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Workers' Daughters on the Outer Boulevard (Illustration for Emile Zola's "L'Assommoir"),
1877/78

Author(s): Pierre Auguste Renoir

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Workers' Daughters on the Outer Boulevard
(Illustration for Emile Zola's "L'Assommoir"), 1877/78

Pen and brown ink, over black chalk, on ivory laid paper;
275 x 399 mm (10³/₁₆ x 15³/₄ in.)
REGENSTEIN COLLECTION, 1986.420

A contemporary once remarked of Pierre Auguste Renoir that "he always looks on the bright side."¹ Certainly, this artist's extraordinary popularity today can be explained in part by his preference for bright color and appealing subject matter. Given his commitment to visual optimism, Renoir faced no small challenge when in 1877 he set about providing illustrations for one of the most grittily realistic novels of his day, Emile Zola's *L'Assommoir*.

Although regarded by many of its contemporary readers as an unforgivable lapse of taste on the part of its author, *L'Assommoir* aroused a great deal of interest and firmly established Zola's reputation as a writer of the Naturalist school. As Zola put it, he aimed to depict "morality in action" by telling the story of "the inevitable downfall of a working-class family in the polluted atmosphere of our urban areas."² Written largely in the crude metaphors and slang of slum dwellers themselves, the novel revealed to contemporary Parisians an aspect of current life that most found frightening and repulsive.

L'Assommoir was published in 1877 by Renoir's patron, the publisher Georges Charpentier; the first illustrated edition was issued the following year. Zola himself was involved in selecting the artists for this project, and approached his old acquaintance Renoir to provide drawings for four scenes in the novel. Renoir's preference for creating images of beauty made the illustration of the particularly seedy passages of the novel problematic, and some of the resulting drawings lack conviction. However, a lively scene toward the end of the tale provided a more inspiring, if still bittersweet, subject for his fourth and highly successful drawing, *Workers' Daughters on the Outer Boulevard*, now in the Regenstein Collection.³

In this passage of the novel, the reader meets for the first time the precocious beauty Nana, daughter of the laundress Gervaise, who is the book's protagonist. Nana, a voluptuous and high-spirited teenager, would eventually

become the subject of Zola's novel *Nana* (1880), in which she evolves into a ruthless courtesan. In Renoir's light-filled pen-and-ink drawing, however, there is still a sense of Nana's innocence, as she escapes her tenement for a Sunday-afternoon walk on the outer boulevards with her friends. Zola's text represents the episode as follows:

Amid the slow, dull crowd between the spindly trees, they rushed along. . . . Their flying dresses trailed behind them their youth and innocence, they displayed themselves for all to see in the glaring light with the coarseness and obscenity of street urchins, provocative and delicious as virgins returning from the bath with their hair still damp.⁴

Renoir's first attempt at illustrating Zola's compelling word picture was a loose wash drawing that probably proved too subtle and sketchy for reproduction.⁵ The artist's second attempt, the Chicago sheet is rendered in layered strokes of warm, brown ink. It is one of the most important drawings the artist produced during the years of high Impressionism. Here, Renoir gently subverted the dark undertones of Zola's text: While the novelist had seen the blossoming of Nana's physical beauty as the starting point for her eventual loss of innocence, Renoir's interpretation shows the girl and her friends as brash yet graceful. Full of youth and energy, they revel in the bright sunlight and in their own good looks. The artist used varied networks of fine lines to create a shimmering surface in which details and contours dissolve. While Nana's future may be clouded, her pleasure in the moment is radiant. M. T.



5. 1998.693.
 6. Murphy (note 1), p. 99.
 7. For more on the religious evocations in Millet's drawings, see Robert Herbert, *Jean-François Millet*, exh. cat. (London, 1976), pp. 152–54.

31. JEAN BAPTISTE CAMILLE COROT, *The Abbot Jouveau, Curate of Coubron, 1875*, pp. 72–73

- As quoted in Ian Barras Hill, "Jean Baptiste Camille Corot: A Centenary Appraisal," *The Connoisseur* 189 (June 1975), p. 100.
- 1922.410.
- For more on the issue of photography and portraiture during this period, see Heather McPherson, "Courbet and Baudelaire: Portraiture Against the Grain of Photography," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 128 (1996), pp. 223–36; and David C. Ogawa, "Conditions of Beholding: Images of Femininity in the Work of Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 1999), chap. 3.
- According to letters by Corot to Madame Gratiot cited in Etienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Corot: Raconté par lui-même* (Paris, 1924), vol. 2, pp. 94–99.

32. GUSTAVE MOREAU, *Portrait of Eugène Lacheur*, 1852, pp. 74–75

- Pierre Louis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 1995), p. 22.
- Geneviève Lacambre, *Gustave Moreau: Between Epic and Dream*, exh. cat. (Chicago, 1999), pp. 46–47.
- Robert Rosenblum, "Ingres's Portraits and their Muses," in Gary Tinterow and Philip Conisbee, eds., *Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch*, exh. cat. (New York, 1999), pp. 5–7.
- For more on these copies after Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, see Larry J. Feinberg, "Gustave Moreau and the Italian Renaissance," in Lacambre (note 2), pp. 5–13.

33. GUSTAVE MOREAU, *Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra*, c. 1876, pp. 76–77

- As quoted in Douglas W. Druick, "Moreau's Symbolist Ideal," in Geneviève Lacambre, *Gustave Moreau: Between Epic and Dream*, exh. cat. (Chicago, 1999), p. 35.
- As quoted in Julius Kaplan, *The Art of Gustave Moreau: Theory, Style, and Content* (Ann Arbor, 1982), p. 67.
- As discussed in Larry J. Feinberg, "Dossier: Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra," in Lacambre (note 1), p. 139.
- Ibid.*, pp. 140–41.

34. PIERRE AUGUSTE RENOIR, *Workers' Daughters on the Outer Boulevard, 1877/78*, pp. 78–79

- Guy de Maupassant, as quoted in Douglas W. Druick, *Renoir* (Chicago, 1997), p. 31.
- Emile Zola, as quoted in Druick (note 1), p. 31. For further discussion of Zola's work, the Naturalist school, and the connection of these writers to Renoir, see *ibid.*, pp. 30–36.
- The other three scenes Renoir illustrated from *L'Assommoir* are: "La Loge des Boche," "Le Père Bru dans la neige," and "Lantier et Gervaise." These are reproduced in the first illustrated edition of the novel, published by Marpon and Flammarion; see Emile Zola, *L'Assommoir* (Paris, 1878), pp. 137, 193, and 273, respectively. The location of the original drawings is unknown.
- Emile Zola, *L'Assommoir*, trans. by L.W. Tancock (Harmondsworth, England, 1970), p. 343.
- See Michel Drucker, *Renoir* (Paris, 1944), p. 38, ill.

35. PIERRE AUGUSTE RENOIR, *On the Terrace of a Hotel in Bordighera: The Painter Jean Martin Reviews His Bill, 1881*, pp. 80–81

- For information on their trip, which took the brothers from the south of France to Algeria, see John Rewald, "Auguste Renoir and His Brother," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 27 (Mar. 1945), p. 186.
- Quoted in Douglas W. Druick, *Renoir* (Chicago, 1997), p. 40.
- Although Edmond Renoir wrote the story in 1881 and his brother illustrated it at the same time, their collaboration did not appear in print until 1883. "L'Etiquette" was published in two parts in *La Vie moderne*, on Dec. 15, 1883, and Dec. 29, 1883. The Chicago drawing appears in the first part, on p. 803.
- For further discussion of Renoir's strategy regarding the Salon and the positioning of his work, see Druick (note 2), pp. 41–45.

36. GEORGES PIERRE SEURAT, *Study of Trees, 1884*, pp. 82–83

- For illustrations of all studies related to the *Grande Jatte* project, see André Chastel, *L'opera completa di Seurat* (Milan, 1972), where the black-and-white drawings are illustrated as nos. D14–D41.
- Robert L. Herbert, *Seurat's Drawings* (New York, 1962), p. 106.
- The other pure tree study is in a private collection in Paris. It is reproduced in Chastel (note 1), no. D16.

37. PAUL GAUGUIN, Recto: *Portrait of Charles Laval and Other Sketches, 1887*; verso: *Figure Studies from Martinique, 1887*, pp. 84–85

- Paul Gauguin to his wife, Mette Gauguin, late Mar. 1887, in Victor Merlhès, ed., *Correspondence de Paul Gauguin* (Paris, 1984), pp. 147–48, letter 122.
- Paul Gauguin to Emile Schuffenecker, July 1887, in Merlhès (note 1), pp. 156–57, letter 129.
- Many years afterward, in 1895, the sheet was part of a group of works that Gauguin consigned to dealer Francisco "Paco" Durrio when he left for his second and final trip to Tahiti, a voyage from which he never returned. On Gauguin's life and work in Martinique, see Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers, *Paul Gauguin: Pages from the Pacific*, exh. cat. (Auckland, 1995), pp. 12–13 and no. 3; and Roger Cucchi, *Gauguin à la Martinique* (Vaduz, Liechtenstein, 1979).

38. HENRI EDMOND CROSS, *Three Men, Half-length ("Trois Hommes en buste"), 1895/1900*, pp. 86–87

- 1983.513; Isabelle Compin, *H. E. Cross* (Paris, 1964), no. 31, ill.; Scott Schaefer in Richard Brettell, et al., *A Day in the Country: Impressionism and the French Landscape*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles/New York, 1984), no. 136, color ill.
- For these portraits, see Compin (note 1), nos. 1–6, ill.; and Françoise Baligand et al., *Henri-Edmond Cross 1856–1910*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1998), nos. 1–4, color ill. Cross is no relation to Eugène Delacroix (see cat. no. 29).
- For these prints, see Compin (note 1), pp. 337–39, ill.; Baligand et al. (note 2), nos. 59–60, color ill., and pp. 105–10, ill. For a discussion of Cross's anarchist lithograph *L'Errant*, see John Hutton, "Les Prolos Vagabondent": Neo-Impressionism and the Anarchist Image of the Trimarqueur," *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990), pp. 300–302, fig. 7.
- I am grateful to James A. Bergquist for bringing this monotype to my attention, and also to its owner, Samuel Josefowitz, for kindly giving me permission to publish it. In its measurements, the monotype corresponds with lot 25 ("*Au Spectacle*") in Paris, Hôtel Drouot, *Henri-Edmond Cross: Ancienne Collection Félix Fénéon* (Oct. 15, 1980). The Regenstein monotype corresponds with lot 23 ("*Trois Hommes en buste*") in the same sale.
- Although there are numerous preparatory studies and sketchbooks by Cross, his draftsmanship has been little studied. See John Rewald, ed., *H. E. Cross: Carnet de dessins*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1959); and Isabelle Compin, "Henri-Edmond Cross et les primitifs italiens: Le Voyage de 1908," in *Hommage à Michel Lacotte: Etudes sur la peinture du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance* (Milan/Paris, 1994), pp. 616–38. For other examples of Cross's drawings, see Compin (note 1), pp. 341–42, and Paris (note 4), passim.
- For the most comprehensive discussion of Degas's monotypes, see Eugenia Parry Janis, *Degas Monotypes: Essay, Catalogue & Checklist*, exh. cat. (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); and Jean Adhémar and Françoise Cachin, *Degas: The Complete Etchings, Lithographs and Monotypes*, trans. by Jane Brenton (New York, 1974). As there is no recorded friendship or even acquaintance between the two artists, it is unclear as to how Cross would have had access to Degas's monotypes, which the older artist rarely exhibited and showed only to his closest friends. One possibility is that Camille Pissarro, who was a friend of both men and who executed monotypes himself, may have instructed Cross in the technique and shown him examples by Degas.
- This suggestion was first put forward by Andrea Honore, former Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Prints and Drawings, The Art Institute of Chicago (curatorial files), who noted striking similarities with photographs taken of Degas in profile in the mid-to-late 1890s. For pertinent examples, see Malcolm Daniel, *Edgar Degas, Photographer*, exh. cat. (New York, 1998), esp. figs. 10 and 15. More recently Richard Kendall (in conversation with Laura M. Giles, Oct. 1999) has supported this idea, drawing attention to a sketch (dated 1908) by Paul Helleu of a similarly profiled Degas, shown attending an art auction in 1908 (see Ann Dumas, "Degas and The Collecting Milieu," in Ann Dumas et al., *The Private Collection of Edgar Degas*, exh. cat. [New York, 1997], p. 110, fig. 126).

39. WALTER RICHARD SICKERT, Recto: *The Old Bedford, c. 1894*; verso: *The Gallery of the Old Bedford, c. 1894*, pp. 88–89

- William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories* (New York, 1937), vol. 1, p. 169.
- Wendy Baron and Richard Shone, eds., *Sickert: Paintings*, exh. cat. (London/New Haven, 1992), no. 16. For other painted versions of the subject, see also nos. 17–18.

40. JOAN MIRO, *The Kerosene Lamp, 1924*, pp. 90–91

- As quoted in Evan Maurer, "The Kerosene Lamp and the Development of Miró's Poetic Imagery," *The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 12, 1 (1985), p. 69.
- Carolyn Lanchner, *Joan Miró*, exh. cat. (New York, 1993), pp. 22, 34. See also Jacques Dupin, "The Birth of Signs," in *Joan Miró: a Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York/New Haven, 1987), pp. 30–40.
- Maurer (note 1), p. 61.
- Such an alchemical vessel figures prominently in the center panel of Hieronymus Bosch's painting *Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1500; Madrid, Museo del Prado). For more on the concept of alchemy and alchemical vessels, see Laurinda S. Dixon, *Alchemical Imagery in Bosch's 'Garden of Earthly Delights'* (Ann Arbor, 1981); and Robert J. Belton, *The Ribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary, 1995).