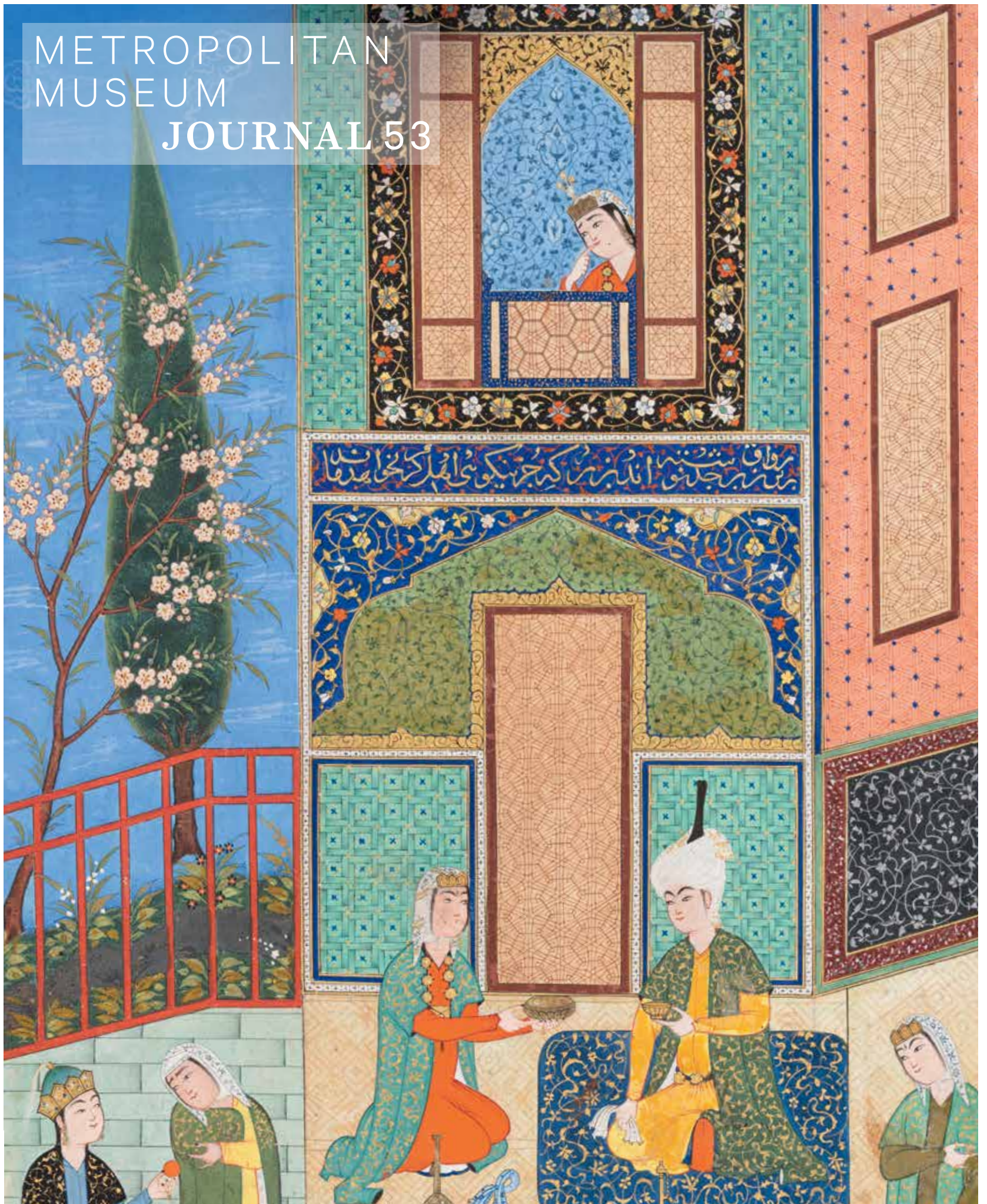


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Opposite: Attic red-figure bell-krater attributed to the Persephone Painter. Greek, ca. 440 B.C. Terracotta, H. 16½ in. (41 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1928 (28.57.23)

*For Joan Mertens*

IN HONOR OF HER YEARS OF DEDICATION TO THIS PUBLICATION  
AND HER EXEMPLARY ERUDITION, GENEROSITY, AND WIT



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### ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*

MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

*Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.*

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**GEORGE D. SUSSMAN**

## The Wet Nurse in Daumier's *Third-Class Carriage*

Honoré Daumier's *The Third-Class Carriage* depicts the interior of an early railway car. In the foreground is a group of four people seated on a wooden bench. Viewed from left to right, they are: a plainly dressed young woman with a brimless bonnet tied under her chin; a baby who lies crosswise in her lap with its head pressed against the young woman's breast; an older woman wearing a hooded overgarment and holding a basket on her lap; and a young boy, apparently asleep, leaning against the older woman's shoulder. Visible in the background are other passengers, who occupy benches behind the primary group. The men wear top hats and, in one instance, a bowler; a couple of women wear head scarves. In short, these individuals constitute a somewhat better-dressed group than the four main figures (see fig. 1).

Art historians have generally considered the four figures in the foreground to be a humble family group.



*fig. 1* Honoré Daumier  
(French, 1808–1879).  
*The Third-Class Carriage*,  
ca. 1862–64. Oil on canvas,  
25¾ × 35½ in. (65.4 ×  
90.2 cm). The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, H. O.  
Havemeyer Collection,  
Bequest of Mrs. H. O.  
Havemeyer, 1929  
(29.100.129) (DR 7165)

*fig. 2* Honoré Daumier.  
*The Third-Class Carriage*,  
1864. Watercolor, ink wash,  
and charcoal on slightly  
textured, moderately thick,  
cream laid paper, sheet 8 ×  
11½ in. (20.3 × 29.5 cm).  
The Walters Art Museum,  
Baltimore (37.1226)  
(DR 10298)



This article argues that *The Third-Class Carriage* does not represent a peasant family but instead belongs to the set of Daumier's paintings depicting working-class occupations—in this instance, the then commonplace occupation of wet-nursing, which tended to the needs of more than half the babies born in Paris each year. It demonstrates that Daumier's lithographs and engravings show a sustained interest in both the new experience of railway travel, which developed over his career, and the widespread practice of wet-nursing, which was still a major component of exchanges between Paris and the surrounding country in the 1860s before the appearance of pasteurized milk and infant-feeding bottles with vulcanized rubber nipples. In addition, the artist must have been aware of common references in literature and illustration to the obtrusive presence of wet nurses, with their sometimes raucous and foul-smelling charges, in railway cars traveling in and out of Paris. Indeed, he had likely witnessed these scenes himself. In *The Third-Class Carriage*, Daumier depicted the reality of traveling wet nurses and of the older women who served as intermediaries between rural wet nurses and urban parents in the same sympathetic manner that he lavished on other working-class occupations in his paintings.

The central group—the young woman with the baby, the older woman, and the sleeping boy—is consistent, with minor differences, across three versions of *The Third-Class Carriage*: a smaller (20.3 × 29.5 cm) drawing on paper with watercolor washes at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (fig. 2) and two larger (65.4 × 90.2 cm) oil paintings on canvas, one at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa (fig. 3), the most fully colored in, and another, somewhat less finished, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> In addition, there are at least four lesser-known versions of the work with the same basic composition but different groups of figures in the foreground: two oil paintings on canvas and two drawings on paper with watercolor washes.<sup>2</sup> This article is concerned with the central group depicted in the three better-known compositions.

#### THE COMPOSITIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMISSION OF *THE THIRD-CLASS CARRIAGE*

In his own time, as today, Honoré Daumier was far more widely recognized for his lithographs, most of which appeared in the satirical daily *Le charivari*, than for his paintings. Indeed, he barely began painting before the late 1850s, when he was nearly fifty years old, and then the paintings were hardly known beyond a small circle of



fig. 3 Honoré Daumier. *The Third-Class Carriage*, ca. 1863–65. Oil on canvas, 25¾ × 35½ in. (65.4 × 90.2 cm). National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (4633) (DR 7166)

fig. 4 Honoré Daumier. *Voilà déjà plus de huit jours qu'il n'est pas arrivé d'accident sur cette ligne . . . ça ne peut pas durer longtemps comme ça . . . je suis fâché d'avoir pris ce train de plaisir! . . .* From "Impressions de Voyage en Chemin de Fer," published in *Le charivari*, November 9, 1855. Lithograph, sheet 10 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 14 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (26.3 × 35.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1922 (22.61.84) (DR 2640)



friends and patrons. A large but little-noted retrospective exhibition of his work in various media at the Galerie Durand-Ruel from April to June 1878, less than a year before his death, provided an essential catalogue for later art historians but did little to expand his reputation as a painter among his contemporaries.<sup>3</sup>

While Daumier's lithographs and woodcut engravings are generally satirical in content, the paintings are not. His paintings of third-class railway carriages are consistent with this pattern, as they are not satirical, but they are unusual among his paintings in that their format derives directly from earlier lithographs. According to Louis Provost's "thematic guide" to Daumier's oeuvre, the artist produced some 130 lithographs and five wood engravings on the topic of railroads, beginning in the 1840s.<sup>4</sup> Two lithographs published in *Le charivari*—on November 9, 1855 (fig. 4), and December 25, 1856—show that Daumier had already developed the basic format of *The Third-Class Carriage* nearly a decade before he completed the paintings.<sup>5</sup> In both lithographs the viewer is placed inside the railway car, looking down its length. Facing the viewer in the foreground is a wooden bench with several figures on it; behind that bench, additional figures occupy parallel benches that face one another. Unlike the accommodations in first- and second-class carriages, these benches have not been upholstered, and no walls separate the car into compartments with two facing benches in each compartment.<sup>6</sup> At the time, trains did not have a central or side aisle that led to

doors at the ends of the car; rather, side doors were used to enter and leave the train for each pair of benches.<sup>7</sup> The interior walls of the third-class wagon were bare, whereas those in the first- and second-class carriages sported striped wall covering.<sup>8</sup>

Daumier's paintings of *The Third-Class Carriage* are usually traced back to a commission from the wealthy American expatriate William Walters in the spring of 1864. Walters was a civil engineer from Baltimore who built several successful transportation companies, including an omnibus line, a steamship line, and railroads. He and his family moved to Paris during the American Civil War. Either he or his agent, George A. Lucas, noticed a satirical woodcut engraving by Daumier of passengers in an omnibus published in *Le monde illustré* on January 30, 1864, and asked Daumier to produce a watercolor of the scene for 100 francs.<sup>9</sup> Walters or Lucas also may have noticed a wood engraving published in the same periodical on January 18, 1862, captioned "Holiday Train, 10 degrees of boredom and bad mood."<sup>10</sup> The engraving depicts four figures seated in a railway compartment, bundled up against the cold. On April 29, 1864, Lucas noted in his diary that he had ordered two watercolors, "1st and 2nd Class," from Daumier; on June 6 he picked up the two watercolors and paid the artist 200 francs. Daumier noted in his accounts for 1864 that he had received payments totaling 400 francs from Lucas for four drawings, first for one drawing (presumably of the omnibus interior), then later for three others.

Thus, *The Third-Class Carriage* now in the Walters Art Museum must have been completed in spring 1864 about the same time as the watercolor drawings of the first- and second-class railway carriages in the same collection.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars disagree on the sequence in the preparation of the Baltimore watercolor and the New York and Ottawa oil paintings of *The Third-Class Carriage*. Most believe that the smaller watercolor was prepared first, in response to Walters's commission, and the oil paintings were developed afterward based on a tracing of the watercolor made by Daumier. The grid lines visible in the unfinished portion of the New York painting point to a transfer of some sort, although they do not indicate the direction of that transfer. Based on X-radiography showing various changes made in the Ottawa composition compared to the Baltimore composition, Bruce Laughton argues that the Ottawa version was begun in 1864 from a tracing of the watercolor, while the New York painting was begun in 1865 or 1866.<sup>12</sup> Michael Pantazzi notes in this regard Daumier's common practice of developing a single composition on several canvases at once.<sup>13</sup> Pantazzi believes, however, that Daumier began to work on at least one of the oil paintings of *The Third-Class Carriage* before receiving the commission for a watercolor drawing from Lucas and Walters. In support of this position Pantazzi cites a letter that the art dealer Arthur Stevens wrote from Belgium to Daumier on September 26, 1864, inquiring about a painting of "a third-class journey" that the poet Charles Baudelaire claimed to have seen in Daumier's studio sometime before he left Paris on April 24, 1864, fleeing his creditors, five days prior to the Lucas commission.<sup>14</sup>

If Daumier did begin *The Third-Class Carriage* before receiving the commission from Walters to depict all three classes of railway carriages, then his purpose in this painting was not to contrast the drabness of the setting and the humble status of the occupants with what was found in the first- and second-class carriages. His primary focus was on the central group of figures in the painting, rather than on the theme of travel status or of strangers randomly thrown together in a modern conveyance. Daumier was, after all, a figure painter. It is unlikely that he selected the central figures of *The Third-Class Carriage*, who are clearly linked to one another and differentiated from the other passengers, merely to fill up a railway carriage. By contrast, there are no groups (or any children) in the Walters Art Museum drawings of first- and second-class carriages, conceived primarily to fulfill a commission.

#### MOTHER OR WET NURSE?

The group of four central figures in the paintings of *The Third-Class Carriage* belongs to a category of heroic working-class figures especially common in Daumier's paintings. They stand in sharp contrast to the figures of the Parisian bourgeoisie in his satirical lithographs and woodcut engravings. The robust, dignified younger woman tenderly cradling a baby calls to mind another painting by Daumier in the Metropolitan Museum of a laundress and child (see fig. 10).<sup>15</sup> Many other instances could be cited of Daumier's respectful idealization of the urban working class, including the famous lithograph of 1834 of a defiant printer standing up for freedom of the press against the censorship of Louis-Philippe, or later paintings of a butcher, a water carrier, two woodcutters, and a towman.<sup>16</sup> Art historians have seen in Daumier's heroic workers the urban equivalent of his close friend Jean-François Millet's classic figures of sowers, reapers, winnowers, shepherdesses, and other rural laborers.<sup>17</sup>

The nearly universal assumption of those who have studied Daumier's *Third-Class Carriage* is that the group in the foreground represents a peasant family. Various scholars and museum websites refer to the figures' "familial bond," "the family [or family group] in the foreground," "the *mother's* hands," and, with a hint of skepticism, "three generations of an apparently fatherless family."<sup>18</sup> Where, indeed, are the adult males in this family group?

Asher Miller asks, in addition, the purpose of their journey, "whether they are setting out or concluding it, and their final destination (city or country?)."<sup>19</sup> These questions are more easily answered for the petty-bourgeois passengers sitting behind the bench in the foreground: they are likely traveling salesmen or Parisian couples en route to or from their native villages on a visit. But why would two poor peasant women, at least a generation apart, be traveling with a baby and a young boy but no husband on a railway car? Daumier suggests an answer to this question in the figure of the young woman in the third-class carriage. Perhaps her most prominent features are her full round breasts, their shape echoed by the bald head of the baby nestled in a nursing position against one of them. Because this breast appears to be covered by her blouse, the baby is most likely asleep rather than nursing, but the infant is similarly sized and occupies a position comparable to that of the nurslings whom Daumier depicted in two drawings of the 1850s or 1860s: *The Soup* in the Musée du Louvre and *The Family* in the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.<sup>20</sup> How does this suggestion of a



nursing position explain the presence of peasant mother and baby in a railway car? Perhaps the woman was not the baby's mother, but its wet nurse.

Rural wet-nursing for the infants of preindustrial cities was a widespread practice in France from at least the early eighteenth century to the First World War.<sup>21</sup> It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that bottle-feeding became a safe alternative to breastfeeding with the development of the germ theory of disease, the sterilization and refrigeration of cow's milk delivered to cities, and the perfection of infant feeding bottles and rubber nipples. Throughout the nineteenth century most urban wives still worked alongside their husbands in artisan and retail trades, while the number of children born out of wedlock mounted rapidly. In these circumstances, urban parents and founding institutions in France found it convenient and economical to place newborns in the country to be nursed for approximately a year by poor peasant women who had recently weaned or lost their own babies. This trade was organized by the administration of public assistance for abandoned children or, for the others, by private or municipal placement bureaus in the cities, where fathers or other relatives of newborns contracted with peasant women who had come to the city seeking infants to nurse. Self-employed male or female rural intermediaries known as *meneurs* or *meneuses* ("leaders" or "guides") escorted the prospective nurses to the city by wagon and later by rail; collected monthly wages and supplies (baby clothing,

soap, etc.) from the parents of children already placed; delivered messages about the babies' welfare (oral reports or notes written by the village priest or teacher); and then conducted wet nurses with their new charges back to the country and delivered wages (net of their own fee) and supplies to established nurses in their territory.

At least half of the 55,000 to 60,000 infants born each year in the department of the Seine (Paris and immediate suburbs) during the 1850s and 1860s were commercially nursed in this manner. This total included abandoned children placed by the administration of public assistance with wet nurses in the country (about 5 percent of newborns); babies placed with rural wet nurses by their parents through the auspices of municipal and private placement bureaus and supervised by the municipal authorities (approximately 25 percent); and an unknown number estimated by contemporary authorities at 11 percent to 17 percent of newborns placed directly by the parents with rural wet nurses. Not included in this total—already 41 percent to 47 percent of newborns—was an unknown number of babies from well-to-do families who were nursed in their parents' homes in the city by live-in wet nurses (*nourrices sur lieu*) who had been imported individually from the country or procured from private placement bureaus.<sup>22</sup> Thus the resort to wet nurses via one source or another was characteristic of all social classes in mid-nineteenth-century Paris, from destitute single mothers to the *haute bourgeoisie*. The majority of customers, given the demographic makeup of the capital, were the shopkeepers and artisans of this still largely preindustrial city where wives worked in small family enterprises that had no place for newborns.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the area of recruitment for wet nurses serving Parisian babies extended farther and farther from the capital as a result of mounting demand from a rapidly growing city, the improvement of roads, and the construction of railroads. By the mid-1860s, when Daumier painted *The Third-Class Carriage*, an increasing proportion of the women who served Paris both as rural and as live-in wet nurses hailed from a poor mountainous region of Burgundy known as the Morvan, located more than 250 kilometers southeast of the capital. In 1909 the trip by rail from Paris to Avalon, a town on the edge of the Morvan in the department of the Yonne, took some five hours.<sup>23</sup> Dr. Charles Monot, a local physician in the Morvan, wrote in 1866 that two-thirds of the new mothers in his canton between 1858 and 1864 departed for

fig. 5 Albert Edelfelt  
(Finnish, 1854–1905). *The Luxembourg Gardens, Paris*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 55¾ × 73½ in. (141.5 × 186.5 cm). Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum (A II 835)

the capital shortly after giving birth to seek positions as live-in nurses. Each woman took her baby with her to Paris as evidence of her capacity to nurse and was accompanied on the journey by a *meneuse*. An important task of the *meneuse* was to bring the nurse's baby back to the country to be nursed or bottle-fed by another woman after the mother was hired. The *meneuses* also trafficked in private placements of Parisian infants whom they brought back from Paris.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the city's administration of public assistance sent hundreds of abandoned "Petits-Paris" every year to be nursed in the Morvan, despite the depletion of its population of lactating women by the mass exodus of new mothers to the capital to become live-in nurses.<sup>25</sup> According to Dr. Monot, every village had three or four *meneuses*. The prefecture of police of Paris, which regulated the wet-nursing business under a national law adopted in 1874, counted sixty *meneuses* who specialized in recruiting live-in nurses in two of the four departments of the Morvan in 1884. Each *meneuse* would come to Paris five or six times a year, each time with one nurse.<sup>26</sup> A Parisian obstetrician who visited the region in 1881 claimed that virtually all the women of the Morvan made two or three stints in Paris as live-in nurses before retiring on their earnings in the country or migrating permanently to Paris with their families.<sup>27</sup>

#### REPRESENTATIONS OF WET NURSES

The wet nurse was a stock figure of nineteenth-century painting and caricature in Paris. Typically, she was rendered as plump, wearing a servant's apron and a brimless cloth bonnet, and carrying a baby in her arms. Parisian painters mostly depicted the live-in nurses they encountered in parks and gardens; such live-in wet nurses were further marked by two long ribbons that hung down their backs from their bonnets. *The Luxembourg Gardens, Paris* (fig. 5) by the Finnish artist Albert Edelfelt depicts many live-in nurses with their charges; in the middle ground on the right, the red ribbons of one nurse are fully visible. Mary Cassatt's *Children in the Garden* (1878; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) shows a nurse sitting in what appears to be a private garden with a baby sleeping in a carriage and a toddler playing beside her. José Frappa, a French Salon artist, painted a scene in a placement bureau for wet nurses: a top-hatted father negotiates with one prospective nurse while others look on (fig. 6).

According to Provost's thematic guide to Daumier's work, the artist executed thirteen lithographs and five wood engravings on the topic of wet nurses.<sup>28</sup> A particularly fine, late lithograph of 1871 shows Adolphe Thiers, the leader of the majority in the newly installed government, in the garb of a wet nurse, cradling the newborn



fig. 6 José Frappa (French, 1854–1904). *Un bureau de nourrice*, late 19th century. Painting, 52 × 62 in. (129.5 × 157.5 cm). Musée de l'Assistance Publique-Hôpitaux de Paris (AP 210)

fig. 7 Honoré Daumier.  
 “Ah! monsieur . . . faut pas  
 lui rire comme ça, vous allez  
 l’faire pleurer!” from LES  
 PAPAS, published in *Le  
 charivari*, February 12, 1848.  
 Lithograph, 9 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 8 $\frac{1}{2}$  in.  
 (24.5 × 21.6 cm). Noack  
 Collection, Ascona,  
 Switzerland (DR 1587)

Third Republic. A street entertainer (*saltimbanque*), clearly intended to represent the artist, leans over and delicately lifts a blanket to view the baby. “Be careful, Madame Majority,” he warns. “It’s devilishly difficult to raise such children.”<sup>29</sup>

Most of Daumier’s prints depicting wet nurses date from the late 1830s and 1840s, and these works have a more generic, satirical message. One lithograph from 1843 is critical of the practice of rural wet-nursing itself.<sup>30</sup> It depicts a bawling baby wrapped in a bag, which is suspended from a peg in a cottage. Through the open top of a Dutch door we see the nurse dancing with a man outside. On the floor below the suspended baby are a jug and spoon, suggesting that the wet nurse, in addition to neglecting her charge, is not even breast-feeding him. While this print represents a hostile strain of educated, upper-class opinion with regard to the largely unsupervised practice of rural wet-nursing, the target of the satire in most of Daumier’s depictions of wet nurses is the Parisian fathers. In a lithograph from 1848 (fig. 7), a rural wet nurse in bonnet, apron, and



wooden clogs holds up a baby to a visiting father—top-hatted, potbellied, and grinning—while cautioning that his expression will make his infant cry.<sup>31</sup> Another shows a prosperous-looking father holding up his baby in the nursery and declaring how the “little cherub” resembles “papa”; a live-in wet nurse, marked by her rimless bonnet and servant’s attire, stands beside a bassinet in the background.<sup>32</sup>

Two of Daumier’s prints of wet nurses evince a deeper knowledge of and interest in the wet nurses themselves and particularly in their movement between city and country. A wood engraving of 1841 shows “wet nurses in a water coach,” a kind of river or canal barge, with the heads of three bonneted women and one baby appearing in the side windows and luggage resting on the open deck above.<sup>33</sup> This mode of transportation could have been used to carry wet nurses to and from Normandy before the railroad became an affordable alternative.<sup>34</sup> Eleven years later Daumier published a lithograph titled *Railroad to Lyon . . . Special Platform for Wet Nurses from Burgundy* (fig. 8). In this scene of a railroad waiting room, four rural wet nurses in bonnets and clogs, each holding or tending to a baby (one is wiping her charge’s bottom), sit or stand before a wood gate that separates them from the rest of the crowd awaiting the train. The wet nurses do not appear to be in the bloom of youth: one is missing several teeth; another has a pudgy neck and cheeks and a grim expression on her face. Nearby a top-hatted older man speaks with a stooped older woman wearing a top hat over her bonnet, whose back is turned to the viewer. Could she be the *meneuse*? The older nurses pictured here are certainly not the young mothers of the Morvan coming to Paris to become live-in nurses. Instead, they may have been hired by the administration of public assistance (perhaps represented here by the older man) to nurse or bottle-feed the abandoned infants in its care.

Wet nurses were a common sight in third-class carriages along the rail lines radiating out of Paris in the 1860s. Writers and other artists in addition to Daumier represented these women, with their bawling and incontinent charges, as one of the unpleasantries of third-class travel—along with unheated cars, unupholstered and crowded benches, and drunken and rowdy fellow travelers. In *Le petit chose* (“The Little Thing”), an autobiographical novel of 1868, Alphonse Daudet described an unforgettable voyage on a third-class railway coach: “It was the end of February; it was very cold. . . . Inside were drunken sailors singing, fat peasants sleeping with their mouths open like

*fig. 8* Honoré Daumier. *Le chemin der fer de Lyon . . . Embarcadère spécial des nourrices de Bourgogne*, from “Physionomies des Chemins de Fer,” published in *Le charivari*, March 23, 1852. Lithograph, 8 1/8 × 10 3/4 in. (20.5 × 27.2 cm). Noack Collection, Ascona, Switzerland (DR 2279)



*fig. 9* Horace Castell (French, 1825–1889). “*Ne nous ennuyez pas avec votre poupon*,” in Ségur 1923, p. 41.



dead fish, old women with their sacks, children, fleas, wet nurses, all the gear of a wagon full of the poor with its smell of pipes, brandy, garlic sausages and moldy straw.”<sup>35</sup>

In *Les deux nigauds* (“The Two Fools”), a young person’s novel published in 1863, the Comtesse de Ségur describes a provincial twelve-year-old named Simplicie, her younger sister Innocent, and their servant-chaperone Prudence packed into a third-class carriage on their first trip to Paris:

The wagon was full; there were three wet nurses, with two nurslings each, a drunkard and a large Englishman with long teeth.

The babies cried, sometimes one after another, sometimes all together. The nurses fed one, changed and rocked the other; the soiled diapers lay on the floor to dry out and to lose their repulsive odor. Simplicie struggled with one wet nurse who placed one of her nurslings in her arms. The nurse would not be discouraged and renewed her attempts ceaselessly.<sup>36</sup>



fig. 10 Honoré Daumier. *The Laundress*, 1863(?). Oil on wood, 19¼ × 13 in. (48.9 × 33 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Lillie P. Bliss, 1931 (47.122) (DR 7159)

An illustration of this scene by Horace Castelli (fig. 9) shows five figures crammed together on a bench: from left to right, an indignant *Simplicie* recoils from a wet nurse wearing an elaborate provincial bonnet; she faces *Simplicie* while holding the soiled diaper of the baby she is wiping. Another wet nurse is breastfeeding her charge, a man in a cap holds his nose, and another in a battered top hat looks on stoically.<sup>37</sup>

Daumier's *Third-Class Carriage* treats the subject of the wet nurse on a train very differently. Here the nurse is young and healthy. Neither she nor the older woman,

clearly the *meneuse*, is a comic figure. This could be a painting of a young mother traveling to Paris to find a placement as a live-in nurse. She brings her own baby along with her to demonstrate to prospective employers her capacity as a nurse and caregiver. Once she is placed, the *meneuse* will bring the baby back to the country to be nursed or bottle-fed by another woman. Another possibility is that *The Third-Class Carriage* depicts a rural wet nurse returning to the country with her new charge and a *meneuse*. The nurse's own baby, the one who induced her lactation, may have died or may have been left in the country with another woman. Police regulations for the protection of newborns required a new nurse to show that her own baby had died, had been placed with another nurse, or had passed six months of age, at which time it was considered safe to wean the child.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of whether we imagine the group in *The Third-Class Carriage* as journeying to or returning from Paris, the presence of these peasant women in a railway car with a baby but no men fits into the model of the wet-nursing business better than into any other explanation. If Daumier had intended to represent a peasant family, why would he have failed to include the father?

That said, the fourth figure in the foreground group of Daumier's painting, the sleeping boy, may seem problematic. Most likely another child of the wet nurse, he appears too old to be the nursling's *frère de lait*—that is, the nurse's baby weaned to make way for his Parisian “milk brother” or “sister.” Thus, the boy has no direct role in the wet-nursing relationship. Still, he does play a part in the larger story of working women, as highlighted also in Daumier's painting *The Laundress*. In that painting, of which three versions exist—at the Metropolitan Museum (fig. 10), at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, and at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo<sup>39</sup>—a woman ascends the stairs from a laundry barge on the Seine to the quay; she carries a bundle of wash in one hand and tenderly holds by the other hand a child who appears to be a girl. The child grips her mother's washing paddle in the other hand. This scene, which Daumier could have witnessed from his apartment on the quai d'Anjou on the Île Saint-Jacques, illustrates how working women were also primary caregivers to their children and had to combine these two roles when alternative child-care arrangements were unaffordable or unavailable. Similarly, the sleeping boy in *The Third-Class Carriage* could be simply an older child of the wet nurse who was brought along on her journey to Paris because there was no one at the moment to look after him in the country. Daumier, who was not a



fig. 11 Gédéon Baril (French, 1832–1906). “Fallait prévenir bourgeois; on y aurait mis du musc!!” in Gédéon [1866], pl. 3

long-distance traveler, could have witnessed this scene on his frequent trips to visit Millet and other artist friends in nearby Fontainebleau, a stop on the way to the wet-nursing region of Burgundy.<sup>40</sup>

One more piece of evidence bolsters this interpretation of the principal group in *The Third-Class Carriage*. Two years after Daumier’s Baltimore watercolor was completed and delivered to William Walters, Gédéon Baril, a French caricaturist, published a collection of fourteen lithographs entitled *Les nourrices* (*The Wet Nurses*). A native of Amiens, Gédéon (as he signed all his work) was living in Paris before 1870 and publishing his work in various periodicals.<sup>41</sup> One print from *Les nourrices* (fig. 11) presents the inside of a cheap railway coach (wooden benches and sides, no compartments) from nearly the same perspective as Daumier’s paintings of *The Third-Class Carriage*. On the front bench, facing the viewer, sit two wet nurses with baskets at

their feet. One holds a bawling baby while the other wipes a baby’s behind. Between them sits a man in top hat, a newspaper spread across his lap; he presses one hand against his ear to shut out the one baby’s cries and holds with his other hand a handkerchief to his nose to defend against the smell of the other infant. The woman changing her baby says to her companion on the opposite side of the bench, “We should have warned the gentleman that we would use musk.” In the rows behind this group at least five similarly dressed wet nurses are visible standing or seated. The two standing nurses hold babies; the seated nurses may also hold babies, but the bench blocks the view. An older woman, who could be a *meneuse*, is visible in the middle ground on the left.

Gédéon’s print testifies to the ubiquity of the scene of wet nurses and babies traveling in cheap railway cars around Paris during the 1860s. It is possible that Gédéon had visited Daumier in his studio and seen the painting of *The Third-Class Carriage* before making his own print, although there is no evidence that the two men were even acquainted. More likely, both artists were inspired by similar scenes of everyday life in the Second Empire: one explored the comic possibilities of the scene, while the other—Daumier this time—presented the dignity of poor peasant women engaged in an essential occupation.

*The Third-Class Carriage* is, then, primarily a painting of wet-nursing, depicting a common occupation in nineteenth-century Paris and environs. Outside of rural cottages or Parisian apartments, urban artists would have been most likely to encounter this activity in public spaces like the parks where live-in nurses brought their charges, the placement bureaus where rural women and urban parents met to match nurses with babies, and the public transit connecting Paris and the countryside, where the wet nurses came from. Daumier’s painting is not so much a comment on a new form of transportation and the intrusion of class distinctions into railroad travel, but one of the artist’s celebrations of the occupations of the working class and of working women—like his painting of *The Laundress*, which hangs near *The Third-Class Carriage* in the Metropolitan Museum.

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## NOTES

- 1 Works by Daumier are identified by their numbers in the Daumier Register ([www.daumier-register.org](http://www.daumier-register.org)), a website maintained by Dieter and Lilian Noack. Readers may view and obtain information on each work discussed in this article by going to this online catalogue and entering the DR number. The three versions of *The Third-Class Carriage* referred to in this paragraph are DR 10298 (Baltimore), DR 7166 (Ottawa), and DR 7165 (New York).
- 2 DR 7109 (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), DR 7178 (Manchester Art Gallery, England), DR 10301 (Galerie Nathan, Zürich, Switzerland), and DR 10303 (Reinhart Collection, Winterthur, Switzerland).
- 3 The most important works in recent decades on Daumier are Laughton 1996 and Loyrette et al. 1999. For details on the Durand-Ruel exhibition, see Loyrette 1999, especially pp. 12–14.
- 4 Provost 1989, p. 108.
- 5 The first (DR 2640) pokes fun at the frequency of accidents on the railroad, while the second (DR 2824) satirizes the extreme cold in the unheated third-class carriages in winter.
- 6 For Daumier's depiction of first- and second-class carriages, see DR 10296 and 10297, respectively, both now in the Walters Art Museum.
- 7 French engineers referred to interior corridors running the length of railway carriages as the "American system" and rejected it out of a preference for shorter cars; Caron 1997, pp. 310–11. See DR 2730 and 2732 for Daumier's depictions of the side doors from the station platform.
- 8 François Caron, a historian of French railroads, argues that the railroad companies deliberately exacerbated the austerity of third-class carriages to discourage travelers who could afford better from choosing the cheapest option. In 1868, 65 percent of passengers traveled via third class, 17 percent via second class, and 18 percent via first class. Caron 1997, pp. 370–71.
- 9 DR 6022 (woodcut engraving) and DR 10294 (watercolor, now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore).
- 10 "Train de Plaisir, 10 degrés d'ennui et de mauvais humeur"; translation from DR 5998. Both third- and second-class carriages were still unheated in the 1860s. Caron 1997, p. 372.
- 11 For Lucas's diary entries and descriptions of his dealings with William Walters, see Lucas 1979, vol. 2, pp. 174, 177–79, and passim; Laughton 1996, pp. 109–11; Pantazzi 1999a, pp. 377–79; Pantazzi 1999b, p. 423.
- 12 Laughton 1996, pp. 113–14.
- 13 Pantazzi 1999c, p. 24.
- 14 Pantazzi 1999b, pp. 427–28.
- 15 Two other versions of this painting may be found at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (DR 7084) and the Musée d'Orsay, Paris (DR 7160).
- 16 DR 133 (printer), DR 10264 (butcher), DR 8049 (water carrier), DR 9075 (woodcutters), and DR 7028 (towman).
- 17 See Laughton 1991, especially chaps. 6 and 7.
- 18 Miller 2016; National Gallery of Canada 2016; Laughton 1996; Faison [1946], p. 4 (emphasis mine); Finocchio 2004.
- 19 Miller 2016.
- 20 DR 10698 (*The Soup*) and DR 10699 (*The Family*).
- 21 The following discussion of wet-nursing in France is drawn from my 1982 book on that subject.
- 22 Sussman 1982, pp. 111–12.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 158.
- 24 Monot 1867.
- 25 Levainville 1909, pp. 280–81; Dupoux 1958, pp. 272–75.
- 26 Préfecture de Police, Paris, 1884, pp. 83–85.
- 27 Bailly 1882, pp. 36–37, 90.
- 28 Provost 1989, p. 89.
- 29 "Prenez garde, madame la Majorité! C'est délicat en diable à élever ces enfans-là!" The lithograph is DR 3893.
- 30 DR 1006.
- 31 DR 1587.
- 32 DR 1581.
- 33 DR 5646.
- 34 See Sussman 1982, pp. 137–51, on wet-nursing in the department of the Eure in Normandy in the early nineteenth century.
- 35 "C'était dans les derniers jours de février; il faisait encore très-froid. . . . Au dedans, des matelots ivres qui chantaient, de gros paysans qui dormaient la bouche ouverte comme des poissons morts, de petites vieilles avec leur cabas, des enfants, des puces, des nourrices, tout l'attrail du wagon des pauvres avec son odeur de pipe, d'eau-de-vie, de saucisses à l'ail et de paille moisie." Daudet 1868, pp. 157–58.
- 36 ". . . le wagon était plein, il y avait trois nourrices munies de deux nourrissons chacune, un homme ivre et un grand Anglais à longues dents. . . . les poupons criaient tantôt un à un, tantôt tous ensemble. Les nourrices faisaient boire l'un, changeaient, secouaient l'autre; les couches salies restaient sur le plancher pour sécher et pour perdre leur odeur repoussante. Simplicie était en lutte avec une nourrice qui lui déposait un de ses nourrissons sur le bras. La nourrice ne se décourageait pas et recommençait sans cesse des tentatives." Ségur 1923, pp. 40, 43.
- 37 The French illustrator Horace Castelli (1825–1889) specialized in wood engravings for young people's books and periodicals. See "Castelli, Horace," in *Benezit Dictionary of Artists*; *Oxford Art Online*, updated October 31, 2011, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/benezit/view/10.1093/benz/9780199773787.001.0001/acref-9780199773787-e-00033564>.
- 38 Sussman 1982, pp. 40–41, 52–53.
- 39 DR 7159 (MMA), DR 7160 (Musée d'Orsay), and DR 7084 (Albright-Knox).
- 40 Laughton 1991, p. 8.
- 41 Gédéon [1866]; Grand-Carteret 1888, p. 644. The date of Gédéon's collection is cited in Grand-Carteret's notice and is also confirmed by an author's inscription dated 1866 in the copy at the University of Toronto Library.

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DR Daumier Register (<http://www.daumier-register.org>)

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