



Theodoule Ribot, *The Morning Wash (The Children's Home)*, ca. 1863, oil on canvas, 73.2 x 61 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Theodoule Ribot (1823–1891) was born in the small village of Saint-Nicolas-d'Attez, in France, but as a young adult sought a new life in the Parisian metropolis. However, his enduring connection to his rural roots is apparent in his numerous paintings of the common class. Many of the figures who appear in Ribot's works were family members because he could not always

afford to hire models, but he also found pleasure in painting his loved ones. Working predominantly in oils, Ribot turned to religion and elements of popular culture, such as folk songs and literary subjects, for artistic inspiration. The influence of Spanish painters such as Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) is evident in the monochromatic palette and sombre grey tones of *The Morning Wash* (1863). This work, which has also been exhibited under the title *A Children's Home* or *Orphanage*, depicts young girls washing their hands in a large, reflective copper basin. Watching over them is a teacher who is looking towards the viewer as she stands in a dark doorway. A girl standing to her right similarly gazes at the viewer and has her hands clasped together. The young girl peering at the viewer in the foreground of the image has been identified as the artist's daughter, Louise. The rosy cheeks and bluish socks of the children stand out against the mostly monochromatic palette, alluding to their youth and vitality. The austere atmosphere may represent the reality of working-class children in the state-run schools in Paris, or perhaps it is how the artist imagines the environment of an orphanage might be. Ribot offers us an interesting glimpse into the lives of Parisian working-class children in the mid-nineteenth century.

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