



Théodule Ribot, *A Young Vendean*, 1863, oil on canvas, 56.5 x 47 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

The work of the realist painter Théodule Ribot (1823–1891) was socially oriented and based on people he encountered in his everyday life. In *A Young Vendean* (1863), Ribot paints a full-length portrait of a Vendean adolescent, with equal attention paid to his working attire and stern expression. These elements, along with the boy's stooped posture, stand out against the almost uniform dark background. The subject projects a businesslike attitude as his hand searches

through his pocket, yet there is also a sense of desperation in his eyes. Although the figure is not looking at the viewer, his gaze nevertheless attracts the viewer's attention, conveying a stubborn, persistent and bitter personality. He has already reached the age when most working-class children worked in factories and workhouses or made a living by brigandage. This cunning boy knows how to survive in a city; he knows what is important to have in life and with whom to hobnob. A red purse on his stomach stands out dramatically in this dark painting, highlighting the fact that he works to make a living. Despite the social nature of his job, this boy is represented alone, which, along with the impersonal title of the painting, underscores his solitary existence. The title of the painting, *A Young Vendean*, situates his origins in the Vendée, where tens of thousands of Republicans, civilians and sympathizers were massacred during the French Revolution (1789–99). This reference reveals the revolutionary legacy that this young, independent man is to carry on. Painted in a frank and noble manner, this work presents a working-class man who is fully aware of life's value and who constitutes a vital part of society.

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