had occurred in the decorative arts within which, according to him, mural painting belonged.<sup>590</sup> Marx believed that works destined to embellish public buildings were similar to posters, not only in their style but also in their didactic function. Like posters, public art had the power to communicate ideas to a broad public.<sup>591</sup> His writings found their echo in the work of a number of artists, one of the most important of whom was his fellow *Nancéen* Victor Prouvé.<sup>592</sup>

Victor Prouvé was an artistic figure whose work managed to communicate ideals that flourished during the *Ralliement*. The artist participated in various political initiatives. In the mid-1890s he displayed great interest in the radical ideas of Bourgeois. The same years, the painter got acquainted with an engineer and former member of the Commune named Charles Keller. This man, who had translated Marx's *Das Kapital* and published poems under the pseudonym of Jacques Turbin, was a free-thinker who fought for the workers' cause and was a patron of the *Maison du peuple de Nancy*, the over-door of which was sculpted by Prouvé. The artist was inspired by Keller's vision of a society free from hatred, moral deprivation and injustice; he shared his dream of a political system which would abolish the exploitation of lower classes from the rich. The painter ventured to communicate these ideas through his work.<sup>593</sup> In the *Journal des arts* Auguste Daligny observed that "*Victor Prouvé est l'un des*

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<sup>590</sup> Roger Marx, 'Salons de 1897, II: La peinture au Salon du Champs de Mars', *Le Voltaire*, 24 avril 1897, p.2.

<sup>591</sup> Roger Marx, 'L'Affiche et les industries d'art', *Le Voltaire*, 29 novembre 1897, p.1.

<sup>592</sup> Victor Prouvé. *Peinture et art nouveau: L'école de Nancy*, Exhibition Catalogue, Jean-Paul Midant, Béatrice Salmon François Loyers *et al.*, Nancy, Musée des Beaux Arts 24 April - 26 July 1999, p.71.

<sup>593</sup> Victor Prouvé (1858-1943), *Les années de l'Ecole de Nancy*, Exhibition Catalogue, Stoullig Claire, Thomas Valérie, Moinet Eric *et al.*, Nancy, Musée des Beaux Arts, Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy, Musée Lorrain 17 May-21 September 2008, p.43.

*rare maîtres originaires de Lorraine tout en signalant une évolution de la peinture décorative avec des thèmes mythologiques et religieux qui tendaient vers des scènes empruntées à la réalité contemporaine ou nées de l'imagination de l'artiste.*"<sup>594</sup>

In 1896 Victor Prouvé took over the decoration of the recently built *mairie* d'Issy-les-Moulineaux. This work is considered as one of his career's highlights. A letter addressed to the artist on behalf of the *Préfecture de la Seine* said that he would not receive his 12,000 francs until the *Commission Administrative* confirmed that his project was satisfactory. The painting had to appeal to the people; therefore the artist's final cartoon was exhibited in the *Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts* in 1897. In a review, the critic Léo Claretie observed how successfully Prouvé married symbolism and realism, achieving the desired result.<sup>595</sup> His painting, titled *La Vie* (Fig.78) comprises a modern allegory which was deliberately deprived of the elitist tone of Boulanger without being less didactic. It was meant to be read as a hymn to conjugal love and family unity, qualities that constituted the alpha and the omega of human life rendering it happy and meaningful. The scene of the betrothal of two young, robust persons opens the composition, which closes with the same pair of individuals who are rejoicing in their role as parents of a little girl. In the middle of the painting a house is being built; the act comprises primarily a symbol of working class labour exalted by the artist. Furthermore, the building under construction is a sign of national hope; it conveys the idea of a new *foyer* where the couple shall live as husband and wife and procreate. The notions of fertility and dutiful maternity are encompassed in the figure of the young woman who breastfeeds her child while picking fruits from a tree. Prouvé shares the optimism, or the determination, of the Republic's representatives and is inspired by their rhetoric. The older people conversing with adolescents illustrate the values of respect for elders and the ideal of solidarity and continuity among different generations. Each member of society is indebted to all others, said Bourgeois; the young owe respect and the old are expected to offer experience and advice. *La Vie* is a vision of harmony and social justice; in the world of Victor Prouvé, the Republic is triumphant and the members of the working class have conquered their rights. Finally the focus on the everyday life of workers was a conscientious choice; Issy-les-Moulineaux was a suburb populated by the lower *couches sociales* and urbanised for their

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<sup>594</sup>Victor Prouvé. *Peinture et art nouveau*, p.74.

<sup>595</sup>Victor Prouvé. *Peinture et art nouveau*, p.74.

benefit by the government. Even the construction of the *mairie* formed part of this programme.<sup>596</sup>

In his large decorative painting *Joie de vivre* (Fig.79) the family is represented as a peaceful site which shelters human bliss. Prouvé situated them in an Arcadian landscape and the vivid colours he used bestowed his image with a festive atmosphere. All the sitters manifest an outpouring of joy, giving the impression that no adversity can shadow this celestial mood. In the left-hand corner of the canvas a father is giving his smiling daughter a kiss and extends his arm to his wife; she lies on the ground playing with her other child. Next to them two elderly people sit side by side; their granddaughter is walking towards her mother. The model for this latter was the beautiful young wife of Prouvé who gave her good republican husband seven children. Again the message of the artist is that of solidarity which has to exist among three different generations; here, the toddler's presence comprises the connecting bond. Four adolescent girls are dancing on the right side as symbols of youth. The ensemble is moving and whirling to enhance the impression of unimpeded joy. The painter rendered homage to fertility, an idea that is also suggested in the blooming nature. As the scene in the background implies, the sitters' bliss is also founded on hard work; a group of harvesters are leaving the fields as the day is coming to its end. Men's greatest achievements lay in marriage and procreation, their happiness springs from the knowledge that their continuity is secured. Prouvé illustrates the social vision of a regime, whose supporters proclaimed the coming of a new era. Prouvé's rhetoric is affiliated with that of Émile Zola in his novel *Fécondité*. Both men's works announce the coming of a reign of freedom and fraternity; their messages comprise the epitome of the republican thought as this latter was crystallised in the 1890s. In the case of Prouvé the public is confronted with a secular allegory, which answers fundamental metaphysical questions; one comes to earth in order to love, get married and procreate. Furthermore, citizens must offer their capacities to the service of their family and their community, contributing to the moral and social progress of the nation. The artist articulated the solidarist ideal; social progress and happiness are the fruits of the co-operation of responsible individuals, who labour for the common good in a fraternal ambience.

The changes which occurred in republican policies during the course of thirty years, played an important role in the evolution of mural paintings, created to decorate the Parisian

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<sup>596</sup>Victor Prouvé. *Peinture et art nouveau*, p.74.

*Mairies*. The subjects chosen by the artists and the style these latter adopted in order to serve the state propaganda, conformed to the ideology and the principles successive governments sought to promote among the French people. Thus, the conservatism of McMahon's Moral Order is conveyed through the elitist classicism of Boulanger's images, while the paternalistic republicanism of the 1880s found its expression in the down-to-earth realism of Chabas's everyday-life scenes. The marriage of allegory and realism we may observe in Prouvé's decorative paintings, corresponds to the official attempts to rally opposing ideological and political tendencies within society during the 1890s, a decade when Solidarism gained popularity.

#### **4. Among the Humble: the Peasant Family as a Model.**

During the 1850s the peasant became the symbol of work and order. In the painting of rural subjects by artists like Jean-François Millet (1814-1875), the idealisation of peasant life and labour could be interpreted as a reaction to France's industrialisation, which had resulted in an increasing rupture in men's relationship with nature. Therefore, Millet's predilection for such themes should not be attributed only to his personal fascination for the rural world; he aspired to communicate a message to the Second Empire Salon audience. With his quasi-universalised representations, he brought bourgeois men and factory workers who were considered corrupted by the urban way of life, before the exalted, pure and heroic peasant.<sup>597</sup> The rendering of rural subjects started to evolve after the establishment of the Third Republic, when Adolphe Thiers tried to establish a new social order. In the period covered by the thesis, images of peasant life gradually acquired a modern quality and a 'French', national character. The artists' purpose was not anymore to denounce the European phenomenon of industrialisation by praising those who cultivated the earth to gain their living. They focused on particular details of their models' family life in an attempt to articulate republican, patriotic ideals for the moral benefit of the middle and lower-class Salon viewers. Especially after the Commune, the figure of the peasant who is contented with his modest means was inculcated in order to be juxtaposed to that of the city worker, who was considered rebellious and tainted

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<sup>597</sup>Juneja Monica, *Peindre le paysan: L'image rurale dans la peinture française de Millet à Van Gogh* (Paris 1998), p.130.



with socialist ideas. Through their works, Third Republic painters like Jean-Charles Cazin and Léon Lhermitte adopted a didactic tone; their conscientious choice met the approval of Salon critics who worked for the bourgeois press. Representations of family themes where peasants are the protagonists breathe an air of peace and stability. They convey the portrayed persons' attachment to fundamental values such as hard work and focus on family duties, something which corresponded to the current social exigencies. It should be remembered that, in 1891, peasants represented the 61% of the national population.<sup>598</sup> Furthermore, it was their vote that consolidated the political foundations of the young Republic between 1871 and 1877. Peter McPhee posited that after 1877 the peasant was ever more seen as the personification of republican virtues.<sup>599</sup> Finally, there was a wrong impression that peasants were more fertile than the people who lived in the city; this erroneous idea was expanded in 1899 in Émile Zola's *Fécondité*, where the two protagonists abandon the urban centre in order to go to the country and discover the familial virtues of rural life.<sup>600</sup> The virtuous peasant, suggested Monica Juneja in her study, became a basis on which the morality of French people should be reestablished.<sup>601</sup> This imagery, which conveyed a national vision, formed a part of the official art of the Third Republic.<sup>602</sup>

*La Journée faite* (Fig.80) exhibited by Jean-Charles Cazin at the Salon of 1888, is a characteristic example of the kind of painting that was admired by the art critics and the political regime. A man who has just finished his work in the fields is standing next to his wife, who is breastfeeding a baby. He lifts the shawl which covers the woman's head and back revealing the nursing scene. A large painting, purchased directly from the Salon by the state for the Musée de Luxembourg, the national collection of recent art, *La Journée faite* set a gentle but clear example of positive paternity in a rural setting. Cazin's male model displays tenderness and is prompt to participate in family life, putting the stereotype of the distant nineteenth-century father into question.

Naturalists like Cazin were considered inheritors of the realist tradition established by Millet, Breton and others. Léonce Bénédite, a well-known art critic and, as a museum curator, a republican civil servant, went even further saying that: "*L'évolution naturaliste du roman*

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<sup>598</sup> Mayeur, *Les Débuts*, p.73.

<sup>599</sup> McPhee, *A Social History*, p.252.

<sup>600</sup> Tomlinson, 'The disappearance', p.413.

<sup>601</sup> Juneja, *Peindre le paysan*, p.50.

<sup>602</sup> Le Pelley-Fonteny, *Léon-Auguste Lhermitte*, p.8.

*français qui, prenant ses tableaux dans les actes de la vie populaire, ouvrait à l'art la grande âme anonyme de la foule, ses aspirations et ses espoirs, l'influence profonde chez nous du roman russe qui a exalté la misère, la souffrance, l'abaissement, avec un accent évangélique tout nouveau, placèrent au premier plan de la sollicitude des écrivains les humbles, les souffrants, les déshérités.*"<sup>603</sup> Third Republic painters' assiduous and domesticated peasants work but do not demand, nor do they revolt; that is what the republican bourgeoisie asked for and that is possibly why they were regarded as vessels of virtue.<sup>604</sup> Finally, the increasing interest in the rural population was an aspect of the republican attitude which wanted to integrate the "savage" peasantry into the modern, civilised society.<sup>605</sup>

Art critics saw considerable value in every aspect of *La Journée faite* which praises the harmony of family life; they expressed their respect and reassurance before the spectacle of poverty lived in dignity. They appreciated the ideal of manual labour made apparent in the man's robust figure, the modest and humble character of the sitters, the stillness of their resting moment, the solidarity developed between husband and wife and the feeling that everything stops before the communion of these three beings. Cazin's landscape is plunged into the silence of the dusk while its morphological monotony makes the viewer focus on the family theme; the idea of accomplishment which results from honest work is found in the title of this painting. In 1902, Charles Florisoone, described *La Journée faite* with the following words: "*Sur ces humbles gens, sur cette plaine monotone, sous ce ciel brouillé à peine éclairé, règne quelque chose qui n'est pas dit expressément, qui s'y répand cependant et le pénètre, la paix du soir et celle de la conscience; le calme qui suit l'effort, le soupir du repos après la longue tâche, la tendresse un peu triste de ceux qui s'aiment dans le travail et la pauvreté.*"<sup>606</sup>

The art critic André Michel, in 1888, also praised the tenderness and intimacy that imbue the image. He confirmed the idea of greatness manifested in the peasants' figures, stances and gestures. His colleague Henri Cochin, a pious Catholic, seems to share a similar opinion about this work: "*Ce sont les joies et l'auguste grandeur des humbles, leur repos, leurs amours.*"<sup>607</sup> The realistic rendering is married to the quasi-symbolist intentions of the painting's author who reached an idealistic result. "*Les figures évoquées par l'artiste sont*

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<sup>603</sup>Léonce Bénédite, 'Jean Charles Cazin', *Art et décoration* vol.2, July-December 1897, p.166.

<sup>604</sup>Juneja, *Peindre le paysan*, p.53

<sup>605</sup> Juneja, *Peindre le paysan*, p.51.

<sup>606</sup> Charles Florisoone, *Cazin, peintre de la légende et du symbole*, Paris 1902, p 13

<sup>607</sup> Henri Cochin, 'Réflexions sur le Salon de 1888', *Les Lettres et les arts* III, 1 July 1888, p.105.

*bien ce qu'elles doivent être – leurs gestes, simples et lents, rares et doux concours à l'harmonie totale. Elles sont à la fois très réelles et symboliques, et dans l'extrême simplicité elles atteignent à la grandeur.*”<sup>608</sup> The terms *humble* and *simple* occur in the texts of several art critics; these two qualities encompass the moral essence of the image. It has been argued before that Cazin's figures are vehicles which transmit ideas; they symbolise peasantry, family life, docility and abandonment to the fate of gaining their life with difficulty. The scene was read as Biblical because of the religious sentiment which solemnly emerges both from the composition and the atmosphere of the work. Thus, for Florisoone the woman resembles to the Virgin Mary.<sup>609</sup> The republican Léonce Bénédite, remarked that “*Cazin a voulu rajeunir les Saintes Écritures en plaçant leurs sujets en plein dans la vie moderne.*”<sup>610</sup> Indeed, with the gesture of unveiling the nursing infant, the peasant discloses an icon of maternity; the ensemble seems to have a distant affiliation with the “Flight into Egypt.” Cazin was a committed republican whose Holy Family allusion is not accidental. Like the Third Republic, this rural genre scene appropriated values promulgated by the Church for centuries, in order to touch both the pious and the non-believers. Cazin succeeded in his purpose: Henri Cochin and Léonce Bénédite, who represented two different ideological camps, were both enchanted by this work. In *La Journée faite* the supernatural becomes human and approachable. The ancient theme of Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child is transformed in order to serve modern needs; its sacred tone acquires a different quality. The moral perfection of the *Sainte Famille*, which was always considered a vehicle of divine grace, seems as if it can be conquered by ordinary people. Should the Holy Family allusion be related to the sitters' beliefs? It is not impossible that the painter wanted the viewers to make this connection. Besides, the Pas de Calais, the area where Cazin came from and the landscape of which is suggested in his work, was quite strongly Catholic. Nevertheless, one should not take the peasant piety for granted, since there were areas where rural population was strongly anticlerical and had abandoned religious practice; in Limousin, Charentes and Saône-et-Loire for instance, the majority of peasants were radical republicans hostile to Catholicism.<sup>611</sup>

Cazin's peasants form examples of moral integrity which could satisfy both a secular minded and a pious person. Despite their different approaches, republicans and Catholics

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<sup>608</sup> Michel, ‘Le Salon de 1888’, p.449.

<sup>609</sup> Florisoone, *Cazin*, 1902, p.13.

<sup>610</sup> Bénédite, ‘Jean Charles Cazin’, p.168.

<sup>611</sup> Mayeur, *Les Débuts*, 1973, p.79.

cherished orderly family life and shared fears such as the lack of social discipline and the disdain of moral order, which were thought to be common among urban working-class families. It is characteristic that poor people in the cities would often live in free unions until they had children.<sup>612</sup> Those who worried about the disorganisation of the family and its dreadful consequences were often described by moralists with the term 'braves gens'. They did not necessarily have strong religious convictions; they could be free thinkers. However, they almost invariably belonged to the bourgeoisie.

The social nightmare which haunted middle class men, is illustrated in the painting *L'Homme ivre* exhibited in the Salon of 1881 by the caricaturist André Gill (Fig.81). This man, who spent his childhood in a congregational school for boys, used his talent to defend the Third Republic and attack the Jesuits and the Orléanistes – pretenders to the throne. *L'Homme ivre*, inspired by the theatrical adaptation of *L'Assommoir* (1877), represents a family destroyed because of the father's addiction to alcohol.<sup>613</sup> The scene is particularly violent and could be juxtaposed to the peaceful one depicted in Cazin's *La Journée faite*. Coupeau, the husband of Gervaise with whom she had two children, has just returned home drunk. The man, a portrait of the actor Gil-Naza from the stage version of Zola's novel, has just lost his balance and fallen on the floor. By his facial expression we may state that he is delirious and aggressive. The drunkard's terrified wife cowers by the wall in order to keep a distance from him and protect her children from his threatening and repulsive presence. Her little daughter Nana grasps her skirt in a childish gesture, which manifests her fear. The dereliction of duty shown by this city worker is contrasted to the dutiful paternity of Cazin's peasant. The poverty of the room houses appropriately this sad episode of domestic life. *L'Homme ivre* seems to have attracted no criticism in the leading art journals, possibly because the republican Gill was known as a caricaturist and his work was simply seen as illustrative, or due to the fact that Zola's novel was widely read by the middle classes; the French Salon public knew the story. The message of the painting is that of the book and it is clear; alcoholism, misery and indifference towards one's conjugal and parental responsibility ravage the working population. In the pages of *L'Assommoir* and the terrible scene rendered by

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<sup>612</sup>McPhee, *A Social History*, p195.

<sup>613</sup>*André Gill*, Exhibition Catalogue, Frappat Jean *et al.*, Paris, Musée de Montmartre, 22 septembre - 12 décembre 1993, p.5.

Gill, bourgeois men could affirm their moral superiority to the *classes inférieures*, whose world was degrading.

In 1895, Georges Bonjean, a devout Catholic philanthropist, conveyed his profound anxiety concerning the condition illustrated by the atheist Zola and the anticlerical Gill. Despite their attempt to chastise the poor who neglected their offspring, pious French moralists never got tired of repeating that family relations could grow stronger among people who came from the lower social strata. Thus, Bonjean who considered the ill-discipline of the urban working class as the main generator of social disarray, affirmed that in urban areas many poor couples are chaste, cherish their children and stay united in the face of adversities. Among the needy, he alleged, “*les liens du sang sont plus révévés, la morale plus écoutée et le tendre nom du père plus doux à prononcer. Que ce nom y porte dans l’âme des enfants l’idée du respect jointe à celle de la reconnaissance, surtout lorsqu’ils mangent un pain qu’ils voient arrosé des sueurs de leur père et souvent de ses larmes.*”<sup>614</sup> Émile Bayard, who shared the religious faith of Bonjean, professed that in France the financially disadvantaged developed a tendency to trust to Divine Providence. Their “blessed” ignorance, he thought, leads them to procreate without being intimidated by the difficulties their decision might cause.<sup>615</sup> In his turn Alexandre Dumas  *fils*, an anticlerical republican, affirmed that: “*La famille est le privilège des malheureux. Il suffit de visiter les cimetières aux jours des grandes fêtes pour se convaincre que la famille chez les pauvres gens se continue plus longtemps dans la mort.*”<sup>616</sup> The poor realise that the only thing left after a man ceases to exist are his offspring; their wealth are their children.

An ideal family from the urban working-class milieu was represented by Andre Gill; it should be seen as a deliberate contrast to his own *L’Homme ivre*, as well as counterpart of Cazin’s *La Journée faite*. The painting, titled *Le Nouveau-né* (Fig.82) was also exhibited in the Salon of 1881. It was inspired by the birth of the painter’s illegitimate son Louis-André-Jacques, an infant which only survived for six months.<sup>617</sup> Gill himself was an orphan whose noble father refused to recognise him. He was received by his paternal grandfather and

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<sup>614</sup>Bonjean, *Enfants révoltés*, p.293.

<sup>615</sup> Bayard, *La Peur*, p.14.

<sup>616</sup> Dumas, ‘La Famille moderne’, p.15.

<sup>617</sup> *André Gill*, p.32

brought up by his aunt; his childhood was deprived of the warmth of a nuclear family.<sup>618</sup> Here, he portrayed a robust city worker, seated on the childbed where his wife is lying and holding his baby in his arms. As with Gill's other painting art critics seem to have ignored the picture. The reasons are possibly the same; it is an ambitious work created by a caricaturist. However, this image inspired the poet and sonneteer Adrien Dézamy the following verses: "*C'est un intérieur d'ouvriers. La jeune mère est là, couchée dans son lit blanc. L'homme, un vrai travailleur au bras nu, au front mâle, entre et s'assied près d'elle, ému, joyeux, tremblant.*"<sup>619</sup> More than trembling from emotion, this man is rendered proud, happy and entirely absorbed by this first encounter with his offspring. His gaze is tenderly fixed on the baby; he is contemplating his future, feeling consoled and accomplished before the incarnation of his continuity. The viewers are confronted with a diligent worker – *vrai travailleur*, said Dézamy - and a responsible family man, who hastily left his post upon hearing the news of his child's birth; he is wearing his working clothes and the sleeves of his shirts are lifted over his elbows. The young, contented mother has placed her hand on the man's thigh; the newborn is the manifestation of their love and renders their conjugal bond indissoluble.<sup>620</sup> The atmosphere of the image is marked by a rigorous realism and an austere simplicity. The frank lyricism could find its counterpart in Zola's novels. The impression we gain from this ensemble is one of serenity, intimacy and domestic *chaleur*; qualities which reign in this humble interior. The contrast between the fragile baby and the man's muscled arms intensifies the idea of paternal affection and raises the emotional tone of the image. The white sheets, night-dress and head cover of the mother enhance the notion of cleanliness; the republican campaign concerning the importance of hygiene had started, although it would meet its peak in the 1890s.<sup>621</sup> Furthermore, Gill's cosy, proper interior, brings to mind the subject of working class housing that first appeared under the Second Republic and was later encouraged by Napoleon III. The project of constructing such dwellings was financed by industrialists, but only became common during the late nineteenth century. The state wanted to control the lower strata and their dangerous tendencies, which were discussed above: imprudence, alcoholism and rebellion. Living in a spacious apartment was essential for the

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<sup>618</sup> André Gill, p.4.

<sup>619</sup> D'Ingres à Cézanne *Le XIX siècle dans les collections du Musée de Petit Palais*, Thérèse Burollet, Isabelle Collet *et al.*, Bonn, Kunst und Ausstellungshalle des Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 27 May-28 September 1998, p.160.

<sup>620</sup> Although Gill had not married his mistress, I do not believe his intention was to represent an illegitimate couple; besides, here he focuses on paternity.

<sup>621</sup> Fabienne Chevallier, *Le Paris moderne, Histoire des politiques d'hygiène (1855-1898)*, (Paris 2010).

moral health, stability and solidarity of the working class families.<sup>622</sup> Actually, Jules Siegfried, republican factory owner in Le Havre, fervent Calvinist and militant of this low-cost housing project, said that the *cités ouvrières* were fortresses of order, political and social moderation; a way to fight misery and socialism.<sup>623</sup> The bourgeois - who wanted to keep an easy mind by transforming the workers into calm, contented citizens - benefited from the charity of the industrialists.

The idea of poverty experienced with dignity by honest people emerges from the painting *Le Nouveau-né*. Here, the lower classes become a vehicle which passes on a moral and comforting message to the upper classes. City workers were not necessarily a class *dangereuse*; they could be good, devoted parents. Finally, Gill's image could be associated with the ideas communicated later by Dumas (1888) and Bonjean (1895), but also with those of Zola in *La Fécondité* (1899) and Bayard (1907); for underprivileged people without access to material comforts, family was the only treasure they could cherish and their children were their most precious belongings.

## 5. The Affectionate Father: the Transformation of the Patriarch.

In the early nineteenth century, the French author Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle 1783-1842) affirmed that his father did not love him "*comme individu mais comme fils devant continuer sa famille.*"<sup>624</sup> Decades later, Paul Janet affirmed that "*l'homme aime tant vivre qu'il veut vivre deux fois, de là l'affection conjugale, et qu'il veut se survivre, de là l'affection paternelle.*"<sup>625</sup> A father loved his offspring as an image of his continuity, and, if his child was a son, as the person that would perpetuate his name. It was in the second half of the nineteenth century that the child's status as an individual changed. By that time, the need of adults to discover the secrets of youth had taken a greater urgency: infants and toddlers should be better served. Later, the republican, secular state promulgated *puériculture* and, through its educational and charitable institutions, it assumed a paternal role by becoming the guardian and guide of children who were orphan, illegitimate or came from impoverished and illiterate

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<sup>622</sup>Elwitt Sanford, *The Third Republic Defended; Bourgeois Reform in France 1880-1914* (London 1986), p.132.

<sup>623</sup>Sanford, *The Third Republic*, p.133-135.

<sup>624</sup>Ariès, Duby, Perrot, *Histoire de la vie privée*, p.134.

<sup>625</sup>Janet, *La Famille*, p.13.

backgrounds. When in 1889, after a very long debate the law on the *déchéance paternelle* was voted, a new concept of the family, which has been debated for some time, sprang into being. The legally protected child officially became the centre of the family life. In the Debats de Senat of 1883 we may read the following legislative proposal, which put the paternal behaviour under legal control: “*Le père et la mère sont déchus de plein droit à l’égard de tous leurs enfants de la puissance paternelle et tous les droits qui en découlent. 1. Si ils sont condamnés par application de l’article 334, §2 du code pénal. 2. Si ils sont condamnés deux fois, soit comme auteurs, soit comme coauteurs ou complices d’un crime commis par un ou plusieurs de leurs enfants.*”<sup>626</sup> Concerning this law, right-wing Catholics strongly disagreed with republicans, as the first found it unacceptable and the second judged it as necessary. “*Est-ce que vous excluez pour ivrognerie les citoyens des listes électorales? Si vous leur laissez les droits politiques, si vous leur laissez les droits civils, pouvez-vous leur enlever les droits naturels, ceux qui tiennent à leurs devoirs de famille, les droits les plus sacrés, ceux sur lesquels repose l’ordre social, la première société, la famille ? Je dis que c’est une impiété de les enlever et vous ne pouvez pas les en dépouiller*”, said the conservative Léon Clément in the Senat.<sup>627</sup> Finally, the idea of the “*enfant martyr*”, the child tortured or neglected by his parents, emerged when the law against physical abuse exercised on the child by the father was voted in 1898.<sup>628</sup> Right-wing politicians judged that by these laws the state displayed lack of confidence in the family spirit, acting as if the family could not protect itself. The danger of interventionism was underscored by Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882), a former atheist who had converted to Christianity, in an influential study he first published in 1871: “*Notre plus fatale erreur est de désorganiser par les empiétements de l’Etat, l’autorité du père de famille.*”<sup>629</sup> As will be discussed later, Catholics regarded paternal authority as part of the divine order, where the State could not interfere. Their position contradicted the republicans’ ideas and policies.

It is worthy pointing out that the shift in children’s social position was also perceived in the field of arts. In 1901, the journalist Robert de la Sizeranne wrote an article on a painting exhibition which had as its subject the child: “*Mais voici qu’un temps nouveau est venu pour eux. Loin d’être écartés de la vie des grandes personnes ils semblent en être devenus le centre*

<sup>626</sup>Véronique Antomarchi, *Politique et famille sous la Troisième République 1870-1914*, (Paris 2000), p.53.

<sup>627</sup>Antomarchi, *Politique*, p.51, 52.

<sup>628</sup>Ariès, Duby, Perrot, *Histoire de la vie privée*, p.119.

<sup>629</sup>Frédéric Le Play, *L’Organisation de la famille, selon le vrai modèle signalé par l’histoire de toutes les races et de tous les temps* (Tours 1884), p. XIX.



*et les Rois : Le 'Baby worship' a remplacé les cultes anciens. Bien des gens qui n'oseraient point faire pour eux-mêmes la dépense d'un portrait le Maître, appellent volontiers le Maître pour peindre leur enfant, qui peut-être deviendra illustre et, dans tous les cas, est gracieux. Ils ont raison les parents: l'enfant est l'espérance et il vaut mieux faire le portrait de l'espérance.*"<sup>630</sup> The republican model of the tender father was inextricably linked to the new, more privileged social position which was reserved for children in France particularly during the period under study. Furthermore, the emphasis put on paternity at that time is connected with manhood suffrage. In the Third Republic every French adult male had the right to vote; thus, a man would pass on the appropriate values to his sons as future voters.

Philip Nord argued that men as husbands or fathers played only a "walk-on role to the family drama even though it was for their sake that family life was reframed."<sup>631</sup> This claim partly corresponds to reality; family patterns between 1870 and 1900 were more complicated than that. Certainly, both Catholics and republicans expected from women to dedicate, even sacrifice, their social and moral existence to the upbringing of their children and the happiness of their spouse; their most important achievement was to accomplish their role as wives and mothers. Based on the moralists' discourse and the female condition in the nineteenth-century bourgeois society, feminist scholars asserted that there were two separate, distinguishable social spheres: the public one which was only accessible to men and the private one which was reserved to women. The idea of two clearly formed, gendered spheres, one of which exists as the antithesis of the other, has been challenged by scholars like Dena Goodman, who noted that one should speak of these spheres' interrelatedness rather than dichotomy.<sup>632</sup> The writings of moralists which overemphasised the female duties could make us assume that the husband was regarded as, or was contended to be, the distant observer of his family's life. However, since the 1850s, men were encouraged to be vigilant educators, and participate to their children's upbringing. Thus, in 1855, Jules Simon gave the following advice: "*que la jeune âme apprenne à penser et à sentir dans le voisinage de l'âme paternelle.*"<sup>633</sup>

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<sup>630</sup> Robert de la Sizeranne, 'L'Esthétique de l'enfance au Petit Palais', *Revue des deux mondes*, vol.165, pér.5, 1 July 1901, p.196.

<sup>631</sup> Nord, *The Republican Moment*, p. 218.

<sup>632</sup> Dena Goodman, 'Public sphere and private life: Toward a synthesis of current historiographical approaches to the Old Regime', *History and Theory*, vol.31, n.1, February 1992, p.15.

<sup>633</sup> Simon, *Le Devoir*, p.171.

The elderly father-figure one meets in the eighteenth-century works of Jean-Baptiste Greuze, the fragile patriarch who blessed the devoted son and punished the disobedient one, though never obsolete, was becoming an out-of-date model in the eyes of progressive people. In the second half of the nineteenth century some moralists promoted the image of the man who plays with his sons and daughters, does not hesitate to show his emotions and whose capacity to impose his paternal authority is as important as his ability to display affection. Manifestations of tenderness like kisses and caresses which had invaded bourgeois family etiquette since the Second Empire, were now not only tolerated, but encouraged.<sup>634</sup> Modern, republican fathers were invited to adopt less “biblical” models of paternal behaviour. The *père de famille* was required to be a friend of his children in order to conquer, as early as possible, their love and respect. Filial piety was not presented only as a moral obligation. It was a priceless treasure, something which could not be gained effortlessly. There were voices which affirmed the primacy of the paternal role above all other male duties. A man’s career and presence in public life was important but paternity was everything because it lasts for eternity. One never ceased to be a father; even after his death, he lives in the memory of his descendants. Gustave Droz, in his frequently reprinted and influential book of 1866 titled *Monsieur, Madame et bébé* wrote:

*“Profitez, jeunes pères, des premiers moments de candeur de votre enfant. Tâchez d’entrer dans son cœur. Gagnez son affection; la chose en vaut la peine. Être aimé toute sa vie par un être qu’on aime! Quoi que vous ayez été hommes d’Etat ou artistes militaires ou banquiers, lorsque votre tête sera blanche vous ne serez plus que papas. Or l’amour filial ne naît point tout d’une pièce et comme fatalement. L’affection des enfants se gagne et se mérite ; elle est une conséquence non une cause, et la reconnaissance en est le commencement. Il faut donc à tout prix que votre bébé soit reconnaissant. Ne comptez pas qu’il sache gré de votre sollicitude.”*<sup>635</sup>

One should take the risk of losing some of his authority over his offspring, posited Droz, in order to establish a relation based on love and not on the fear of punishment. Authority should be adorned with tenderness and severity had to be moderated with indulgence. This way the paternal influence endures; a grown child does not take as an example those whom he fears. Men must learn how to be good fathers by abandoning their often pretentious adult sobriety and humbling themselves:

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<sup>634</sup>Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches*, p.18, 19 and Ariès, Duby, Perrot, *Histoire de la vie privée*, p.143.

<sup>635</sup>Droz, *Monsieur, Madame*, p.293.

“Apprenez l’art d’amuser votre enfant, imitez la voix du coq et roulez vous sur le tapis, répondez à ses mille questions laissez vous tirer la barbe et faites coucou dans tous les coins. Tout cela est de la tendresse, mais aussi de l’habileté et le bon roi Henri ne démentait pas sa fine politique en marchant à quatre pattes sur son tapis. A ce compte, sans doute, votre autorité paternelle perdra de son prestige austère, mais vous y gagnerez cette influence profonde et durable que donne l’affection. Votre bébé vous craindra moins mais il vous aimera davantage. Evitez avec soin ces vilains mots de discipline, d’obéissance passive et de commandement; que la soumission soit douce et que son obéissance ressemble à une tendresse. Respectez-le pour qu’il vous respecte.”<sup>636</sup>

An infant had to be treated as an intelligent being: “il n’est point un être incomplet, une ébauche inachevée; c’est un homme.”<sup>637</sup> The theses of Droz were shared by some of his contemporaries. In a collection of poems published in 1877 under the title *L’Art d’être grand-père*, Victor Hugo, grandfather of Jeanne and Georges, wrote: “Je les regarde, et puis je les écoute et puis je suis bon et mon cœur s’apaise en leur présence; j’accepte les conseils sacrés de l’innocence.”<sup>638</sup> The revered author, who had taken his orphaned grandchildren’s guardianship, succumbed to the disarming innocence of youth: “quarante ans fier, indompté, triomphant; et me voilà vaincu par un petit enfant.”<sup>639</sup> In the journal edited at about the same time by the republican educator Jean Macé, the reader can find a number of illustrations where a young bourgeois father figures as his small children’s *premier cheval* and *première voiture*. In the images, accompanied by short, humorous, descriptive comments the man seems almost delighted for the fact that he is becoming like a child only for the sake of his son’s and daughter’s entertainment. In one of the illustrations, the mother is assisting the scene holding the baby’s arms so that she will not fall from her dad’s back. This latter is in all four imitating the horse: “Comme Henri IV avant qu’il fut sur son grand cheval du Pont Neuf, le pauvre père se met à quatre pattes ? Comme cela il sera tout à fait un vrai cheval, il n’y aura pas du tout de différence. La maman surveillera la course? C’est très, très amusant comme cela! Peut-être pas pour le papa.”<sup>640</sup> In this case, the distance between adults and minors seems to be abolished. The barriers set up by conformism cease to exist as the child becomes a king and the father the happy servant.

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<sup>636</sup> Droz, *Monsieur, Madame*, p.294, p.295.

<sup>637</sup> Droz, *Monsieur, Madame*, p.295

<sup>638</sup> Victor Hugo, *L’Art d’être grand-père* (Paris 1877), p.15

<sup>639</sup> Hugo, *L’Art*, p.10.

<sup>640</sup> M.-J. Stahl, “Le Premier Cheval”, *Magazine d’éducation et de récréation*, vol.2, 1871-1872, p.302.

At this point, Catholics do not seem to agree with republicans, who invoked the example of a king in order to fortify their positions, maybe trying to convince parents from every political spectrum. In 1895, the pious Bonjean seemed very concerned with the consequences deriving from the lack of discipline. The inferior classes are to be blamed for the situation.

*“Une des causes principales de la démoralisation c’est la désorganisation de la famille; c’est surtout dans les classes inférieures moins retenues que les autres par un certain souci du décorum et de convention sociale que le mal exerce ses ravages. Les tendresses stériles, souvent aveugles, ne peuvent suppléer à l’autorité, au respect. Les pères ont trouvé qu’il était plus commode de se faire les camarades de leurs enfants que de rester leurs mentors et plus facile de pratiquer la tolérance que de donner des exemples. Cette manière a des déplorable résultats, principalement dans les ménages pauvres où les contacts sont plus intimes et où rien ne se voile.”<sup>641</sup>*

I would argue that, if the Christian views appear more conservative and attached to old traditions, it was because the Church, unlike the Republic, always functioned within a hierarchical system. For Catholics, paternal authority, like the ecclesiastical one, was sacred. Certain conventions were believed to be necessary, even salutary, because they were the safeguards of morality. To preserve the stability of relations between parents and children, the father should not act as a friend. Discipline was an exigency; filial docility within the family reflected the obedience of believers in *Dieu le Père*, or to their *Sainte Mère l’Église* whose chief was the Pope, the *Saint Père*. Discipline was not just a moral, but a religious duty. On the other hand, we have to stress again that republicans did not question the idea of patriarchy; “*Le chef de la famille est le père,*” affirmed E. Delcroix in a book written in 1896 in order to serve as a secular catechist manual. The way this republican moralist advised the younger generation of citizens to behave towards their parents is a rather orthodox one: “*Nous leurs devons le respect parce qu’ils sont nos supérieurs. Nous montrerons notre respect en leur obéissant, en leur parlant poliment, en écoutant leurs conseils, en évitant surtout de nous moquer d’eux. Ce que nos parents nous commandent est pour notre bien : obéir sans discuter et sans murmurer.*”<sup>642</sup> However, the republican’s family ideal, as well as their perception of paternity and filiation, derived from the way they perceived the social position of human beings in the context of their vision. Like Gustave Droz, they were inspired by the principle of fraternity which they understood in a different way than the Catholics. The father was the

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<sup>641</sup>Bonjean, *Enfants révoltés*, p.97.

<sup>642</sup>Delcroix, *Instruction morale*, p.5.

head of the family and gave moral guidance - like the *mere éducatrice* - but he was simultaneously the citizen of an egalitarian regime like his son would one day become. He procreated for the nation, and in the face of the State father and son were equals; the young were not subjected to the old.

Father and child portraits, within the bourgeois milieu, usually evoke questions of continuity and the idea of affection established between parents and offspring. Despite the fact that moralists emphasised the importance of the father's participation in his son's upbringing through the transmission of moral ideals, we have almost no works which represent a man alone with his son. However, images which portray a father and his daughter are quite common. I would argue that the youthful female figure gave the artist more freedom to convey tenderness. It was probably thought more appropriate and natural to show intimacy between a father and his little girl, or maybe men showed their paternal affection with less reserve to their daughter. Furthermore, the girl's feminine presence was possibly believed to underscore the father's "human" dimension: a dimension which transcended the status given to him by his profession or social class. It is not unlikely that the daughter disclosed better the new idea of fatherhood: not in terms of continuity and inheritance, but principally as a love-giving, tender relationship. Colin Heywood observed that daughters were perhaps less turbulent than sons and a potential companion in old age.<sup>643</sup> A daughter would not acquire her status thanks to her father nor would she take up his profession. It could also be suggested that the reason for this absence of father-and-son portraits was that, in the mentality of French people, despite the moralists' discourse, males were regarded as individuals. They existed as independent units; before and beyond the qualities bestowed to them by their kinship, they were active or future citizens. On the other hand, as Greg Thomas argued in his recently published book, the qualities of childhood – innocence, purity, maybe also naivety - were closely associated to femininity.<sup>644</sup> Finally, as in the case of first communicants, female presence usually rendered a work more commercial.

I would argue that Carrière's portraits disclose a new model of paternity which was very close to the one proposed by progressive republican moralists. A committed republican and humanist, he painted a considerable number of images representing his friends, often illustrious intellectuals, with their daughters. Actually Carrière's convictions on the role of the

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<sup>643</sup>Heywood, *Growing up in France*, p.148.

<sup>644</sup>Thomas, *Impressionist Children*, p.67.

father are manifested in the letters he wrote to his own children. These texts show that he was conscious of his duty to teach his offspring their responsibilities, being their moral guide and devoted educator.<sup>645</sup> Furthermore the letters prove that he displayed infinite love and tenderness towards his offspring. In the 1893 portrait of the philosopher Gabriel Séailles with his daughter (Fig.83), the grave figure of the adult man, is juxtaposed with the light, jovial presence of the young girl. Séailles, a Sorbonne professor who later wrote Carrière's *biographie psychologique*, is sitting in an upright position with his legs crossed and turns to the viewer. His smiling daughter's left hand rests on her father's thighs, while with the other she gracefully puts her head on her palm leaning on Séailles's chest. Her stance conveys confidence in her father, as well as the mutual tenderness between them. Their body language reveals an unreserved affection; the man's hand is on the girl's back in a gesture of reassurance and protection. In this proximity the child finds emotional safety and the father finds joy; there is a communion of feelings and the idea that these two beings constitute a unity. The daughter came from this man, she lives because of him and his existence is perpetuated through her. Carrière, whose attitudes are discussed later, would have shared the ideas which Paul Janet had articulated in 1855: "*Les parents vivent de la vie de leurs enfants souffrent de leurs souffrances et meurent dans leur mort et la pensée qui nous fait regarder les enfants comme membres de nous-mêmes n'est pas une pure illusion: c'est notre chair et notre sang, mais surtout c'est notre âme, ce sont nos exemples, nos leçons, nos vertus ou nos faiblesses qui revivent en eux.*"<sup>646</sup> These convictions are also powerfully disclosed in the portrait of Alphonse Daudet and his daughter painted in 1890 (Fig.84). There, the bond between parent and offspring, the notions of heredity and lineage, are revealed through the position of the sitters. The left side of the child's body is touching the right side of that of the author. The girl's torso is parallel to Daudet's, following its rhythm and copying its movement. Paul Desjardins observed that the artist "*a entendu représenter deux rameaux d'une même tige, les chairs sont apparentées, les ossatures analogues.*"<sup>647</sup> Carrière ventured to underline that the girl is the future, the continuity of her father's physical and spiritual existence: the flesh of his flesh.

I have argued that a daughter's presence accentuates the essence of a man's parenthood, transcending the qualities which derive from his professional success, his literary

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<sup>645</sup>Valérie Bajou, *Eugène Carrière* (Lausanne 1998), p.66.

<sup>646</sup>Janet, *La Famille*, p.14.

<sup>647</sup>Desjardins, 'Eugène Carrière', p.138.

and scientific achievements, or his financial status. However, the emphasis put on a person's relationship with his descendants does not undermine the reality of his social position. An example which might illustrate this argument is *Pasteur et sa petite fille* by Leon Bonnat (1834-1922). This official portrait was commissioned by the Danish brewer C. Jacobsen, as sign of gratitude for the scientific work that Pasteur (1822-1895) had undertaken on fermentation and beer manufacture.<sup>648</sup> In this work of 1896, he figures as an imposing elderly man, whose right hand is resting on his chest under his coat, while the other protectively lies on his grand-daughter's shoulder; little Camille, in a light blue dress, is leaning against her grandfather, fondly holding his index finger. There is a charming antithesis between the dark suited, well-built, aged Pasteur and the young, slightly sulking girl. Her fragile presence does not only sweeten the ensemble. In 1883, at the unveiling of a commemorative plaque at his birthplace, the scientist himself asserted that two of the most powerful driving forces in his life were the love of science and the cult of home; Bonnat's portrait epitomises these fundamental qualities which structured his sitter's identity. Pasteur is confronting the viewer as an illustrious man of science, a benefactor of humanity and, at the same time, as a kind grandfather. Despite his Catholicism, he was regarded as a republican hero, an exemplary man. Virtuous and hardworking, he had cultivated an image of modesty, loyalty to his family, and devotion to his country. Recognised for his achievements, he was a member of the *Académie Française* and the *Académie de Médecine*, the permanent secretary of the *Académie des Sciences*, and he was decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honour.<sup>649</sup> Due to his discoveries concerning the microbes and the pasteurisation of milk, the famous chemist and biologist had saved the life of many children in a period when infant mortality formed a major national concern. Camille's generation profited greatly from Pasteur's achievements. It could be suggested that, in this image, his grand-daughter does not represent only the male sitter's continuity as an individual. Like Pasteur, who figures as the representative of scientific progress of his country, Camille symbolises the future of France. In the work of Bonnat, the world of childhood seems to enter the realm of science in order to find protection and safety.

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<sup>648</sup>Ward, "The cult of relics; Pasteur material at the Science Museum, *Medical History*", no.38, 1995, p.61.

<sup>649</sup>Sagnet Léon (ed), *La Grande encyclopédie. Inventaire raisonné des sciences, des lettres et des arts*, vol. 26 (Paris 1902), p.73.

## 6. A Bourgeois Family Insight

The family portrait often satisfied a sentiment of vanity which rendered it extremely popular among the bourgeois. Occasionally, representations of upper-class families could be read as a self-image via which someone projected certain fundamental social qualities. Family portraits constituted the reflection of one's *bien-être* and offered personal gratification. For the woman, a husband and children constituted the basic measure of social status and self-accomplishment. An example which illustrates these theses is one of the most famous bourgeois family portraits created in 1878 by Pierre-Auguste Renoir: *Madame Charpentier et ses enfants* (Fig.86).

Georges Charpentier was the prosperous publisher of Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola, the *frères* Goncourt and Joris-Karl Huysmans.<sup>650</sup> He was an open-minded, socially active man of republican convictions.<sup>651</sup> Jules Ferry and Zola frequented the literary and political Salon organised on a weekly basis, by the editor's young wife Marguerite (née Lemonnier). In the work analysed here, the two children are the six year-old Georgette and her younger brother Paul, whose portrait was often described as that of a little girl because of his long blonde ringlets and his dress, identical to that of his sister. Due to the acquaintances and the influence of the female sitter the portrait was placed in a prominent position in the Salon of 1879 and helped to establish Renoir's reputation among a bourgeois clientele.<sup>652</sup> The artist's rendering of an upper middle-class family that had warmly received him in the evening gatherings of illustrious French citizens, was saluted as the "return of the prodigal son" to the bosom of serious art-world. Critics were favourable to the work although some disapproved of the lack of draughtsmanship: "*Ne cherchons point chicane à M. Renoir; il est rentré dans le giron de l'Église: saluons sa bienvenue, oublions la forme et ne parlons que de colorations.*"<sup>653</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, with genuine enthusiasm, praised the avant-garde qualities of this portrait, which found a place in the fortress of academic art that was the Salon:

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<sup>650</sup> *Pierre-Auguste Renoir*, Exhibition Catalogue, John House, Anne Distel *et al.*, London, Hayward Gallery 30 January-21 April 1985, Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 14 May- 2 September 1985, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 9 October 1985-5 January 1986 p.214.

<sup>651</sup> In their soirees, despite their political ideology, the Charpentiers also invited aristocrats (Anne Martin-Fugier, *Les Salons de la Troisième République: Art, littérature, politique* (Paris 2009), p.297.

<sup>652</sup> Georges Rivière, *Renoir et ses amis* (Paris 1921), p.167.

<sup>653</sup> Arthur Baignière, 'Le Salon de 1879', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, pér.2, vol.20, 1 juillet 1879, p.54.



*“M. Renoir a pensé que mieux valait représenter Mme C. dans son intérieur avec ses enfants, au milieu de ses occupations, plutôt que de la mettre droite dans une pose convenue sur un rideau violet ou rouge. C’est là une tentative intéressante et qui mérite qu’on la loue. Il y a dans ce portrait d’exquis tons de chair et un ingénieux groupement. C’est d’un faire un peu mince et tricoté papillotant dans les accessoires ; mais c’est habilement exécuté, et puis c’est osé. En somme c’est l’œuvre d’un artiste qui a du talent et qui bien que figurant au Salon officiel est un indépendant ; ça étonne, mais ça fait plaisir, de trouver des gens qui ont depuis longtemps abandonné les vieilles routines conservées si précieusement par leurs confrères, dans des pots de saumure.”<sup>654</sup>*

Unlike Marcel Baschet, who tried to convey the secular doctrine of domesticity remaining attached to the old French artistic tradition with a pompous, formal painting, Renoir attempted an independent rendering of the modern, bourgeois family ideal. The impressionist painter, who was never involved into politics, nor was he militant for the government’s cause, tried to achieve two purposes. His image shows the quality and significance of the fraternal, maternal and filial relationships established among the sitters, but it is, no less importantly, a positive testimony to the pleasures a comfortable everyday life can offer. In his criticism, Huysmans referred to the emphasis given by the painter to material accessories; apart from domesticity, this portrait celebrates the triumph of urban bourgeois culture and its love for commodities that rendered life enjoyable.

Madame Charpentier was an elegant woman of her time, known to the Parisian society for her social skills and intelligence.<sup>655</sup> She poses with the famous black dress she used to wear in public occasions; the robe’s superb handling reportedly attracted the viewers’ and the critics’ attention more than the model itself. The golden case she is holding constitutes an allusion to her lineage: her father had been the jeweler of Napoleon III.<sup>656</sup> The three sitters are situated in a semi-private space. In the corner there is a small table upon which lay a jug containing alcohol and two glasses; it is a comfortable, warm and colourful room where visitors had access. This interior would certainly be recognised by many eminent Parisian friends of the editor and his wife. In this dissertation it has frequently been germane to quote texts by Jules Simon and other moralists, who chastised worldly women as uncaring and irresponsible towards their offspring; this portrait challenges their theories. The rhetoric of the moralists, who usually belonged to the same class as Charpentier, conveys a defensive attitude towards an established condition or a social tendency they could not control. Their sermons,

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<sup>654</sup> Patrice Locmant, *Huysmans, Écrits sur l’art* (Paris 2006), p.147, 148.

<sup>655</sup> Locmant, *Huysmans*, p.167.

<sup>656</sup> Thomas, *Impressionist Children*, p.175.

which warned people against the evils caused by neglected parental duties, expressed common opinions, emerging ideas or political tendencies and could indeed be influential. Nevertheless, reality was more complex than their often Manichean vision of society. Madame Charpentier, a bourgeois woman, was not excluded from the “public sphere” unless this latter is identified with the sphere of state authority where her gender had no access. Nevertheless, as Jurgen Habermas has shown in his groundbreaking study of 1962, the *authentic* public sphere is part of the private realm. It is the social space where private individuals *are coming together as a public through the public use of their reason*. Public sphere takes shape in institutions of intellectual sociability like the Salons organised by this editor’s wife and where the political and cultural elite participated.<sup>657</sup>

Renoir’s Margueritte is both the happy mother of two healthy, charming and satisfied children and a *femme du monde*, a quality she was proud to display and for which she wanted to be remembered. Her serene presence is dominating the space of the canvas; however, she is not situated in the foreground, nor does she embrace her offspring, but she discreetly and indulgently observes them. There is nothing stiff in the pose of Georgette and Paul; they both appear relaxed, well behaved, but with the natural spontaneity of their age, enjoying the benefits of an untroubled childhood. During his career, Renoir never depicted sulking, sickly children, but happy ones; here, the blissful faces of the two youths exalt an accomplished woman and competent mother. Paul is placed between Georgette and Madame Charpentier but closer to this latter and more dependent on her due to his age. I would argue that his central position in the portrait is due to the fact that, being a boy, the continuity of the family’s name relied on him.

This image of prosperity vicariously honours George Charpentier, the husband and father; the empty chair in the back suggests his absence, but the family happiness bears his name. To the eyes of the viewer lavish interiors and elegant clothes confirmed that the man, whom every spiritual and political authority proclaimed as the head of the family, is able to provide his loved ones with a comfortable life. Furthermore, by the impression of harmony which reigns in this household one was called to deduce the moral integrity of the father. The cosy home depicted by Renoir is the place where the publisher would return after a very busy day; constantly occupied with his affairs he possibly did not have the time to pose.

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<sup>657</sup>Goodman, ‘Public Sphere and Private Life’, p.5-6 and Jürgen Habermas *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (( MIT 1991) 1962)

Interestingly, in Baschet's *Ma famille* which was painted twenty years later, his brother René, also a publisher, is not represented.

Lack of time can partly explain why in bourgeois family portraits the husband is frequently absent. Another potential reason for which artists did not portray him might be the fact that domesticity and femininity were considered interchangeable. Can we make deductions about the structure and nature of the bourgeois family based on portraits and, if yes, to what extent? In representations of urban middle-class families, the woman is typically represented as a devoted, happy and very affectionate person. But this makes us wonder why paternal authority and female obedience were so overstated by moralists, if they were so evident. The undifferentiated image of the sweet, complacent lady in painting and elsewhere is certainly a bourgeois ideal par excellence; a social exigency she often corresponded to. The legal status of women was indeed deplorable by modern standards, but female docility was not always the rule; Bonnie Smith wrote that in the department of the Nord, among the bourgeoisie, men complained that society "reeked of matriarchy in which women decided all questions of marriage, vocation and parental love".<sup>658</sup> In the literature of this period we have other examples of hideous women, who torture their spouse and offspring. In Zola's *Pot-Bouille* (1886) Madame Josserand is a veritable tyrant, an authoritative, rude woman, who makes her husband tremble. "*Monsieur Josserand continua d'écrire. Il espérait que sa femme se contenterait de l'accabler d'un regard de mépris, en traversant la pièce pour aller se coucher. Mais elle se laissa tomber de nouveau sur une chaise, en face de lui, et le regarda fixement, sans parler. Il sentait ce regard, il était pris d'une telle anxiété, que sa plume crevait le papier mince des bandes.*"<sup>659</sup> Madame Chanteau, in the *Joie de vivre* (1884) is also a detestable person and her infirm husband is totally dependent on her. I would argue that for this author and his contemporaries matriarchy was something monstrous and lack of male authority engendered misery and disorder. Cases similar to those Zola described in his novels existed in real life, even if they did not form rule. Finally, it is necessary to mention that during my research I did not come across any paintings representing despotic wives; maybe, like spinsters, they were too repulsive to be portrayed on a canvas.

As has been discussed earlier female gender was thought to encompass the essence of family life and, for this reason, most of the texts concerning parental and conjugal duty are

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<sup>658</sup> Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, p.63.

<sup>659</sup> Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, p.50, 51.

addressed to girls and young mothers; Jules Simon, Paul Janet, Liebrich, Père Charreau, Hugues Le Roux, Louise d'Alq are some of those authors whose views have been discussed in this thesis. In painting, the idea that women are the soul of the family is strongly conveyed in Eugène Carrière's work. His images communicate the intimacy and holiness of the hearth, which was regarded as interchangeable with the mother. Unlike the two works analysed below, most family portraits created by Carrière are *maternités*, exclusively focusing on the relationship of a woman and her offspring. Therefore, although the viewer sees the family through the eyes of the father, this latter is often omitted. This artist had recurrently explained the reason why this theme became central to his creation: "*Il m'a toujours paru et je le pense toujours d'avantage que seule la femme était restée proche aux sources de la vie par toutes ses douleurs, sa maternité, son enfantement. La femme moderne nous apparaît toujours comme le symbole de la création. Les hommes s'agitent en de grandes gestes, la femme ferme des bras et tout est sauvegardé dans les berceaux,*" he posited.<sup>660</sup>

In a large family portrait of 1891 titled *La Famille Lerolle* (Fig.87) it is the wife of the Catholic artist Henri Lerolle and her youngest son in her arms, who with her oldest daughter occupies the centre of the canvas. The other two children are represented beside the seated woman, but we can barely discern their features. Carrière gave the first and the last offspring of the couple a more prominent position. The teenage girl's place in the portrait might be related to the fact that she has become conscious of her womanhood; she will soon assume her role as a spouse. More importantly, in large families, the oldest daughter realised her responsibilities at an early age; she was expected to assist the mother in her duties and even replace her in case of her early demise.<sup>661</sup> Like the Baschet and the Renoir portraits, the little boy, as last descendant of the Lerolle couple, evokes more intensely the idea of his parents' continuity. According to Bonnie Smith the woman is glorified through her youngest son; she reproduces the father's image, giving flesh and blood to his need to survive after his death.<sup>662</sup> In Carrière's portrait, the husband is situated in the background, on the right-hand corner of the painting, looking at his wife and progeny. More than an engaging father and a spouse, Lerolle is represented as an observer, plunged into the thoughts generated by a spectacle which confirms that his eternity in this mortal world is reassured. Madame Lerolle is wearing white, while all other sitters are rendered in dark clothes. Like with Carrière's *Première*

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<sup>660</sup> Eugène Carrière, *Écrits et lettres choisies* (Paris 1907), p. 310, 311.

<sup>661</sup> Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, p.166.

<sup>662</sup> Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, p.63.

*Communion* of 1888, the white robe attracts the viewer's attention on her figure. It is probable that the artist, through this colour, emphasised that the woman is the luminous centre from where all life begins - a *symbole de la création* according to his own words - as well as the refuge where children sought and found safety and tenderness. For psychological reasons, but also for natural ones, the mother incarnates the idea of life transmission and evokes the idea that continuity passes through her.

The notions of heredity, lineage, unity and affection, are central in most family portraits. Carrière's approach is more trenchant because it is rooted in the meaning he personally bestowed to the family as an ultimate moral value. For him, this institution encompassed his cosmos and formed an inexhaustible source of inspiration and bliss. In 1899, in a letter addressed to his friend and future President Georges Clemenceau, the painter wrote: "*ma famille est très absorbante. Ainsi ma pensée est peu libre.*"<sup>663</sup> "*La famille est le résumé de l'univers: elle concentre tous les actes quotidiens et permet l'épanouissement des êtres,*" he asserted on another occasion.<sup>664</sup> In 1900, the poet and biographer Camille Mauclair affirmed that: "*Carrière vécut dans des quartiers populaires et dans une constante communion du foyer familial. Il y borna sa vision. Il construisit tout entière son âme sagace sur cette conviction que la vie ordinaire confondue par tant d'artistes amoureux du rare avec la vie banale, est la source de toute profondeur morale pour qui sait la vivre.*"<sup>665</sup> *La famille Chausson* (Fig.88), which in Mauclair's opinion is one of this painter's best compositions, provides us with a model of a happy and accomplished bourgeois nuclear family, comprised by the couple and their four children.

The composer Ernest Chausson (1855-1899), came from an upper middle-class background and lived comfortably on a private income. From 1886 he served as secretary of the *Société Nationale de Musique*.<sup>666</sup> Chausson was an art-collector and close friend to the young, pious Nabi painter Maurice Denis (1870-1943). The two men shared the same religious beliefs although the musician was a less fervent Catholic.<sup>667</sup> Ernest, a creative figure

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<sup>663</sup>Eugène Carrière, 1996, p 65.

<sup>664</sup>Bajou, *Eugène Carrière*, 1998, p.65.

<sup>665</sup>Camille Mauclair, 'Eugène Carrière et la psychologie du mystère', *La Nouvelle Revue*, nouv. sér., vol.1, December 1900, p.350, 351.

<sup>666</sup>Theodore Baker and Nicolas Slonimsky (eds.) *Dictionnaire biographique des musiciens*, Paris 1995 p. 737

<sup>667</sup>In 1896, in a letter addressed to Denis, Chausson disclosed his old dream to write music for the *Cantique des Créatures* of Saint Francis of Assisi. For this purpose, he asked the painter information about a poet and recently ordained priest named Chardonnel, who could possibly write him the libretto. However, after meeting the Pope

like Henri Lerolle, and in contrast to the businessmen Georges Charpentier and René Baschet, had more time to pose for a portrait. The piano in front of which the married couple is standing and the paintings hanging on the wall, underscore this erudite man's qualities as a musician and a lover of art. In the image, Jeanne Chausson, sister of Madame Lerolle, is portrayed with a white muslin dress contrasted with her spouse's black costume. She is slightly leaning towards Ernest's side while her youngest daughter is standing before her. The posture of the young boy – the family's only son - is a copy of that of the composer; the youth stands upright with his hands in his pockets, a prefiguration of the future adult he will become. Carrière, according to Paul Desjardins, never portrayed family members as a group of private individuals. The idea of consanguinity, the concept of transmission of values and ideas from one generation to another, and the will to underscore their unity, determined the way he structured his compositions: "*Chacun des ces groupes est organique. Ce n'est pas un rassemblement fortuit, une rencontre de passants... Chaque enfant rassemble en soi toute la famille. Plus d'une fois, il nous est arrivé de constater entre des sœurs ou des cousines la secrète et irrécusable empreinte de leur généalogie, point du tout d'après les originaux vivants mais seulement d'après les portraits que Carrière en avait faits. Il rapproche et ramène au nid les êtres que les circonstances dispensent.*"<sup>668</sup>

In the work analysed here, Madame Chausson does not display her affection for her offspring with passionate gestures, as in most of the portraits where the models are Carrière's own wife and children. One might argue that the *Famille Chausson* focuses on the married couple. The son and the daughters figure as fruits of the spouses' love; they constitute the living manifestations of a harmonious conjugal bond. For Carrière, the relationship between husband and wife was fundamental. He displayed a great devotion to his own wife, had an immense respect for marriage as a civil contract and strongly opposed the idea of free union.<sup>669</sup> This is the advice he gave to his daughter just after her wedding: "*Ne laisse pas le reste effriter l'essentiel: c'est-a-dire l'amour entre les deux époux.*"<sup>670</sup>

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in Rome, Chausson said that Leon XIII looked like a corpse; Denis, later on, was thrilled by the same experience.

Barruel Thérèse, "Maurice Denis et Ernest Chausson. Correspondance inédite et catalogue des œuvres de Denis ayant appartenu à Chausson", *Revue de l'art*, vol. 98, 1992, p. 66, 67, 69

<sup>668</sup> Paul Desjardins, "Eugène Carrière, artistes contemporains", *Gazette des Beaux Arts* per 3.vol. 38, 1 August 1907, p.138

<sup>669</sup> Carrière, *Écrits et lettres*, p.25.

<sup>670</sup> *Eugène Carrière 1849-1906*, Exhibition Catalogue, Claude-Roger Marx *et al.*, London-Marlborough Fine Art Lt, May-June 1970, p.30.

This image gives us an impression of tranquility and balance which, in my opinion, emerges from an egalitarian idea that was dear to the republican Carrière. None of the models is seated. The group of children occupies less space than the two adults, but the presence of the two younger offspring is further emphasised as they are both situated in the foreground. In the relationship established among the sitters there are no masters and servants, but persons who respect their role, and serve one another in a spirit of solidarity. These children are not growing in the shadow of their parents, nor does Madame Jeanne Chausson live in the shadow of her husband. We know that she actively participated to the composer's professional life by organising concerts.<sup>671</sup> The painter's style, foggy and blurred rather than tightly descriptive, gives a sense of flux, thus becoming the pictorial device for conveying his moral values. For him, the ideas of solidarity and fraternity derived from the family nucleus; they were nourished there, in order to be extended to all humanity.<sup>672</sup> By creating this image, he disclosed his world vision which summarised the republican domestic ideals and, at the same time, responded to what the composer expected to see. From the "egalitarianism" of the portrait we can safely assume that Chausson did not adopt the commonplace ultra-conservative positions concerning the place of the father in the family. Actually, nothing in this work allows us to deduce that the musician was a churchgoing man; this latter would not have wished to underscore his faith in a loud manner. The tolerance of Chausson who held progressive political ideas met with that of Carrière who, due to his Catholic upbringing, respected religious beliefs.

## 7. Conclusion.

In most of the paintings I have analysed in the last chapter of this dissertation the religious element is fluid; in fact, it is hard to tell whether the sitters are faithful Catholics or not, based solely on the pictorial data. This is a piece of information an art-historian needs to have in advance, as in the case of the Chausson family portrait (Fig.88); otherwise he attempts to make assumptions like in the *Repas de baptême* of Brispot (Fig.73). The family ideal was the same both for Catholics and republicans, although they would arrive to its'

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<sup>671</sup>Barruel, 'Maurice Denis', p.66.

<sup>672</sup>Séailles, *Eugène Carrière*, p.155, 178.

accomplishment following different paths, since they were inspired by other convictions. The exemplary *foyer* had common external features; Christian and secular virtues are not necessarily distinguishable in painting, unless one is confronted with an ostentatious behaviour such as the rendering of an entire family praying together. It is crucial to underline that the appreciation of the family was the meeting point of ideological opponents. Thus, priests and enemies of the clergy who fought on matters of children's education would agree that an orderly home was imperative for social and national reasons. A respectable, happy household was believed to guarantee stability and safety; therefore, it was treasured by the members an entire social stratum, the bourgeois, regardless of their piety or lack of faith. It is characteristic that Cazin's *La Journée faite* (Fig.20), received compliments from both Catholic and republican art-critics.

Domesticity is a notion historically identified with the female gender, but never so intensely as in the period under study. During the early Third Republic, more than before, wives and mothers were exhorted to embrace their domestic role and stop seeking happiness elsewhere. Often, moralists described anything beyond childrearing as futile and vain; a respectable lady had to find her proper place at home. Painters, like authors, tirelessly reproduced and acclaimed exemplary female attitudes; the image of the tender mother and loving spouse who has no other joy than her children and no other concern than her husband's happiness is uncontroversial. The woman represented the hearth; therefore, in portraits such as those of Baschet and Carrière, she is rendered the centre of the composition and symbolically the heart of family life. Finally, during the years covered by this thesis the model of the affectionate father was promoted with enthusiasm through texts, paintings and illustrations. Although patriarchy was not questioned, there occurred a remarkable change in the way the paternal role was perceived.

Those who rejected Church doctrines were persuaded that the cult of family life was the only way to cure the French middle-class from selfishness, avarice and materialism. The nation's soul would recover, secular thinking went, if citizens cherished their family, which formed the cradle of fraternity and the birthplace of patriotism. At the same time, Bayard's book *La peur de l'enfant* allows us to deduce that pious moralists were also anxious about the declining birthrates, which they interpreted as a dreadful sign of human egoism. I would argue that even if Catholics were told to procreate for the glory of God, in reality, a devout man was no less concerned with the idea of continuity than a republican. The propaganda exercised by



the civic mural decorations of Prouvé and Chabas is not the only evidence which affirms the desire of the regime to teach the French people that family was morally vital and socially indispensable. We cannot fail to see that very different painters and caricaturists who worked independently entered the same debates, or that their works were popular in the Salon. Thus, the success of Brispot's images is worthy of attention; such mediocre paintings charmed the public due to their subject matter. The need to praise the bliss and emotional safety of family life was or had to become very urgent. The Third Republic was a bourgeois regime anxious to promulgate these ideals; it tried to spread the good word in all the tones and in every possible way.

## CONCLUSION.

My thesis has sought to define the evolution of French women's moral identity and analyse the social factors and ideas which contributed to its construction, through books of etiquette, novels and across a wide range of images from visual culture. I have attempted to show that during the early Third Republic there was a dialogue between the ideas conveyed by French moralists and the messages painters wished to communicate through their works. The three decades covered by this dissertation (1870-1900) were marked by political turbulences, important social changes and major ideological conflicts. Thus, as has been demonstrated, the dominance of a comfortable bourgeois culture coincided with the flourishing of various, often excessively sentimental, forms of Catholic devotion. Furthermore, the secular legislation introduced by the state provoked the reactions of priests and pious writers who articulated their ideas in moral manuals. The aspiration of the Third Republic to replace the Church in its role as fatherly guardian and instructor of girls and young women as well as its ambition to become the arbitrator of female morality, are manifest in the writings of secular-minded authors, but can also be detected in the republican laws providing for public education and the protection of abandoned children.

Imagery affirms that artists consciously contributed to the big moral and social debates of their time. A considerable number of paintings discussed in the dissertation straightforwardly extolled medical progress, stressed the importance of hygiene and promoted the ideals of the chaste young female and the domesticated woman, who is both a tender mother and a conscientious educator of her children. *Le Vaccin de croupes* (Fig.56), *L'Heure de la tétée des enfants débiles à la Maternité* (Fig.47), *Le Petit bain* (Fig.60), *La Restitution à la Vierge le lendemain des noces* (Fig.34) and *La Bonne Éducation* (Fig.1) comprise some characteristic examples where these subjects were illustrated. On the other hand, Salon painters tended to be more reserved and subtle when they dealt with delicate issues like female celibacy, adultery and sexual intimacy: the works *Le Flagrant Délit* (Fig.44) and *Mariage d'inclication* (Fig.39) constitute exceptions to the rule.

Most of the images analysed in the five chapters of this dissertation are open to multiple interpretations. It is risky to posit that a work of art communicated republican ideas, unless it was commissioned by the State for the decoration of a public space, like Victor

Prouvé's *La Joie de vivre* (Fig.79), or created in order to propagate a new policy, like the school paintings of Jean Geoffroy. It would even be rash to assert that every painting of a church interior or daily religious observance necessarily promoted an overtly Catholic position. Paintings for which no contemporary criticism was found can certainly be very puzzling for a scholar. At the same time, an art-critic's comments do not automatically solve "the riddle" of an image, revealing the veritable intentions of this latter's author; two commentators may happen to give different, even opposing interpretations of the same work. It is useful to point out that art-critics, like the public who visited an exhibition, were flexible and ambiguous, sometimes even biased; artists were aware of this fact. Henri Brispot in the *Repas de baptême* (Fig.73) could have had the moral intention to show the Salon audience an honest and happy middle-class family. However, this once popular painter of bourgeois genre was not essentially motivated by the desire to promote the necessity of christening one's babies. Ideology was divisive, while the moral element was often shared; hence the difficulty in distinguishing whether the values transmitted by an artist pertain to his Christian piety or his secular view of the world. Finally, it must be underlined that painters did not always have clear ideas of how an image stood in relation to major social issues of their time.

The ambiguous message of a work of art could raise a debate. Pascal Blanchard's *La Première Communion* (Fig.27) could be praised as a positive view of young women's piety, or incite the reaction of a secular-minded person who rejected Church doctrines and disdained manifestations of superstition. The fact that Salon works with an apparently pious content were sometimes bought by the Republic does not always resolve the problem of ambiguity; it may complicate it. For instance, the *Leçon de catéchisme* (Fig.11) of Jules-Alexis Muenier, which was extensively discussed in the first chapter, constitutes another example of a work that could be interpreted either as favourable to religious instruction or as hostile to the educational role of priests. Finally, even when the message of an image was obvious and clear, controversy could be raised between people who accepted it and those who opposed it. Therefore, Chabas's mural decorations were unreservedly praised by Besnard and severely criticised by Péladan, while the republican rhetoric of Gervex's *Mariage civil* (Fig.46) met the disapproval of Paul Mantz although the latter was not hostile to the regime.

It was essentially the forgotten or lost works of now obscure artists discovered in journals like *L'Illustration* and *Le Monde illustré*, which reinforced my major argument that imagery interweaves with the moral discourse, and that artists participated in the debates on

depopulation, childcare and hygiene. As I have already explained in the introduction, the masterpieces painted by impressionists represent a small percentage of the late nineteenth-century artistic production, and were of little use in the attempt to answer my research questions. This fact has allowed me to reaffirm that works of art are not just the products of human imagination, but also the fruits of social experiences absorbed by early Third Republic painters, who were historical beings: members of society and children of their time.

The ambiguities paintings bear and the coincidence of Catholic and republican opinions on matters of ethics lead to the deduction that the secular State and the Church did not comprise two completely separate spheres. The system of moral values the republic regime struggled to set up was not only the child of the Enlightenment and the Revolution. It was also intimately and inevitably affiliated to the Catholic Church; not to the institution which was founded upon the doctrines of Trinity and Redemption, but to the powerful mechanism which had played a crucial role to the historical development of France by forging its moral and cultural structures. Alexandre Dumas *fils* and Jules Simon objected to the clergy's interference in public life, but regarded religious faith as a veritable ally; these men were convinced that the application of Christian principles would make society progress to the right direction. Particularly in the case of women, religion was seen as a mighty force of moral control, an antidote to selfishness and an efficient weapon against dangerous inclinations; the concept that every aspect of female existence had to be regulated was largely accepted and propagated. Free thinkers who claimed the role of spiritual directors through books of etiquette and painters who had abandoned religious practice eagerly promoted sexual innocence, conjugal devotion and dutiful maternity, just as priests had done uninterruptedly for centuries. Thus, the fact that First Communion inspired even anticlerical artists like Carrière does not find its only explanation in the secularisation of the ecclesiastic ritual which served as a rite of passage and a family feast. It constitutes a proof that values like chastity which were emphasised by the Church were also cherished by the Republic.

From their point of view French women showed an abiding loyalty to Catholicism and an unflinching attachment to devotional practices. Their relationship to the Church was indeed a very privileged one, often with their husbands' approval or tolerance; it is not accidental that in late nineteenth-century French painting boys' First Communion was not represented, or that prayer was depicted as something taught to young girls by their mothers and grandmothers. Indicative of the female attitude towards the Church is the fact that in 1878,

under the Conservative Republic, female religious congregations had 130,000 members, while in 1901, the anticlerical propaganda which raged against the celibate *bonnes soeurs* had not managed to make this impressive number decrease.<sup>673</sup> It is important to point out that, even if many men encouraged female religiosity because they found it morally reassuring, they did not force their wives to be devout. Fathers, with few exceptions, tended to trust their daughters' instruction to members of monastic orders; however, one should not automatically interpret girls' piety as a fruit of the systematic brainwashing they were subjected to in congregational schools. Young men were also educated by priests but this did not prevent them from turning their back to the faith as soon as they reached adulthood. It was mentioned before that André Gill attended a Jesuit school and the young Jules Ferry had been a diligent student who always knew his catechism, while Jaurès had received a Catholic upbringing. The reason why women of all classes remained faithful to the Church was that this latter gave them a considerable autonomy, a role which, unlike men, they were not able to seek elsewhere. This ancient institution provided the space where they could take decisions for matters other than housekeeping and childcare. The female members of a parish formed groups and societies, organised pilgrimages, dedicated themselves to works of charity and effected social reforms.<sup>674</sup> Especially the celibate and widowed women, who established religious congregations with the objective of educating girls, were constantly called to take initiatives and display an independent spirit: a *fondatrice* held multifaceted responsibilities.<sup>675</sup> Apart from offering women the opportunity of being socially active, Catholicism gave them spiritual comfort in hard times, something which was no less important. During the late nineteenth century, as before, prayer, confession and Mass were the refuge of unhappy spouses, the consolation of distressed mothers and the shelter of spinsters. The Church did not challenge the dignity nor did it question the value of celibate women, who represented the 10% of the female population but had to confront the disdain of their family milieu and the contempt, even the hostility, of society.

Certainly, the artists who reproduced the image of the happy, domesticated woman projected a specific moral, social and national ideal; as I have discussed in the thesis, a work of art forms a construction and not a mirror reflecting reality. However, it should be understood that paintings depicting sweet, altruistic and dutiful *mères de famille*, were not

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<sup>673</sup>Langlois, *Le Catholicisme*, p.58.

<sup>674</sup> Stone, 'Anticlericals and Bonnes Sœurs', p.109.

<sup>675</sup>Langlois, *Le Catholicisme*, p.643.

created only in order to soothe the anxieties of bourgeois males. During the period under study, the majority of women were not feminists who would revolt against the lack of equality between the two genders, oppose the model of the obedient spouse, or feel oppressed and suffocated. In most cases, they accepted their social position and were satisfied with the role they were required to play, or, at least, reconciled to its exigencies. The belief that all aspects of female behaviour should be under control was not espoused only by men. Women were persuaded that it was necessary to adopt a certain system of values, which they zealously attempted to transmit to their daughters. It is quite striking that Sophie de Segur in 1859, Louise d'Alq in 1881 and Françoise Harmel in 1912 were no less convinced than male moralists that young girls needed discipline and self-control in order to respond to the demands of their adult life.

Finally, a crucial aspect that must be restated in the conclusion of the dissertation is that the face of republicanism did not remain the same during the course of these thirty years. Thus, the conservatism of the 1870s was followed by the radical anticlericalism of the 1880s and this latter was succeeded by a period of reconciliation: the *Ralliement*. The representatives of the young regime were not characterised by ideological uniformity: their policies and sympathies would occasionally be very different. For instance, Jules Ferry envisaged a secular society free from superstition and abolished catechism from public schools, while Jules Simon, who held a high opinion of the Catholic religion, considered his younger colleague's legislation morally harmful for the French youth. In the realm of the arts, Jules Breton was a pious man who attended Mass and supported the Republic, while Carrière, a *libre-penseur*, rejected all doctrines. In the Church, attitudes and reactions towards social changes could also differ; there were reactionary and open-minded prelates. The progressive and conservative tendencies which structured the modern society of the early Third Republic France, found their expression in painting and moral discourse, literature and etiquette.

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## **CATALOGUE OF IMAGES**



**Fig.1 Paul Thomas, *La Bonne Éducation*, 1896, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Panorama: Salon 1896*, no page number.**



**Fig. 2 Madame Colin-Libour, *Premières études*, 1895, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré*, 9 February 1895, p.93.**



**Fig.3** Auguste Toulmouche, *La Leçon*, 1889, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *L'Illustration*, 5 janvier 1889, p.1.



**Fig.4** Elisabeth Nourse, *Leçon de lecture*, 1895, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from Mary Alice Heekin-Burke, *Elisabeth Nourse: A Salon Career*, 1983, p.167.





**Fig.5** Léon Lhermitte, *Mois de Marie à Chartèves*, 1885, charcoal drawing, 32x47 cm , location unknown, repr. from Le Pelley-Fonteny, *Léon Auguste Lhermitte*, 1991, p.402.



**Fig.6** M. Chalon, *Au Nom du Père*, 1889, drawing for *L' Illustration*, 30 November 1889, p. 457.



**Fig.7 Léon Lhermitte, *L'Aïeule*, 1880, oil on canvas, 154x126, 5 cm, Gand, Museum of Fine Arts.**



**Fig. 8 Louis Deschamps, *Résignation*, 1882, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from the dossier of Louis Henri Deschamps, Documentation, Musée d'Orsay.**



**Fig. 9** Jean Geoffroy, *Les Résignés*, 1901, oil on canvas, 110x150 cm, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



**Fig.10** Jean Geoffroy, *Dimanche des Rameaux*, 1887, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from Bournand, *Paris Salon 1887*, 1987 p.52.



**Fig.11 Jules Alexis Muenier, *Leçon de catéchisme*, 1890, oil on canvas, 68x92 cm, Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie.**



**Fig.12 Georges Vibert, *La Sauce merveilleuse*, 1890, oil on canvas, 63, 5x82, 5 cm, Buffalo, New York, Albright Knox Art Gallery.**



**Fig.13** Jean Geoffroy, *École primaire en Bretagne*, 1896, oil on canvas, 165x235 cm, Lyon, Ecole Normale de Fontenay aux Roses.



**Fig 14**, Jean Geoffroy, *École maternelle*, 1898, oil on canvas, 185x235 cm, Paris, Ecole Normale d'Institutrices.



**Fig.15** Jean Geoffroy, *En classe, le travail des petits*, 1889, oil on canvas, 145x220 cm, Rouen, Musée National de l'Éducation.



**Fig.16** Auguste Truphème *La Retenue*, 1888, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré*, 13 octobre 1888, p.229.



**Fig.17** Aimé Perret, *La Distribution des prix*, 1890, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *L'Illustration*, 17 mai 1890, p.436.



BEAUX-ARTS. — LE RETOUR DES PRIX. — Tableau de M. H. CAIN (Salon des Champs-Élysées). — Gravure de M. BAUOT.

**Fig.18** Henri Cain, *Retour de prix*, 1891, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré*, 15 août 1891, p. 105.





**Fig.19 Jules Breton, *Les communiantes*, 1884, oil on canvas, 124x191, 5 cm, Perth Museum and Art Gallery on loan from the Foundation of Honorable Mrs Kitson.**



**Fig.20 Eugène Carrière, *Le premier voile*, 1886, oil on canvas, 243x348 cm Toulon, Musée des Beaux Arts.**



BEAUX-ARTS. — UNE PROMENADE / « SOIR DE PREMIÈRE COMMUNION ». — Tableau de M. ALFRED GUILLOU (Salon de 1888). — (Gravure de M. BAUME.)

**Fig.21 Alfred Guillou, *Soir de Première Communion*, 1888, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré*, 11 août 1888, p.89.**



BEAUX-ARTS. — Un Jour de Fête. — Tableau de M. ALBERT FOURIÉ. — Salon de 1886. — (Gravure de M. BAUME.)

**Fig.22 Albert Fourié, *Un jour de fête*, 1886, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré*, 22 mai 1886 p.329.**



**Fig.23** Léon Lhermitte, *La Première Communion à Mont-Saint-Père*, 1884, charcoal drawing, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré*, 6 juin 1891, p. 446-447.



**Fig.24** Henri Desrousseaux, *Première Communion*, 1888, pastel, 63, 5x41 cm, Sotheby's New York.



**Fig.25 Jules Bastien-Lepage, *La Communiant*, 1875, oil on canvas, 50x35 cm, Tournai, Musée de Beaux Arts.**



**Fig.26 Hans Holbein, *Anne of Cleves*, 1539, oil on parchment mounted on canvas, 65x48 cm, Louvre, Paris.**



**Fig.27** Pascal Blanchard, *Communion Solennelle*, ca.1902, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Québec, Musée de la civilisation.



**Fig.28** Henri Desrousseaux, *La Veille de la Première Communion*, 1888, oil on canvas, 160, 5x207 cm, Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts.



**Fig.29** Henri Gervex, *La Communion à l'église de la Trinité*, 1877, oil on canvas, 402x291 cm, Dijon, Musée des Beaux Arts.



**Fig.30** Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Un jour de Première Communion*, 1888, essence drawing, 63x36 cm, Toulouse, Musée des Augustins.



**Fig.31** Adolphe Willette, *Parce Domine*, 1884, oil on canvas, 200x390 cm, Paris, Musée de Montmartre.

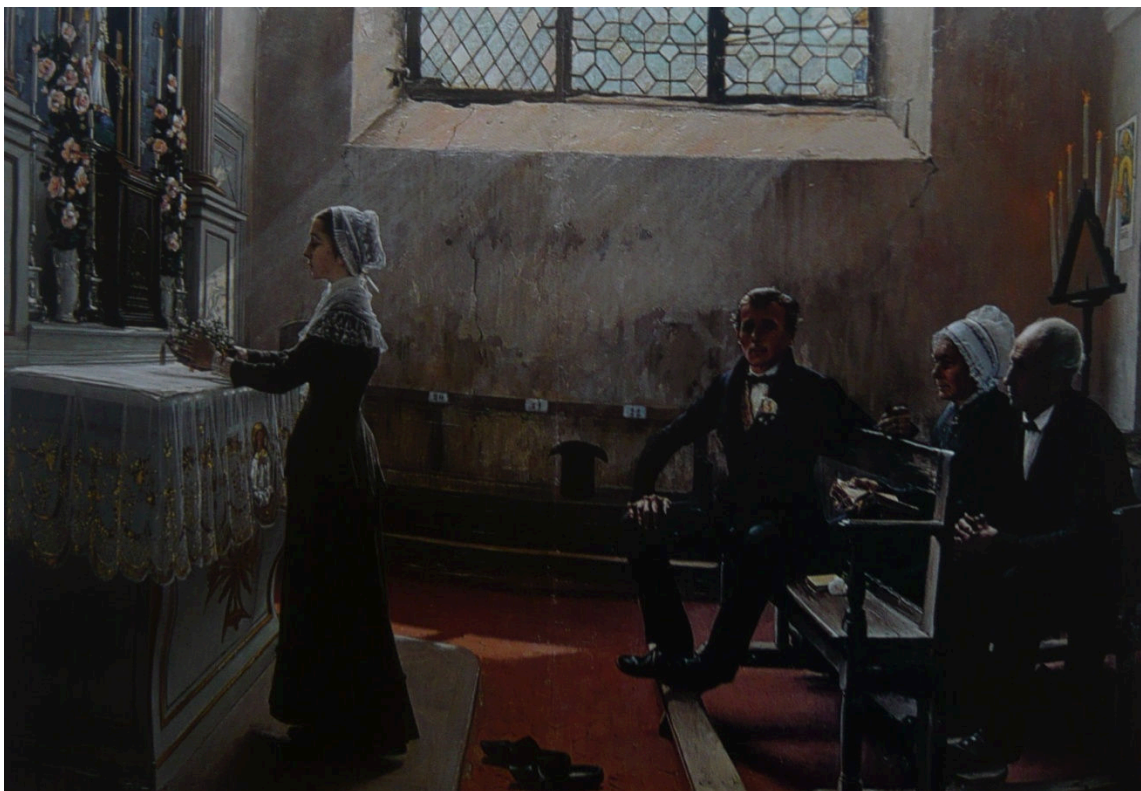


**Fig.32** Henry Royer, *Communiantes*, 1896, oil on canvas 62x46 cm, Paris, Conservé à la réserve de la section des Cartes et Plans de la Bibliothèque National de France.



**Fig.33** Charles Baugniet, *La Prière de la mariée*, 1870, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Bordeaux, Musée Goupil.





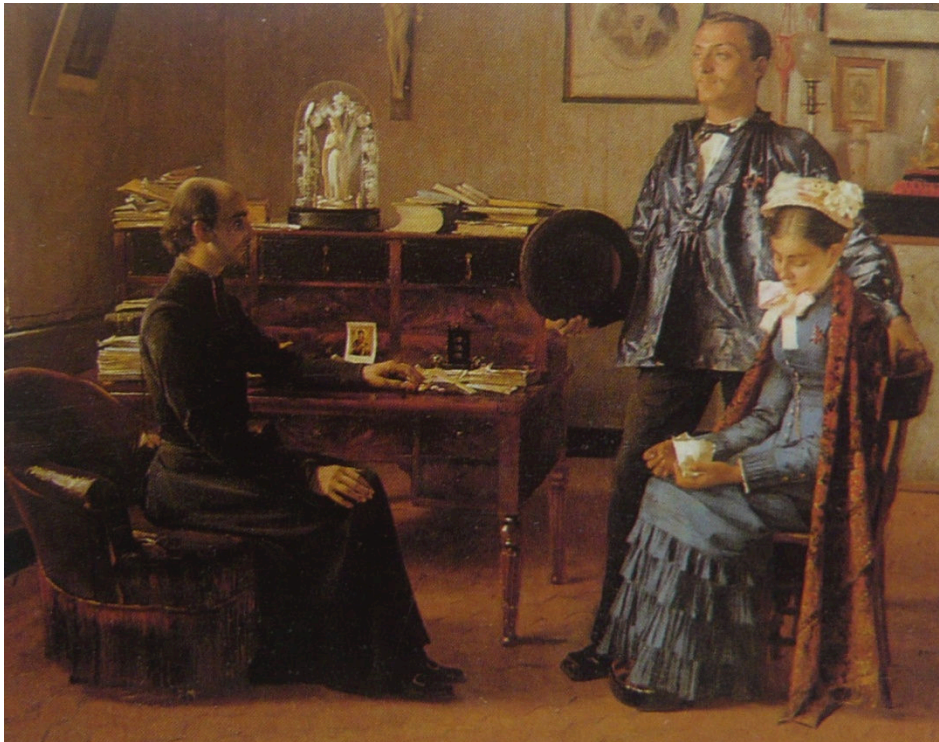
**Fig. 34** Eugène Buland, *La Restitution à la Vierge le lendemain des nocés*, 1885, oil on canvas, 146, 5x211, 1 cm, Caen, Musée des Beaux Arts.



**Fig. 35** Alfred Stevens, *Le bain*, 1867, oil on canvas, 73x92 cm, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



**Fig. 36** Auguste Toulmouche, *Le Fruit défendu*, 1865, oil on canvas, 63x48 cm, New York, Sotheby's.



**Fig.37** Eugène Buland, *Le Lendemain de la nuit des nocés*, 1884, oil on canvas, 112 x 150, 5 cm, Paris, Étude Briest (now Artcurial).



**Fig.38** Melanie Besson, *Hésitation*, 1896, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from the Documentation, Musée d'Orsay. The source of the image was not indicated.



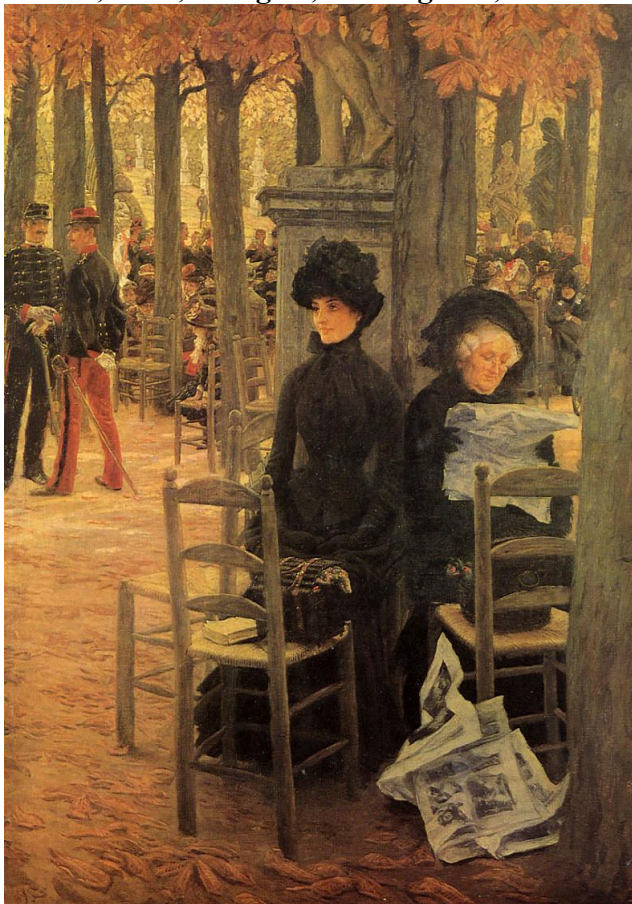
**Fig.39** Joseph Frappa, *Mariage d'inclination*, 1891, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from the *Catalogue officiel de la société nationale des Beaux Arts: Exposition de 1891*, 1891, p. 72.



**Fig.40** Auguste Loustaunau, *Un mariage de raison*, 1878, oil on canvas, 66, 7x95, 5 cm, New York, Sotheby's.



**Fig.41 William Quiller Orchardson, *Marriage of convenience*, 1883, 104, 8 x 154, 3 cm, Glasgow, Kelvingrove, Art Gallery and Museum.**



**Fig.42 James Tissot's *Sans dot*, 1883-1885 oil on canvas 146, 7x105 cm, Toronto, Collection Mr and Mrs Joseph Tannenbaum.**



**Fig.43** Henri Gervex, *Retour de bal*, 1879, oil on canvas, 158 x 203, 8 cm, private collection, repr. from J.C. Gouvernec, *Henri Gervex 1852-1923, Exhibition Catalogue*, 1992, p.110.



**Fig.44** Jules-Arsène Garnier, *Le flagrant délit or Constat d'adultère*, 1883, oil on canvas, 55, 5x90, 8 cm, Granville, Ohio, Denison University Art Gallery.



**Fig. 45** Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret, *La bénédiction des jeunes époux*, 1881, oil on canvas, 99x142, 2 cm, Moscow, The State Pushkin Museum.



**Fig.46** Henri Gervex, *Le Mariage civil*, 1881, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Paris, Mairie du 19<sup>ème</sup>.



**Fig.47 Ernest-Ange Duez, *L'Heure de la tétée des enfants débiles à la Maternité*, 1895, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré*, 4 mai 1895, p. 286.**



**Fig.48 Jean Geoffroy, *Le Dispensaire de la Goûte de Lait à Belleville*, 1901, oil on canvas, 256x563 cm, Paris, Musée de l'Assistance public, (central panel).**





**Fig.49** Pharaon de Winter, *Au dispensaire*, 1888, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré* 3 novembre 1888, p. 280-281.



**Fig.50** Jean Geoffroy, *À la crèche*, 1897, oil on canvas, 214x138 cm, Rochefort, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire.



**Fig.51** Albert Demarest, *Devant la maternité*, 1892, oil on canvas 172, 5x137, 5 cm, Paris, Musée d'Assistance publique.



**Fig. 52** Charles Baude, *Aux enfants trouvés: L'abandon*, drawing for *L'Illustration*, 25 March 1882, p. 194-195.



**Fig.53** Charles Baude, *Aux enfants assistés. Le change*, 1882, drawing for *L'Illustration*, 25 mars 1882, p.107.



**Fig.54** Timoléon Lobrichon, *Le Pesage aux enfants assistés*, 1895, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré*, 4 mai 1895, p.285.



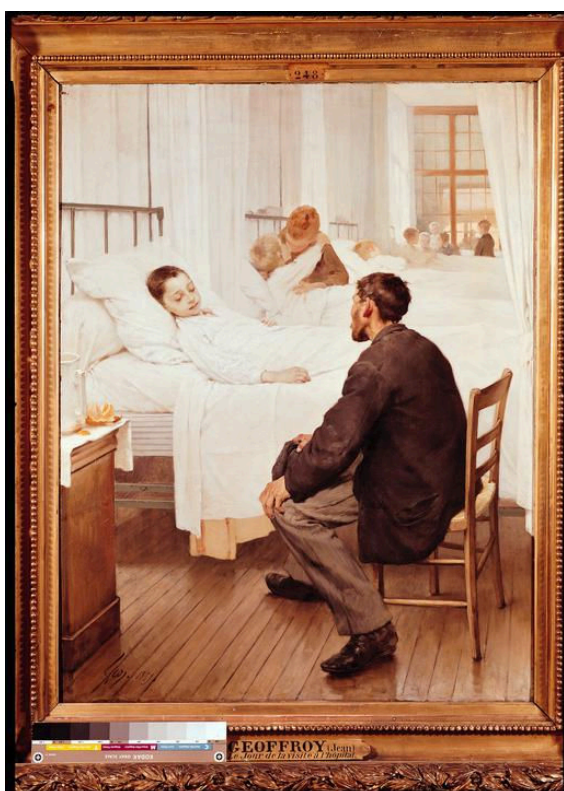
**Fig.55** David Estroppey, *Le Concours de bébés*, 1886, drawing for *Le Monde illustré*, 8 May 1886, p. 292.



**Fig.56** André Brouillet's, *Le Vaccin de croups*, 1895, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Monde illustré*, 4 mai 1895 p.284



**Fig.57 Jules Scalbert, *La Vaccination gratuite à Paris: Mairie du Panthéon*, 1890, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *L'Illustration*, 3 May 1890, p. 401.**



**Fig.58 Jean Geoffroy, *Jour de visite à l'hôpital* 1889, oil on canvas 120x80 cm, Vichy, Dépôt des Musées Nationaux.**



**Fig.59** Edouard Dantan, *La Toilette*, 1892, oil on canvas, 118x130 cm, location unknown, repr. from Sophie de Juvigny, *Edouard Dantan*, 2002, p.100.



**Fig.60**, Edmond-Alphonse Defonte, *Le Petit Bain*, 1896, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Le Panorama; Salon 1896*, no page number.



**Fig.61** Norbert Goenette, *La toilette de Jean Guérard*, 1889, oil on canvas, 144, 2x115, 3 cm, New York, private collection.



**Fig. 62** Edouard Debat-Ponsan, *Avant le bal*, 1886, oil on canvas, 87, 5x65 cm, Tours, Musée des Beaux Arts.



**Fig. 63** Antoine-Emile Plassan, *Retour de la nourrice*, 1870 repr. from *L'Illustration*, 18 June 1870, p. 437.



**Fig.64** Georges Moreau de Tours, *Mme et Mlle X.*, 1887, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from Bournand, *Le Salon de 1887*, 1987, p.16.





**Fig.65** Berthe Morisot, *Nourrice et bébé*, 1880, oil on canvas, 50x61 cm, Washington D.C, private collection.



**Fig.66** Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Maternité*, 1886, oil on canvas, 54x74 cm, Saint Petersburg, Florida, Museum of Fine Arts.



**Fig.67 Alfred Roll, *Louise Cattell, nourrice*, 1892, oil on canvas, 64x157 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux Arts.**



**Fig.68, Eugène Carrière, *Nativité*, 1903-1905, oil on canvas 279x350 cm Paris, Musée du Petit Palais.**



**Fig. 69, Fernand Pelez, *Maternité*, 1881, oil on canvas, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *Album artistique et biographique 1881-1886*, 1886 no page number.**



**Fig.70 William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Charité*, oil on canvas, 196x117 cm, 1878, New York, private collection.**



**Fig.71 William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Alma Parens*, 1883, oil on canvas, 233x139 cm, M.S. Rau Antiques, New Orleans, Louisiana.**



**Fig.72** Marcel Baschet, *Ma famille*, 1898, oil on canvas, 300x240 cm, Poitiers, Musée de Sainte Croix.



**Fig.73** Henri Brispot, *Le Repas de baptême*, 1884, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from Louis Enault, *Paris Salon 1884*, 1884, no page number.



**Fig.74** Henri Brispot, *Le Roi boit*, 1892, medium, dimensions and location unknown, repr. from *L'Illustration*, 7 mai 1892, p.20.



**Fig.75** Gustave Boulanger, *Les Vertus civiques*, 1878, preparatory work for the Mairie du XIIIe, oil on canvas, 82x97 cm, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais.



**Fig.76** Maurice Chabas, *Le Repas de noce*, 1889, preparatory work for the Mairie of the XIVe arrondissement 29,6 x 64,2 cm, oil on canvas, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais.



**Fig.77** Maurice Chabas, *Promenade en famille ou La Famille ou Le Repos de travailleurs*, preparatory work for the Mairie of the XIVe arrondissement, oil on canvas, 29,5x64, 2 cm, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais.





**Fig.78 Victor Prouvé, *La Vie*, 1897, oil on canvas, estimated dimensions of stairwell 2,5 x 18 m, Haute de Seine, Mairie d'Issy les Moulineaux.**



**Fig.79** Victor Prouvé, *La Joie de vivre*, 1904, huile sur toile 266x514 cm, Nancy, Musée des Beaux Arts.



**Fig.80** Jean-Charles Cazin, *La Journée faite*, 1888, oil on canvas, 196x166, 5 cm, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



**Fig.81** André Gill, *L'homme ivre*, 1881, oil on canvas, 225x205 cm, location unknown, repr. from Gabriel Weisberg, *Montmartre and the making of Mass culture*, 2001, p.82.



**Fig.82** André Gill, *Le Nouveau-né*, 1881, oil on canvas, 210x170 cm, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais.



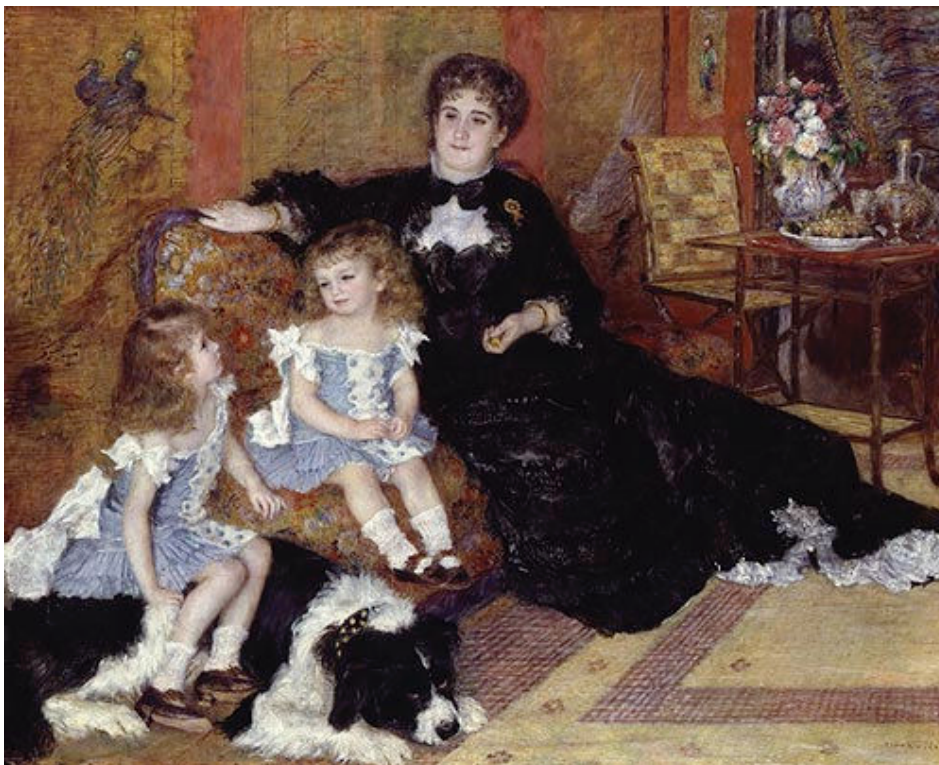
**Fig.83** Eugène Carrière, *Gabriel Séailles et sa fille*, 1893, oil on canvas, 114x 89, 5 cm, Strasbourg, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain.



**Fig.84** Eugène Carrière, *Alphonse Daudet et sa fille*, 85x115 cm 1890, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



**Fig.85** Léon Bonnat, *Pasteur et sa petite fille* 1886, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Musée Pasteur, Paris.



**Fig.86** Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Madame Charpentier et ses enfants* 153,7x190, 2 cm, 1878, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**Fig.87 Eugène Carrière, *La famille Lerolle*, 1891, oil on canvas, 158,5 x 221,5 cm, Paris, collection Nelly Carrière.**



**Fig.88 Eugène Carrière, *La famille Chausson*, 1895, oil on canvas, 278 x 237 cm, Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts.**