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John Cabot University

Department of Art History

Bachelor of Arts in Art History

Negotiating public and private identities: Berthe Morisot's *The Wet Nurse and Julie* (1879)

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Abstract

The French painter Berthe Morisot (1841-1895) provides a perfect case study to examine the negotiation between the artistic ambitions and the personal identity of a female Impressionist. Although many feminist art historians have argued the ways in which women artists opted for a compromise between artistic practice and social demands, examining this experience, and its impact on personal identity has been overlooked. Hence understanding private and deep inner realities in relation to both context and to one's own stylistic evolution have rarely been taken into consideration. This is the reason why this thesis attempts, first, to look at Morisot's *The Wet Nurse and Julie* (1879) with regards to Impressionism, and in the relation between her claims to inner emotional instability and her dissolution of forms. This internal turmoil is not examined in psychoanalytic terms, but in social ones: it seems to stem in part from the anxiety provoked by social factors such as the wet industry, the anonymity of modern workers and the "cult of true womanhood". The internal struggle that Morisot expresses, in her writings and painted works, and the way in which Morisot tried to find a compromise between professional identity and personal life — which culminates, she states, in becoming an affectionate mother — is analyzed in depth from the point of view of the tensions and negotiations apparent in *The Wet Nurse and Julie*. Indeed, by observing how Morisot emerged professionally in the artistic circles of the late 19th century and how this generated feelings of uncertainty and loneliness allows us to understand Morisot's claim to have found self-fulfillment in marriage and motherhood. For Morisot, public and private identities found their angle of repose in a careful negotiation of self, art and family.

Dedication

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Sarah Linford for having accompanied me through the evolution of this thesis. I am grateful for her deep empathy and for having identified with my academic admiration for Berthe Morisot's artistic renegotiation in the French modern society.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Karen L. Georgi for helping me clarify my initial uncertainties at the beginning of my research and for guiding me in furthering the academic investigation of women Impressionists.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for having me allowed, in the first place, to pursue my academic ambitions and deep interest in artistic studies.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the ways in which Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), a French Impressionist artist of the late 19th century, attempted to negotiate her artistic ambitions with her need for affection. According to Berthe Morisot, the union between the act of painting and the presence of a stable family constituted the way to achieve self-fulfillment.

The sources I used throughout my thesis are mainly drawn from the realm of feminist art history, especially in the first chapter which is entitled "A feminist and post-feminist approach in assessing the renegotiation between the public and private sphere of women artists." In this part of the thesis I analyze the secondary sources relevant to my topic, in which feminist art historians explore the notions of gender, educational constraints and the need for challenging the actual discipline of art history in order to reassess work by women artists. This first chapter is crucial in this as it helps to set the stage and to frame the methodological approaches to the study of women Impressionists, and in particular Berthe Morisot. Judith Butler deconstructs the fixed category of "woman" by debunking political assumptions of a universal basis for feminism.[1] Linda Nochlin instead analyzes institutional restraints preventing women artists from emerging as great artists in the history of art.[2] Griselda Pollock suggests the need for studying art as a "practice," and more specifically as a social totality consisting of interacting processes.[3] It is

[1] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), xxxi.
[2] Linda Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?" in *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader*, edited by Maura Reilly (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 46.
[3] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 4.

certain that the aforementioned scholars, and other important feminist art historians mentioned in the chapter, provide valid alternatives to a less biased study of women artists. However, they do not explore how in the late 19th century women artists' professional realm intertwined with the private one and how the association between these two opposite spheres was reflected in terms of either their personal identity or their artistic practice. In that sense, Berthe Morisot represents a perfect case study to examine the negotiations between and, ultimately, the reconciliation of artistic and personal selves.

In the second chapter, my attempt is to show, from a pictorial point of view, and specifically in the painting *The Wet Nurse and Julie* (Fig. 1)*,* how Morisot adopted Impressionist pictorial traditions to ensure artistic success. David Bomford's *Impressionism. Art in the Making* helps me to explore the specific artistic techniques employed by Morisot. However, it is only by using additional secondary sources such as Nochlin's "Morisot's *Wet Nurse:* The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting" that I can more fully consider personal interpretations of the painting, as linked to Morisot's inner tensions. The latter are due in part to the phenomenon of wet nursing; the growing anonymity of modern society, as Walter Benjamin, T.J. Clark and Charles Baudelaire famously discuss; and, lastly, the "cult of true womanhood" examined by both Stewart Buettner and Barbara Welter. Thus, my goal is to base my research on both artistic and social factors of the late 19th century to formulate a possible line of inquiry into Morisot's internal turmoil as an intersection of social and personal factors.

With regards to the third and final chapter, entitled "Berthe Morisot: between artistic ambitions and 'feminine' values," my intention is to expose how Morisot eventually found harmony in her art, her family life and her personal identity. One of the articles that provided the most useful tools to examine Morisot's reconciliation of the professional and private spheres is

"Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" by Pollock. This text allowed me to explore how women Impressionists managed to marshal popular images of domesticity to assert their artistic agency. In addition, the article "An Image of One's Own" by Anne Higonnet explores Morisot's belief that pictorial self-assertion, which was for her a matter of survival, and family, which contributed to her emotional stability, fostered each other. However, I have found that evidence to be incomplete. This is why I have adopted a multi-perspectival view, as Pollock suggests, to try to explain Morisot's identity issues in terms of public reception, avant-gardist approaches, professional relationships and the commercial sphere, as well as how Morisot emerged in the artistic circles in the late 19th century. Following this analysis, I also attempted to expand upon her inner turmoil provoked by the unstable artistic realm to which she belonged.

I hope that by the end of the thesis I will have provided sufficient evidence from the pictorial, professional and private spheres to show how Morisot eventually managed to reconciliate both artistic fulfillment and emotional stability in a very specific ideological and historical context.

1. A feminist and post-feminist approach in assessing the renegotiation between the public and private sphere of women artists

Feminist art history has a varied collection of "feminisms," or rather feminist art histories, rather than a unified form of feminism. Indeed, starting in the 1970s, numerous issues and concerns have been raised by feminist art historians when addressing the role of women in their particular contexts. These topics can be summarized by the attempt of recuperating the experience of women and women artists; criticizing authorities, institutions and ideologies; and finally rethinking the cultural and psychological spaces of women.[4] Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that these issues have been accompanied by philosophical discourses on debates about identifying the notions of "female" and "gender." To fully understand such a diverse field, I have decided to focus on specific aspects: gender studies; educational obstacles faced by women artists in the history of art; the need for making such cultural injustices visible to everyone by challenging the discipline of art history; revealing the stereotyped categorization of female artists; and finally understanding how they managed to emerge professionally in such a biased context. The main feminist and post-feminist art historians and theorists considered here are Judith Butler, Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock, Rozsika Parker and Tamar Garb. Following this discussion of feminism and post-feminism, I will then focus on the main issues faced, from a professional point of view, by women artists of the late 19th century, in particular the members of

[4] Anne D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2012), 62.

the “Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs” and more specifically women Impressionists. Indeed, by introducing the figure of Berthe Morisot I identify a case study to examine how female painters of the last quarter of the 19th century tried to mediate between the public and private spheres in order to assert themselves as respectable artists while maintaining “female” values.

Feminism and post-feminism: setting the stage

Particular attention must be paid to Judith Butler’s argument in *Gender Trouble.* Her aim is to think of the possibilities of subverting the naturalized notions of gender supporting the machine of hegemony and heterosexual power. In other words, her goal is understanding how to debunk the fixed gender categories. This can only occur by mobilizing those authoritative groups that try to keep gender in place.[5] Her discourse is crucial for feminist debates, as she expressively declares and provides important tools for how to free the category of “women” from biased political assumptions.[6] Indeed, this separate category of women is produced by a series of exclusionary practices which derive from structures of power. The latter prevent women from being recognized as subjects before the law in order to legitimate hierarchy, exclusion or subordination. The reason for this kind of indifference towards women category derives from the political assumption according to which there is a universal basis for feminism. This is to say that women subjects belong to a common and shared experience on the basis of their gender. This gender bias is a consequence of the decontextualization generated by the male-centered and binary structures that establish the feminine as a homogeneous « otherness ».

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[5] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), 46.
[6] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 2.

The biased and erroneous political assumptions on the category of women therefore suggest the limits of identity politics which appear to be completely exclusionary. Identity politics, according to Butler, needs to be criticized for the production of a new form of feminine politics which can receive feminism on other grounds. Therefore, Butler suggests gender should be not be considered as a mere reflection of sex. Instead, gender and sex are independent from one another where the former is seen as a biological and political neutral surface, while the latter is a cultural construction activated on that surface.[7] The notion of gender has been constantly debated by contemporary feminist theorists. However, Butler insists on considering it in terms of its cultural and historical constructive relations which define gender as a shifting and contextual phenomenon.[8] The need for considering a totality of cultural, historical and even social circumstances when defining women is an aspect that will run through this entire thesis.

The aims of rejecting the incomplete definition of women category and focusing on the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections can be reached through coalitional politics. The latter, according to Butler, helps promote coalitional unity and solidarity as prerequisites for political action. To put it another way, the totality of gender can only be obtained by implementing an open coalition that will permit multiple convergences and divergences within the gender category [9]. Indeed, according to regimes of power, there are the so-called “incoherent” gender beings which go against the two intelligible genders: male and female. The latter instead are assumed to have coherent relations among sex, sexual practice and desire. Nevertheless, according to Butler, gender should not be based on a unity of experience but instead on a performative process constituted by free-floating attributes.[10]

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[7] Butler, 8.
[8] Butler, 14.
[9] Butler, 22.
[10] Butler, 34.

Lastly, from a linguistic point of view, Butler believes that the hegemonic structures subordinating and excluding women can be dissolved by specific linguistic practices. For instance, "inversion" which is a critical reading practice valorizes the features of undeveloped sexuality.[11] In addition, the matrix of power can be displaced also by the repetition of its laws which eventually expands the boundaries of what's culturally intelligible by mobilizing gender categories. This mobilization helps us understand that women, and more generally gender, are part of a process which consists of a repeated stylization of the body. Thus, what we take as an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of bodily acts.

In addition to Butler's philosophical analysis, which has deeply shaped the discipline of gender studies, we must also consider Linda Nochlin's essay "Why have there been no great women artists?" when assessing gender issues in the specific field of art history. Nochlin's article was published in 1971, in the midst of the second wave of the feminist movement, inaugurating a vast field of feminist art history. Indeed, by posing the thought-provoking question included in the title, she expresses her willingness to bring to light the "natural" and false assumptions that for centuries have been imposed upon women artists.[12] Thus, Nochlin aims at accounting for their under-representation in art historical writings and cultural institutions.

According to Nochlin, this intellectual distortion in art history is activated by the white, western male viewpoint of the art historian that has proved to be inadequate. In order to contrast this biased viewpoint, is it necessary to recognize that the main reason for which great women artists have allegedly not existed in the history of art is embodied by educational institutions.[13]

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[11] Butler, 27.
[12] Linda Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?" in *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader*, edited by Maura Reilly (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 42.
[13] Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?", 46.

The latter represent the rationalization of the bad conscience of those in power. Authorities are indeed responsible for conditioning and manipulating people's consciousness. This explains why women artists are assumed to have naturally less natural predisposition than their male counterparts. As a consequence, there were educational inequalities that prevented women artists from benefitting of the training offered by the academies of the 16th and 17th centuries. They were not permitted to copy directly from nude models when learning to represent anatomical parts. By denying women artists a fundamental step of every artist's training, institutions were consciously taking away from them the opportunity of producing "great art" and becoming "great artists."[14] The issue of limited access to anatomical studies was prevalent also at the end of the 19th century when the so-called "lady" students were not permitted to draw from nude models in the Royal Academy of London.

Similarly, also Griselda Pollock analyzes, in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art*, this form of "naked power". The latter, which was performed by the academies of art, embodied a well-thought stratagem by which academic establishments differentiated women and men's spheres of activity.[15] As a matter of fact, due to the institutional discrimination and the impossibility of developing the skills needed for rightfully representing human anatomy, women were forced to specialize in minor genres of art. For instance, landscape, portraiture and still life: by no means comparable to history painting which was considered the highest genre of all. In the same period, female painters were hindered also by the fact that most of the awards, prizes and competitions were completely inaccessible.[16]

[14] Nochlin, 53.
[15] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 44.
[16] Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?", 56.

In addition, Nochlin affirms that a further educational obstacle which women artists were forced to face within the field of art was the misinterpretation of human excellence and the notion of the "great artist." From the point of view of the artistic elite, the figure of the "great artist" was believed to possess a form of atemporal power and to be surrounded by a magical aura.[17] Needless to say that this artistic genius was considered to belong only to male figures such as Michelangelo, Raphael and Van Gogh.

As suggested earlier when introducing Nochlin's article, I mentioned how important it was for her to reveal the false consciousness promoted by artistic institutions in order to liberate women from those oppressing cultural and social prejudices. One possible way to fulfill such strong ambition is by challenging the art historical apparatus itself in order to bring to light its distorted analysis of the history of art. The latter has indeed marginalized female production in favor of the male one for centuries.[18] In the essay "Why have there been no great women artists? Thirty years after" Nochlin states that this attempt was made by women artists, art historians and critics from the 1970s on.[19] This was the moment when they realized how important it was for feminist art history to become an emblem of anti-establishment practices in order to "make trouble" and to call into question the marginalizing structures of art history. One of the changes that feminist art historians introduced to the field, was the displacement of the traditional male-oriented notion of "greatness" in art.[20] The shift went from a phallic ideal of greatness to an ideal of innovative, interesting and provocative form of art. One further change regards the impact of theory on the art discourse and specifically gender-based theories.[21] One example is provided by

[17] Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?", 48.
[18] Linda Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists? Thirty years after" in *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader*, edited by Maura Reilly (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 319.
[19] Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists? Thirty years after", 320.
[20] Nochlin, 312.
[21] Nochlin, 312.

Butler's *Gender Trouble,* discussed earlier in this chapter, where she questions the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality and rethinks the most basic categories of human identity.

When discussing the paradigm shift needed in art history, as stated by Nochlin in "Why have there been no great women artists?", we must also take into consideration Pollock's suggestion of combining feminist art history with a Marxist approach.[22] Marxist paradigms are significant for the study of social art history that attempts to rethink the social factors of culture. Thus, according to Pollock, if feminism is combined with social art history it will aim at exploring new areas of social conflict by contesting the definitions of society's ideal reality, or ideology. Through a Marxist approach it is possible to perceive art as a practice, and more specifically as a social totality consisting of interacting processes: an argument which is similar to Butler's previous discussion on the notion of gender. Thus, it is only by perceiving art as a social practice that it is possible to provide complete historical explanations of women's art production.[23] Seeing art as a social practice is a paradigm that Nochlin also approves for the debunking of the believed ideal of masculine artistic genius and for recognizing art as a totality of situations. For example, the latter include the nature of the artwork, patronage, social context and the influence of academic establishments.

Within feminist art history, apart from challenging the discipline itself, it is also crucial to recognize the stereotyped categorization imposed on women artists since the period of the Renaissance.[24] According to Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, women's confinement to the category of "femininity" has been considered a product of patriarchal culture where women's activities represented the anthesis to cultural

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[22] Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art,* 27.
[23] Pollock, 5.
[24] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, "Preface" in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (Pandora Press, Unwin Hyman, 1987), xviii.

activity. The impossibility of seeing existing women of genius is explained by the 19th century discourse based on Victorian ideals. According to these ideals, women's art was biologically determined and therefore considered as an extension of their domestic role in society.[25] Victorian society dictated a rigid division between man and woman's roles where the former was expected to work in the outside world, whereas the latter was expected to simply adorn the house. This potent sexism of course conditioned women artists who were forced to focus on determined subjects and styles that could reflect their innate characteristics, such as grace and elegance. The insistence on the separate social spheres between men and women was not only discussed by Victorian English art critics of the time, such as John Ruskin, but also by French art critics like Léon Legrange. The latter described the quality and specialization of women's art as confined by social structures and thus, conceived their works in pejorative connotations. This explains why the only possible artworks identified with female qualities were pastels, portraits, miniatures and especially paintings of flowers that "embodied" women's inner grace, freshness and socially constructed femininity.

Following the recognition of this separate category of women, the feminist scholars Parker and Pollock also suggest that it is crucial to understand how women negotiated their particular positions to make art.[26] Indeed, it is only by taking advantage of their social, historical and cultural circumstances that these female artists were able to contribute to the current artistic development of their time. This tendency was visible since the early Middle Ages when women successfully worked in the numerous craftmanship centers where medieval art production was conducted.[27] For example, guilds, convents and monasteries were common places where female

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[25] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, "Critical stereotypes: the "essential feminine" or how essential is femininity?" in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, (Pandora Press, Unwin Hyman, 1987), 9.
[26] Parker and Pollock, "Preface", xviii.
[27] Parker and Pollock, "Critical stereotypes: the "essential feminine" or how essential is femininity?", 14.

artists could easily access. Subsequently, during the Renaissance when new identities, positions and ways of training emerged for the artists of the time, women's art practice began to be hindered. This is because they were excluded from recently developed professional workshops. However, women artists such as Caterina de' Vigri or Properzia de' Rossi, who had noble origins, took advantage of their high social position to pass by the normal channels of training which allowed them to become cultured ladies of aristocracy. In particular, it is also important to mention that Sofonisba Anguissola who managed to negotiate her artistic ambitions with feminine social standards by specializing in the art genres available to women and proposing new forms of portraiture.[28] She was famous for creating the so-called "conversation pieces" and contributing to the development of self-portraiture, as a way of self-advertisement. One last example which is worth mentioning to understand how women painters took advantage of the female social establishments, is Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. Indeed, she was drawn into the status quo, as to say Louis XVI and Maire Antoinette's royal entourage of the late 18th century, in order to receive recognition for her role as a portrait painter.[29]

To sum up, the primary points discussed by contemporary feminist art historians can be identified as the importance of recognizing gender-based studies; educational constraints, such as limited access to training; the need for challenging the discipline of art history; the stereotyped categorization of women artists; and finally, the renegotiation of art-production with social expectations of women.

[28] Parker and Pollock, 18.
[29] Parker and Pollock, 33.

Being a woman artist in the late 19th century

Among the main issues that feminist art historians discuss, the way female artists renegotiated their public and private sphere requires particular attention. To discuss this issue, by considering the example of women artists operating in the late 19th century, specifically in France, we will ask how women were forced to partly accommodate social expectations in order to lead a successful artistic career. The "Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs" is a perfect case to analyze this.

The organization was founded in 1881 by Hélène Bertaux, also known as "Madame Léon Bertaux," the name she began to sign her works with following her second marriage. The union consisted of only women artists who annually organized exhibitions in Paris, thus competing against the numerous small clubs and exhibition societies operating in the city at the time.[30] This separate organization was in charge of representing and promoting women artists' professional interests in the art sphere and this was done by extensively showcasing their works. The organization grew so much in importance that by 1890 500 members were part of the union; it started to receive official recognition and be active in the government's commissions on women's education. Although this group was rejected by the socialist and anarchist critics of the time who were skeptical of a possible feminist agitation, huge support was given by the expanding Parisian feminist press, such as *L'Art français*, *La Famille* and the *Gazette des femmes*.[31]

When considering these facts, the following question arises: how did this women's union manage to achieve such unprecedented success? The answer has already been partially answered,

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[30] Tamar Garb, "L'Art Féminin: The Formation of a Critical Category in Late Nineteenth-Century" in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, 1st ed. (New York: IconEditions, 1992), 214.
[31] Garb, "L'Art Féminin: The Formation of a Critical Category in Late Nineteenth-Century", 215.

in theoretical terms: renegotiation. The members of the "Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs" believed that if a woman was willing to produce art, it was fundamental that she conformed in part to the nature and social functions of her category. Thus, from a social point of view, female painters saw themselves in a conservative way: they embodied the preservation of the family and traditional structures.[32] This conservatism was also found in artistic production and ambitions and to prove this, we must consider the hostile cultural period of the time. Indeed, art critics considered the expansion of smaller and unofficial exhibitions as a huge threat to the artistic standards embodied by the official salons of the French Academy. This is the moment when the women's union thought of proclaiming itself as the redeemer of French culture and as a way of bringing stability in a period of doubt. The way it cherished traditional style and subject matter can be seen in their production of "feminine" artworks characterized by natural tenderness, heightened emotions and maternal instincts. Thus, the union embodied both the social idea of woman acting as the guardian of family and the artistic notion of femininity. It is only by doing so that these female painters were believed to fulfil their ideal of a true female whose art was infused with the essence of womanliness.[33]

However, it is important to remember the members of the union still demanded respect for their role as women and strongly rejected the belief coming from the psychological and physiological discourses of the time. According to these, the female brain and the nervous system were suitable only for intuitive, imaginative and emotional functions, by opposition to male functions that were highly analytical.[34] The so-called *art féminin* embodied by the union also refused to accept women's art practice as a mere activity of trivialization and superficiality,

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[32] Garb, 222.
[33] Garb, 220.
[34] Garb, 217.

as it was generally advertised in the female magazines of the time in order to minimize their artistic accomplishments.

Apart from the "Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs," women Impressionists represented another artistic group which is worth considering for the discussion of the compatibility between art and the social role of women in this period. An introduction to this artistic group is crucial for the case study of Berthe Morisot. Regarding the group itself, the main female figures belonging to the Impressionist circle were identified as being Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), Marie Bracquemond (1840-1916), and Eva Gonzalès (1849-1883).[35] The idea of studying women Impressionists dates back to the early 1970s when some of the most praised feminist art historians, especially Linda Nochlin, Nancy Mowll Mathews and Griselda Pollock, started publishing essays on feminist art criticism and art history. In addition, Garb is also very important in this discourse for her published work *Women Impressionists* of 1986; in it she reminds the reader to be mindful not to consider this group as a gender-based "female Impressionism." From her point of view, it is misleading to create a shared identity for four very distinct artists only on the basis of their sex.[36] This is because each of them was related in her own peculiar way to the artistic and political circumstances of the time.

All four were consciously not identifying themselves with one another as they were cultivating strong intellectual and aesthetic ties with their male counterparts. For instance, we know that both Gonzalès and Morisot collaborated with Manet; Cassatt with Degas; whereas Bracquemond is usually associated with Monet. Nevertheless, it is true that they did sometimes associate with each professionally and personally. In addition, one specific aspect that was

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[35] Russell T. Clement, Annick Houzé, Christiane Erbolato-Ramsey, *The Women Impressionists A Sourcebook.* (London: Greenwood Press, 2000), xiii.
[36] Tamar Garb, *Women Impressionists*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 5.

shared among them, and that has been constant throughout the history of art, is of course the struggle for acceptance as women artists.[37] Each of them was in fact attempting to balance her personal life with the artistic demands of their time.

In terms of renegotiation between professional careers and private spheres, women Impressionists managed to assert their agency in the way they assessed modern art from a different perspective and personal experience than that of male Impressionists. This distinct approach can be perceived in how Morisot, Cassatt, Bracquemond and Gonzalès represented sexuality, in terms of sexual difference; modernism, in terms of a tradition normalizing gendered practices; and modernity, understood as a set of major myths representing the new Paris of the late 19th century.[38] According to Pollock, the different treatment of these three notions, conducted especially by Morisot or Cassatt, is visible in three different conceptions of space.

The first type of space is conceived in the common pictorial representation of domestic settings as a way to present women's labor in a typical bourgeois home.[39] The second type of space is referred to the spatial order within paintings and was treated differently than the one used by male artists.[40] For instance, Morisot generally represented a peculiar type of spatial ambiguity by juxtaposing two different spatial systems on a single canvas. The third and last type of space is the representation of specific social settings to which the painter belonged.[41] These social settings are usually defined as "spaces of femininity" where the experience of being a woman is lived as a specific position within the social discourse. Thus, women artists depicted physical centers of society according to how female figures of that time experienced them. For

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[37] Russell T. Clement, *The Women Impressionists*, xiv.
[38] Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, 1st ed. (New York: IconEditions, 1992), 245.
[39] Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity", 248.
[40] Pollock, 249.
[41] Pollock, 252.

example, female subjects, in theatres or cafés, normally would be represented in contained and formal poses because the public domain was conceived as threatening and objectifying through the male gaze. On the other hand, the private domain is a place of refuge, natural tranquility and morality and this is where female figures were represented in perfect syntony with the surrounding environment.

Having defined the different depictions of spaces as perceived by women, it is possible to understand how by using the first type of space, as to say the domestic one, women Impressionists operated differently from their male colleagues. The motives which encouraged domestic representations by women Impressionists allow us to understand how they provided a continuous renegotiation of female social constrictions within their art. Both Morisot and Cassatt, when representing bourgeois women in a domestic realm, filtered this space through a complete self-awareness of women's daily rituals.[42] In addition, women Impressionists were interested in providing a shift from women seen as objects of the look, more specifically of male desire, to subjects of their own looking. In other words, domestic scenes painted by Morisot, Cassatt and their other colleagues, evoke a sense of truthfulness and empathy with the depicted daily rituals. This feature was favored by the inclusion of a shallow pictorial space that provokes a close visual proximity to the painted female figures.[43]

The process whereby women continuously renegotiated their social, sexual and psychic construction of femininity, is in some ways connected to the definition of the "intransigent artist" associated with the Impressionist group. As discussed by the American art historian Stephen F. Eisenman in "The Intransigent Artist or How the Impressionists Got Their Name," artists of the Impressionist avant-garde, operating between 1874 and 1877 had a double political connotation.

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[42] Pollock, 260.
[43] Pollock, 264.

They were considered both as Impressionists, that is to say affirmative and individualistic, and Intransigent, as to say Radical and democratic.[44] For our purpose, it seems wise to consider both the notions of the Impressionist and of the Intransigent artist as similar to the ones embodied by Morisot and Cassatt. According to Thédore Duret, two aspects which were considered characteristic of "impressionism" were the technique of painting, consisting of discrete color notes, and individualism, conceived of as political moderation.[45] On the other hand, the term "intransigence," according to Stephane Mallarmé, can be described as the link between art and politics. In other words, the new art of the period was considered as an expression of a collective impulse and ideology which marked a new stage in social evolution and an attempt to achieve a Radical republic.[46] The individualistic attitude but at the same time collective impulse for a Radical republic can be applied to the sphere of woman Impressionists. The latter were indeed animated by a strong willingness in redefining social roles and spaces of femininity through a personal artistic authenticity.

To conclude, it seems clear that both the "Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs" and women Impressionists offer important case studies for understanding how female artists managed to reconcile professional ambitions in the existing artistic sphere. Their aim was to assert themselves as women of strong will, and not entirely conditioned by the social expectations of the time.

[44] Stephen F. Eisenman, "The Intransigent Artist or How the Impressionists Got Their Name" in *The New Painting, Impressionism, 1874-1886: An Exhibition Organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco with the National Gallery of Art, Washington,* edited by Charles S. Moffett, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and National Gallery of Art (U.S.), (Geneva, Switzerland: R. Burton, 1986), 55.
[45] Eisenman, "The Intransigent Artist or How the Impressionists Got Their Name", 52.
[46] Eisenman, 53.

Berthe Morisot: a case study

In order to thoroughly explore how women, belonging to the Impressionist movement, engaged in that important renegotiation, it is fundamental to dedicate particular attention to the figure of Berthe Morisot (1841-1895). She was perceived as one of the most central members of the Impressionist group and exhibited in seven of their eight shows from 1874 to 1886. According to most critics of the time, such as Georges Rivière or Philippe Burty, Morisot was often described as having "strong standing among other Impressionists," being "so charming and so feminine" and with "an extraordinarily sensitive eye."[47] Therefore, it is clear that although she was recognized as a respectable artist, there was always a hint of gender-biased judgement about her art. This was in part responsible for the internal conflict continuously lived by the artist throughout her life.

Born in 1841, in Bourges, from a prominent family, Morisot benefitted together with her sisters from a complete training in different forms of art, especially painting. This fortunate childhood, together with the numerous relationships that she cultivated with the artists met through her master Joseph Guichard, allowed to her to be included in the artistic circle of the time.[48] Important for her were the suggestions given by the pre-Impressionist artist Edouard Manet, who was also a dear friend and trusted colleague. As aforementioned, she also managed to be part of the numerous Impressionist exhibitions where her work received incredibly high praise.[49] However, prior to these shows she was often hindered by strong moments of self-doubt and torment from which she also suffered throughout her whole life. These periods of sorrow

[47] N. V Brodskaia, "Berthe Morisot" in *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism* (Parkstone International, 2018), 235.
[48] Brodskaia, "Berthe Morisot", 237.
[49] Anne Higonnet, and Berthe Morisot, "Fulfillment 1878/1883", *Berthe Morisot* (University of California Press, 1995), 158.

were sometimes prolonged, such as during the Franco-Prussian war, the loss of her father, and the solitary life she was leading. However, after her marriage to Eugène Manet and eventually the birth of her first and only child Julie, she managed to recuperate confidence in her vocation. This hope eventually allowed her to specialize in different genres of art, including landscapes, cityscapes and most importantly for our purposes, scenes of women, mostly of family members. Nevertheless, the moments of agony characterizing her early life, eventually returned following the loss of her husband and the influenza that eventually lead her to death.

Therefore, it is clear that although Bethe Morisot is often seen as a figure leading a full personal life, her existence was actually characterized by a binary contrast between intellectual rigor and self-doubt or lucid detachment and anxiety.[50] This internal conflict is often linked to the struggle between social and artistic demands which allows us to understand why she did not compromise her art or sacrifice her social position to appease convention. This torment is also clearly exposed in the numerous letters she exchanged with her family and friends.[51]

The reason why I decided to focus on this artist is linked to the complexity of the figure due to the tormented existence and continuous struggle between art and personal life. This case study presents one "solution" to the issue of women artists in the late 19th century, one way to connect artistic professions to social demands so that both can be fulfilled. The following chapter discusses, through visual analysis, how that renegotiation took place in Morisot's paintings, specifically in *The Wet Nurse and Julie.* The third and last chapter instead analyzes how Morisot's public artistic identity thrived in a way that could partially appease social expectations. In the same chapter, I also analyze how that renegotiation was internally experienced and eventually fulfilled by Morisot. Her inner state will be presented by considering both the

[50] Anne Higonnet and Berthe Morisot, "Preface", Berthe Morisot (University of California Press, 1995), xii.
[51] Higonnet and Morisot, "Preface", xii.

professional relationships she cultivated with her peers, and the thoughts she expressed in the numerous letters exchanged with friends and family members.

Of course, the methodological elements that will eventually lead me to answering how Morisot managed both her public and private sphere in a way that could provide self-fulfillment, are identical to the main issues previously discussed by Butler, Nochlin, Pollock and Garb. When assessing such a research question it is important to keep in mind the notion of gender, the institutional constraints of the time and the need for challenging the discipline of art history. This discipline will more specifically queried by paying more attention to the totality of cultural, social and political circumstances in the larger examination of identity as intersectional.

2. The Wet Nurse and Julie

Morisot's renegotiation between her private life and professional sphere was a matter of constant tension; this is embodied, in both form and content, in one of her most innovative paintings: *The Wet Nurse and Julie* painted in 1879 and now part of a private collection in New York. This oil on canvas incorporates Impressionist brushwork but reflects a major stylistic change that, I would argue, was in part prompted by her inner turmoil between the end of the 1870s and throughout the 1880s. Indeed, Morisot was deeply impacted by her conflicted identity reflecting her shifting roles as devoted mother and professional artist. This internal pressure takes the form of an extreme disembodiment of visual elements in favor of anonymizing impastoed brushstrokes in flurry of all-overness; placing the emphasis on the activity of nursing instead of portraiture. This is evident not only in *The Wet Nurse and Julie* but also in other artworks, such as *Summer's Day* (Fig. 4) and *Eugène Manet and his Daughter Julie at Bougival* (Fig. 5), all painted between the late 1870s and early 1880s.

These late paintings clearly contrast with Morisot's earlier paintings, such as *Reading* (Fig. 6), that instead depicts a picturesque landscape unified in its overall composition and with a clarity of vision. The dissolution of forms does not represent the only striking feature of *The Wet Nurse and Julie:* the subject matter is deeply ambiguous. The latter is indicated by a mother painting another woman nursing her baby which means that the infant included in the image represents Morisot's own daughter Julie. The subject matter makes clear reference to the phenomenon of the wet nursing industry through which it is possible to understand the alleged "corruption" of modern French society in the second half of the 19th century. This theme

dovetails with questions about the “cult of true womanhood” as it evolved in French society in a time of rapid industrialization. Morisot’s *The Wet Nurse and Julie* is traversed by the inner conflict provoked, in part, by her hiring a wet nurse but wanting to show affection towards her only child. As a painter, Morisot’s subjectivity, and her strategies of representation, oscillate between “true woman” and “modern woman”, understood in the ideological categories afforded by her socio-cultural context.

The influence of Impressionism

The Wet Nurse and Julie was painted in 1879 and it represents a work scene where the figured “mother” is not a real mother but a so-called *seconde mère*.[52] Indeed, the central figure is not feeding her own child in keeping with a so-called natural nurturing instinct but for wages, as part of the widespread wet nursing industry in the late 19th-century France. The wet nurse is placed in the very center of the painting and is shown in the act of breast-feeding the little Julie who rests in her lap. The scene is set in a lush garden and a parasol lies to the left of the nurser. In style, the work declares itself to be in keeping with the formal characteristics associated with the Impressionist movement of 1874-1886, dates of the eight independent Impressionist exhibitions led by the so-called *Société Anonyme* in the center of Paris.[53] Morisot was one of the several members of this independent group which included also the painters Frédéric Bazille, Gustave Caillebotte, Mary Cassatt, Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Eva Gonzales, Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Alfred Sisley.

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[52] Linda Nochlin, “Morisot’s *Wet Nurse:* The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting” in *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader*, edited by Maura Reilly (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 161.
[53] Stephen Eisenman, *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*. Fifth ed (London: Thames and Hudson 2020), 368.

Like her peers, Morisot rejected the subject matter and stylistic conventions of Academic art promoted by the official Academy and its Salons. [54] In a similar way to her fellow Impressionists, she preferred to work directly from nature, *en plein air,* rather than in the studio.[55] This explains why Morisot adopted loose and textured brushstrokes in order to render the effect of outdoor light, weather and atmosphere. In addition, central to this outdoor practice was the adoption of pure colors and a rejection of Academic "chiaroscuro". The use of pure hues defines space through contrasts and nuances of color as a way to replace the academic tonal modelling by a new study of colors.[56] This is visible in *The Wet Nurse and Julie* where contrasting colors appear in several portions of the painting, reflecting her increasing involvement in the exploration of light and color, starting from the mid 1870s.[57] There is a clear chromatic opposition between the surrounding green expanse of the garden and the bright white attire of the wet nurse. Like her peers Monet, Sisley and later Bracquemond, Morisot was extremely interested in rendering the effect of light on white which led her to compose a number of paintings where she could explore this pictorial concern in detail. Most of the subjects of these experimental images represent women at their toilettes, sometimes in front of mirrors, usually in low-cut white dresses, like the wet nurse's, which often reveal portions of their neck and shoulders. Just such an example is provided by *Psyche* (Fig. 2), painted by Morisot in 1876. In the painting, the mirror inside the bedroom emphasizes the play of light reflected on the white petticoat worn by the young woman. In *The Wet Nurse and Julie* case study, the effect of light on white is effectively rendered on the left shoulder of the *seconde mère* which reflects the natural

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[54] David Bomford and National Gallery (Great Britain). *Impressionism*. *Art in the Making* (London: National Gallery, in association with Yale University Press 1990), 15.
[55] Bomford, *Impressionism*, 17.
[56] Paul Cézanne qtd. in Bomford, 25.
[57] Tamar Garb, *Women Impressionists* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), 44.

light filtering through the leaves on the left side of the painting. In addition, it is interesting to notice how the brightness of the white dress worn by the nurser contrasts with the cool gradations of green that are used to represent the garden. The brightest of these are concentrated around the woman's attire while the darkest ones appear in the left upper corner of the image. Morisot also uses an aqua green tone to represent the inside of the parasol.

Morisot further uses dashes of dull blue against the white gown where she places splashes of orange creating a "simultaneously contrast". In this way, she enhances the vibrancy and brightness of tone in keeping with the Impressionists' understanding of the laws of simultaneous color contrast as devised by Michel Eugène Chevreul. His *Des Couleurs et de leurs application aux arts industriels,* was published in 1864 and built on the previous theories of the Enlightenment philosopher Diderot, the engineer Pieur and the draughtsman Grégoire. Chevreul's seminal publication maintained that the brightness of a particular color depended exclusively on the hues surrounding it.[58] According to his law of the simultaneous contrast of colors, when placing two complementary colors from Chevreul's complex color wheel next to each other, the differences between the two hues are at their greatest. The theory was well-known by the late 1860s and in the 1870s it was adopted by the Impressionists as a way to render natural light as a vibration of color.[59] This system is visible in the orange-dull blue tandem of the nurse's gown, but also in the reddish dots and strokes that beckon to the green hues in the parasol and above the head of the wet nurse.

In addition to the peculiar chromatic effects obtained in this painting, the brushstrokes too are singular: they are varied in width, breadth and direction, giving rise to an animated, agitated

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[58] Bomford, *Impressionism*, 79.
[59] Bomford, 83.

composition attempting to render immediacy of execution, and of vision.[60] Like many of her fellow Impressionists, in particular Monet and Renoir, Morisot applied a loaded brush to produce an impastoed facture.[61] In *The Wet Nurse and Julie* Morisot applied complex and dynamic patches of color applied through short and broken strokes which are scattered all over the surface of the canvas.

The use of such broad, impastoed and violent brushstrokes contribute to the extreme flatness of the image. One can clearly notice how the background of the scene is pushed forward to the surface of the canvas eliminating the fictive space between the two human figures and the garden painted behind them. Thus, the strong visual decomposition heightened by an all-overness technique suggests an increasing abstraction of the subject matter that contrasts with the one of earlier paintings. For instance, in *Psyche* (1876) it is still possible to conceive the visual depth which separates the figured young lady from the mirror standing in front of her and the cropped sofa placed to her right. The gradual dissolution of forms and the subsequent loss of an easily recognizable subject matter, perfectly visible in *The Wet Nurse and Julie*, reflects a true crisis in the Impressionist movement. This occurred following the eighth exhibition in 1886, when the members of the *Société Anonyme* started exploring, almost in an obsessive manner, the effects of light and instantaneity, at the expense of the pictorial content.[62] This new artistic approach was reflected in Monet, Sisley and Pissarro's "series," namely groups of paintings that suggested something more personal, intangible and emotional than the objective transcription of visual perceptions.[63]

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[60] Eisenman, *Nineteenth Century Art,* 379.
[61] Eisenman, 379.
[62] James H Rubin, *Impressionism*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 348.
[63] Rubin, *Impressionism*, 348-354.

As far as the resulting "unfinished" appearance of Morisot's paintings is concerned, this accounted for much of the incomprehension and anger of the critics levelled at Morisot. For instance, her oil on canvas titled *Young Woman by a Window* (Fig. 3), painted only one year before *The Wet Nurse and Julie,* in 1878, and shown in the fifth Impressionist exhibition, attracted the disparaging attention of the art critic Paul de Charry. On April 10th, 1880 he published the following account of Morisot in *Le Pays:* "Her work is almost atmospheric. With this talent, why does she not take the trouble to finish? Morisot is a woman, and therefore capricious. Unfortunately, she is like Eve who bites the apple and then gives up on it too soon. Too bad, since she bites so well!".[64] Clearly, de Charry recognized Morisot's artistic talent but resented the unfinished nature of her work, as though her natural gifts were not used to their full potential. The general critiques that Morisot's works received varied enormously, and some critics, contrary to de Charry, found the unfinished quality of her work incredibly harmonious and sweet-toned. This is the case, for instance, when Gustave Geffroy wrote of *The Wet Nurse and Julie,* in the weekly newspaper *La Justice* on April 19th, 1881:

> The forms are always vague in Berthe Morisot's paintings, but a strange life animates them. The artist has found the means to fix the play of colors, the quivering between things and the air that envelops them…Pink, pale green, faintly gilded light sings with an inexpressible harmony. No one represents Impressionism with more refined talent or with more authority than Morisot.[65]

Thus, it is clear that Morisot can be considered to have fully engaged with Impressionism, considering the rejection of Academic art and the subsequent use of contrasting

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[64] Qtd. in Charles S, Moffett, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and National Gallery of Art (U.S.), *The New Painting, Impressionism, 1874-1886: An Exhibition Organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco with the National Gallery of Art, Washington* (Geneva, Switzerland: R. Burton, 1986), 326.
[65] Qtd. in Moffett, *The New Painting,* 366.

colors and broad brushstrokes. This resulted in an incredibly flat, "abstract" or "all-over" painting that further reflects the crisis of Impressionism of the late 1880s. Morisot's images also provoked different reactions among the art critics of her time, as it is in the case of Paul de Charry and Gustave Geffroy.

Visual decomposition in Morisot's late paintings

The vagueness of atmosphere that Geffroy discusses goes well beyond the dynamic interplay between patches of colors that was common among Impressionist painters. In *The Wet Nurse and Julie*, Morisot creates an unprecedentedly disembodied composition where the figures of the nurser and the nursed seem almost reduced to caricature and "synoptic adumbration".[66] This pictorial and stylistic shift within Morisot's oeuvre starts to take place as early as the late 1870s. This is the moment when her brushstrokes lengthened and became more nervous, giving rise to strong vibration of color and light which was previously absent in her paintings.[67] Similarly, agitated brushstrokes can be found in other works by Morisot painted between the late 1870s and the mid-1880s.

One example is provided by *Summer's Day* (1879) which was included in the fifth Impressionist exhibition. The image depicts two women in a boat immersed in a lake. The two women are represented from a sharp angle and parts of their bodies, like most of the boat, are cut off by the picture frame. This is one of the first paintings by Morisot set in the Bois de Boulogne, a popular spot for promenades and picnics, and which became one of her favorite motifs.[68] This place allowed Morisot to concentrate on capturing the reflections of the lake and the lush

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[66] Nochlin, "Morisot's *Wet Nurse",* 162.
[67]Brodskaia., "Berthe Morisot", 250.
[68] Garb, *Women Impressionists,* 18.

vegetation by using sketchy brushstrokes both for the women and the water, therefore unifying the figures and ground in a striking two-dimensional composition. In addition, Morisot herself is included in the same boat but she is unseen. Indeed, by following the typical Impressionist practice of painting from the same boat where the subjects were located, she depicts the two female figures according to purely plein-air aesthetics.[69] However, there were several practical difficulties involved in the act of painting from a boat. For example, apart from the challenge of constantly changing weather, light and moving shadows, the motif itself could actually alter as the painter worked. This is why Morisot executed the scene first in a watercolor sketch and then in oil painting, in order to perfectly render the movement of light over the surfaces of the landscape and the figures.[70]

Similarly, broad and rapid brushstrokes can be noticed in a later painting by Morisot entitled *Eugène Manet and His Daughter Julie at Bougival* (1881). The artwork depicts Morisot's husband Eugène Manet, brother of the artist Edouard Manet, in a sun-filled garden at Bougival together with their little daughter Julie. The latter is playing with a large toy, probably a train station, supported by her father's lap. In addition, the painting is an example of the rare handling of the *paternité* theme.[71] Indeed, Eugène was not only a devoted husband who strongly promoted Morisot's work, but also a loving father deeply involved in his daughter's education. For the purpose of our comparison, this artwork is extremely important because it represents, even more than *Summer's Day,* and similarly to *The Wet Nurse and Julie,* an extreme form of visual decomposition. As a matter of fact, by the 1880s, Morisot had completely abandoned all regard to academic conventions and worked on a light brown canvas where she painted directly

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[69] Bomford, *Impressionism*, 26.
[70] Garb, *Women Impressionists,* 18.
[71] Garb, 76.

and boldly.[72] In terms of composition, the focal point becomes the center of the artwork, as though there were a spiral visual force that left the edges and corners almost completely blank. In *Eugène Manet and His Daughter Julie at Bougival* this is perfectly visible in the left upper and lower corners, and also in the right lower corner of the painting where one can notice the original light brown canvas.

With regards to brushstrokes, these have become “large electric sparks having a vital energy of their own” which result in a strong dynamic composition.[73] In addition to the extreme sketchiness of manner, the chromatic features of *Eugène Manet and His Daughter Julie at Bougival* are also quite unique: the pervasive color-light is heightened by dashes of light-toned strokes dancing around the figures and without defining their edges. Following the Impressionist pictorial technique, the brightness within *Eugène Manet and His Daughter Julie at Bougival* and *Summer's Day* is not only obtained through the use of light toned and white strokes, but also through a varied and contrasting palette, far removed from the range of subtle and neutral tones of her early works.

To further highlight how Morisot fully absorbed Impressionist techniques in her late artistic career, one must consider her earlier artwork *Reading,* painted in 1873. The painting, also known as *The Green Parasol,* depicts Morisot's older sister Edma seated in a meadow and in the act of reading. A small dark green parasol is positioned upturned to her left side, whereas on her opposite side there is a small fan. This artwork stands in deep contrast to *The Wet Nurse and Julie*, *Summer's Day* and *Eugène Manet and His Daughter Julie at Bougival* for the peculiar way in which Morisot rendered the landscape. In the pastoral scene of *Reading*, Morisot failed to

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[72] Garb, 76.
[73] Bomford, *Impressionism*, 255.

analyze the typical Impressionist effect of light on colors. Instead of complementary colors, here we find green tones which are rather uniform and incapable of capturing the tenuous distinctions between the various gradations of a single green, as she did in her later Bougival or Bois de Boulogne scenes. In her early works, Morisot's picturesque representation of landscape was largely indebted to the School of Fontainebleau and the painter Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot in particular, whose influence played a major role in Morisot's early training.[74] Not only was Corot a permanent guest at the Morisot family house, he also allowed both Berthe and Edma to benefit from his lessons and artistic experience.[75] In *Reading,* Morisot seemed to be emulating Corot's way of depicting humble and unpretentious scenes of French landscape, therefore adapting his technique to modern subject matter. One can perceive Corot's influence especially in the visual uniformity of the colors and strokes which stand in sharp contrast to the dazzling and aggressive composition of *The Wet Nurse and Julie.* Indeed, in *Reading* she gave priority to the single details of the natural landscape, where it is possible to distinguish the various types of fields extending in the background, the cart on the right and the single leaves of the grass. Following Corot's example, Morisot tried to keep the first impressions of nature fresh and unaltered in order to render a specific site in the most direct possible way.

Therefore, it is clear that the strong visual decomposition in *The Wet Nurse and Julie* is a specific feature that Morisot started to develop in the late 1870s: it is clearly visible in *Summer's Day* and in a more emphatic way in *Eugène Manet and His Daughter Julie at Bougival.* The analysis of these last two paintings also allows us to perceive the huge visual difference with *Reading* painted by Morisot, earlier, in 1873. This image reflects an evident uniformity of colors

[74] Brodskaia, "Berthe Morisot", 236.
[75] Brodskaia, 236.

and brushstrokes that is no longer present in her late paintings as they incorporate Chevreul's law of simultaneous contrast, and dynamic strokes.

Ambiguous subject matter

In addition to the unique and violent application of color, another innovative feature of *The Wet Nurse and Julie* can be perceived in the actual subject matter. The image introduces one of Morisot's new pictorial themes: it focuses on the figure of her own daughter Julie, born in 1878. This moment represented a watershed in Morisot's life, as after years of solitude, doubt and longing for affection, she finally gave birth to a daughter that became the focal point of her existence.[76] Morisot cultivated a deep love for her child and was mesmerized by her every feature. The birth of Julie coincided with a radical shift in Morisot's style, and the emergence of her new cycle of paintings, centered around the gradual growth of Julie, alternately accompanied by her father, aunts, cousins and nurses.[77]

The subject matter is innovative in the larger history of art in that it is a woman painting another woman breastfeeding her baby.[78] Therefore, the two working female subjects confront each other through the body of the shared baby. Both women stake claim to motherhood for different reasons, and in both cases the milk, produced for the nourishment of the child, and the painting, realized by the artist, represent two products that have market value. The ambiguous relation between the painter and the wet nurse indicates a strong internal pressure lived by Morisot during her late artistic career.[79] The personal conflict is further highlighted by the strong

[76] Anne Higonnet and Berthe Morisot, "Fulfillment 1878/1883", *Berthe Morisot* (University of California Press, 1995), 150.
[77] Brodskaia., "Berthe Morisot", 250.
[78] Nochlin, "Morisot's *Wet Nurse",* 161.
[79] Nochlin*,* 162.

dissolution of forms which has been previously discussed in the formal analysis of *The Wet Nurse and Julie* and similar artworks. Thus, it seems like the aggressive patches of colors act like signs of erasure and tension. The classical topos of maternity hides Morisot's conflicted identity as devoted mother and professional artist, two roles which were considered mutually exclusive according to the 19th century social discourse.

Indeed, aspiring women of the time, such as writers or artists, were forced to sacrifice their profession in order to appease the conventions dictated by society.[80] This meant that a successful career could only be led in solitude, whereas a married woman was forced to renounce to her lifework in order to take care of her family. Although Morisot believed she could reconcile the roles of mother and artist, very often she found herself in the position of hiring a wet nurse for the care of her young daughter Julie. Therefore, the artist's internal conflict is in many ways prompted by the figure of the nurse herself.

The wet-nursing industry, modern social "corruption" and the cult of "true womanhood"

During the Third Republic (1870-1940) in France the concept of work was constructed around the notions of productive activity, wage-earning and capital production.[81] Specifically, in the realm of the feminine labor, the wet nurse was seen as an oddity because like a prostitute, she sold her body for profit, but unlike a prostitute, her reasons were honorable. The wet nurse was both a second mother and an employee who performed a mother's natural function of nursing a child as part of her job. In France, between the 18th and 19th century, wet nursing represented a large-scale industry whereby urban female laborers were forced to send out their children to the

[80] Higonnet, "Preface", xii.
[81] Nochlin, "Morisot's *Wet Nurse",* 165.

country to be nursed while they continued to work for their own families.[82] The expansion of such detrimental industry also indicated the limited intervention of the French government to regulate the practices involved in this job and the frequent neglected care of the nurses towards the infants. Many were the sanitary violations that characterized the so-called *industrie nourricière* (wet nurse industry) which led to high infant mortality rates.[83] For instance, during the late 18th century, in the years preceding the French Revolution when most aristocratic women viewed their children as burdens, infant mortality rates ranged between 25 and 30 percent.[84]

Such a "corrupted" industry, from both a sanitary and moral perspective, seems to me to connect to a wider social and cultural realm. In particular, the nurses' neglected care can be considered as part of the frequent excesses and hypocrisies that characterized French modern society in the 19th century. More specifically, strong social pressures were felt following the renewal of Paris led by the French architect and Prefect Baron Haussmann through the architectural plan of 1867.[85] His aim was to substitute the "old squalor" of the narrow medieval street with modern elegance, and to facilitate Louis Napoleon's authoritarianism.[86] Certainly, the construction of wide streets, bridges, uniform buildings, cafés, theatres and restaurants, was favored by some artists of the time. For instance, the impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir preferred the new city over the old one and showed his appreciation by heightening the beauty of modern urban structures in his paintings.[87] However, at the same time, severe consequences followed the renewal of the city and were felt by thousands of people who were evicted from the

[82] Nochlin, 166.
[83] Stewart Buettner, "Images of Modern Motherhood in the Art of Morisot, Cassatt, Modersohn-Becker, Kollwitz." *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2, (1986), 15.
[84]Buettner, "Images of Modern Motherhood in the Art of Morisot, Cassatt, Modersohn-Becker, Kollwitz.", 15.
[85] Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 1.
[86]Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society,* 1.
[87] Herbert, 7.

15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th-century buildings, destroyed and razed completely to the ground. Therefore, many started condemning Haussmann for his acts of vandalism which led to a feeling of regret for the loss of historical structures.[88] From a psychological perspective, the urban transformation of the city affected many Impressionist painters, including Gustave Caillebotte. His aim was to emphasize the ruthless geometry and uniformity of Haussmann's buildings which crushed the space of the streets and transformed people into anonymous city dwellers.[89] The denunciation of the feeling of desolation was further heightened by depicting thoughtful observers who contemplate, from private spaces, the viewing of vulnerable and fragile pedestrians. Caillebotte also denounced the raw industrial power of urban metalwork and train stations that were perceived as the aggressive symbol of modern Paris.[90]

The social hypocrisies and forms of corruption that contributed to Morisot's internal pressure can be examined also by relying on Walter Benjamin, T.J. Clark and Charles Baudelaire's accounts of modern society. Benjamin argued that commodity fetish had become the only true value to worship in society, as a form of merchandise.[91] World exhibitions represented the peak of consumerist society as they glorified the exchange value of material goods and elevated people to commodities, thus creating a deep social alienation. Morisot's figure of the wet nurse was de facto part of that industrial economy within which all laborers had been objectified. A similar idea has been expressed by T.J. Clark, who famously argued that commodity production extended to all areas of social practice and the accumulation of capital caused the commercialization of life and leisure in Paris.[92]

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[88] Herbert, 3.
[89] Herbert, 19.
[90] Herbert, 24.
[91] Walter Benjamin and Peter Demetz, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 152.
[92] T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 9.

For both Clark and Benjamin, the French poet Charles Baudelaire acutely denounced the modernization of Paris which he witnessed first-hand. Baudelaire effectively condemned modern society through his highly provocative poetic language and his works of criticism. According to the poet *cum* social critic, Paris had been transformed into a submerged city whose ambiguity was visible specifically in social relationships.[93] According to him, the notion of novelty constituted the origin of the illusion of perpetual sameness within society. This idea was taken up by Clark who argued, over a century later, that social differences could no longer be distinguished among the various classes.[94] Social homogenization was discussed by Baudelaire when he wrote that the inhabitants of Paris had converted into a single anonymous mass that the poet identified as a "danse macabre."[95] Fear, revulsion and horror were the emotions aroused by the observers, the so-called *flâneurs* of the big city crowd whose uniformity was constituted by constant movements of automation.

Therefore, by taking into consideration such accounts of modern French society, we can connect the figure of the wet nurse to the wider group of anonymous workers who were moving according to nervous impulses and constant collisions. Considering the threatening manner through which the unidentified nurser executes her job in *The Wet Nurse and Julie*, we can see how the feelings of fear, revulsion and horror felt by Baudelaire can be extended to Morisot. These emotions were provoked by seeing the faceless and automatized wet nurse breastfeeding Morisot's own child. The anonymity of the wet nurse is further heightened by the extreme visual decomposition of her face that cannot in any way be identified. The nurse also contrasts with the human sweetness and delicacy through which Morisot depicted her own daughter Julie. As a

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[93] Benjamin, *Reflections,* 157.
[94] Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 8.
[95] Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 168.

consequence, the wet nurse in the image represents an iconic figure whose anonymization stands for the general neglected care and strong ambiguity involved in the larger industry.

Lastly, in opposition to the crude industry of wet nursing, one must consider the so-called phenomenon of the "cult of true womanhood" or "cult of true motherhood" that gained popularity among upper-class French women from the late 18th century.[96] This is because of the high infant mortality rates that were registered in the years preceding the French Revolution and that led to a change in attitude towards the raising of children. The first attempt to fight uncontrolled wet-nursing was brought forward by the publication of *Emile* (1762) by the Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[97] In this novel, he encouraged mothers to be the baby's natural nurse. Such ideas were integrated into French society only after one generation from the publication of the work at the very earliest. In addition, with the establishment of Napoleon's empire, women's education aimed at forming responsible mothers that according to him, contributed to the stability of the nation.[98] The political authority was not the only figure advancing such ideas, but also doctors and associations like the *Sociétés protectrices de l'Enfance* (Infants' protection societies) encouraged the health giving-effects of maternal nursing. Finally, the government itself intervened in 1874 by promulgating the so-called Roussel Law to regulate the wet nurse industry and supervise both nursemaids and the infants at a national level.[99]

Another writer that helped me reflect on the phenomenon of the "cult of true womanhood" is Barbara Welter. Although she treats this issue from a different cultural context, as to say the American society of the middle 19th century, it is still crucial for understanding how

[96] Buettner, "Images of Modern Motherhood", 15.
[97] Buettner, 15.
[98] Buettner, 15.
[99] Nochlin, "Morisot's *Wet Nurse",* 166.

women and mothers were expected to behave throughout the 19th century. More specifically, according to the social conventions of the time, the features of true womanhood were identified as being piety, purity, submissiveness and, lastly, domesticity.[100] It was only by following these values that mothers, daughters, sisters and wives could engage in responsible and moderate behavior. Strongly connected to the idea of maternal duties was the feature of domesticity that defined the true dignity and beauty of female character. The domestic realm was of fundamental importance because it afforded security from the dangers and delusions of the world and at the same time it allowed women to dispense comfort and cheer within the family.[101] As far as motherhood is concerned, the domestic sphere was the place where women offered their children correct and elevated literary taste.[102] More specifically, mothers brought up their daughters infusing in them the feeling that they had a responsible part to bear in promoting happiness in the family. Motherhood allowed "maiden ladies" to act as unselfish ministers of the sick within the family, thus taking care not only of the morality of their loved ones, but also of their health.[103] On the whole, maternity added another dimension and prestige to the role of woman that reached the peak of happiness only when becoming a devoted mother.

In addition, it is also important to take into consideration the wider debate centered around the role of mothers in society starting from the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century. Indeed, seeing mothers as the infants' natural nurse, as discussed in Rousseau's *Emile*, was not fully integrated into women's consciousness. This new way of considering mothers as fundamental educators of their own children and therefore of society, strongly contrasted with the attitude of aristocratic women in the late 18th century. The latter considered children to be

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[100] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966), 152.
[101] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood.", 162-163.
[102] Welter, 168.
[103] Welter, 169.

burdens, and threats to their physical integrity, and consequently adopted nursers to take care of the infants' health and education. There was a true cultural conflict between two very different conceptions of being a mother that created an interior conflict and confusion over the proper approach and attitude to adopt towards one's own children. On the one hand, there was the need of behaving as a proper educator within one's family in order to infuse moral values into the youngest members of the family unit as a way to train them as respectful and honest citizens. On the other hand, there was still the idea that taking care of one's own children was considered to be a demeaning activity and degrading to the female body. The "cult of true motherhood," as the social foundation of a Republican society, and its educational program, is attested by the "monumentomania" for female figures educating their young, especially under the Third Republic.[104]

Considering the phenomena of the wet nurse industry, its relations to the "corruption" of modern French society and the "cult of true womanhood," we can now try to explain and justify Morisot's internal tension. In her professional career as a painter, she was forced to hire a wet nurse because of constant occupation with the Impressionist exhibitions. This, I would argue, provoked in her a huge void and preoccupation, being aware of the strong immorality and decay that characterized modern society. More specifically, the commodification and automatization of modern workers, including the wet nurse, certainly did not reassure her. In addition, the "cult of true womanhood" affected her in her late artistic career, after giving birth to Julie and thus, provoking fear and anxiety of not being an adequate and ideal mother. In other words, Morisot was aware of the French social conventions of the late 19th century according to which a mother was the baby's natural nurse and in *The Wet Nurse and Julie*, she is clearly acting in the opposite

[104] In conversation with Professor Linford.

way. In addition, the cultural debate on the proper role of mothers that contrasted responsible and absent maternal figures, could well have contributed to Morisot's sense of confusion and anxiety.

In conclusion, by analyzing the impressionist techniques adopted by Morisot in *The Wet Nurse and Julie,* one can clearly notice the use of bright and contrasting colors heightened by the application of aggressive brushstrokes. The resulting agitated composition, visible also in other Morisot's paintings of the late 1870s and early1880s, seems to suggest a deeper meaning. Indeed, following the birth of her daughter Julie, Morisot started doubting her role as a responsible and loving mother because of her active artistic career. In addition, the hiring of a wet nurse increased this sense of anxiety because of the sanitary violations registered in the industry of wet nursing. An even stronger reason can be identified in the social hypocrisies and excesses of the time which led to a complete commodification and automation of modern workers. The "cult of true womanhood" which affected Morisot's idea of loving mother, represented the only form of salvation. Lastly, it is clear that the constant internal struggle and the way Morisot tried to find a compromise between her being an affectionate mother and active painter, requires further attention and explanation. This is why the following chapter is dedicated to the way Morisot managed to emerge professionally, in a primarily masculine environment, and how at the same time she manifested self-doubt and a need for affection.

3. Berthe Morisot: between artistic ambitions and "feminine" values

In this chapter I analyze how Morisot managed to emerge in the artistic environment to which she belonged. First, it is important to consider the wider artistic sphere of women Impressionists and their continuous institutional constraints. A brief visual comparison is used to understand the way women Impressionists redefined domestic scenes to assert their own artistic identities. In this attempt, Morisot received varied feedback from surrounding artists, writers and art critics that both denigrated and praised her paintings. More specifically, her public reception is analyzed in relation to the "Feminizing of Impressionism," her professional relationship to Edouard Manet and, lastly, the Parisian art market. Following the discussion of her admission to the larger artistic sphere, it is crucial to focus on how she managed to reinterpret "feminine values," promoted by amateur pictorial tradition and mass culture, to her own advantage. In conclusion, and most importantly, it is fundamental to take into account her inner identity from the point of view of Paul Valéry's writings, Edouard Manet's portrait of Morisot, and Morisot's own letters that combined to a self-portrait made in 1885 reveal the sincerest version of her thoughts. By considering Morisot's personal statements on professional and personal spheres of life, we will ask whether she eventually managed to reconcile these identities.

Women Impressionists and institutional constraints

First of all, it is important to underline the fact that all women Impressionists, and not only Berthe Morisot, were continuously challenged in professional terms and found it extremely hard to emerge in the artistic circles of the late 19th century. Therefore, there was a shared difficulty and subsequent anxiety that hindered female Impressionists throughout their careers. Although this discourse was previously introduced in the first chapter of this thesis, I will now expand on the main issues faced by women Impressionists to further understand the cause and effects of their institutional constraints. One of the first obstacles was the lack of access to professional and academic training, such as the absence of state education in the fine arts for women, and the impossibility of accessing the École des Beaux-Arts until 1897.[105] The general unavailability of advanced fine arts education was primarily justified by the belief that women were incapable of handling complex subjects.[106] This idea was also supported by women's subsequent specialization in still life and genre painting, due their exclusion from academic training. As a consequence, wealthy women Impressionists found alternatives to acquire basic artistic training. For instance, they attended private academies, such as the Académie Julian, became the private students of established artists, and made copies at the Louvre.[107]

Another great obstacle, historiographically, is considering the four leading women Impressionists (Morisot, Cassatt, Gonzalès and Bracquemond) as having a common identity.[108] Their only common point was a shared intention to break away from academic painting, and their search for a pictorial practice which was equivalent to both contemporary subjects and

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[105] Tamar Garb, *Women Impressionists* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), 6.
[106] Garb, *Women Impressionists*, 6.
[107] Garb, 6.
[108] Garb, 5.

visual experiences of the external world. However, they did differ from each other given the fact that Morisot, Cassatt, Gonzalès and Bracquemond related to the cultural and political debates of the time in their own way. Each one of them was also professionally linked to some of their contemporary male colleagues, for instance Cassatt had a strong artistic relationship with Degas while Morisot with Manet.[109] This closeness undoubtedly proved to be a useful strategy that helped women Impressionists to be promoted artistically in the public arena. However, it has also tended to diminish the recognition of their work as a kind of footnote to their male counterparts'. It is evident, however, that they were continuously in search of alternative paths to pursue artistic goals despite numerous institutional and socio-political restraints.

Unfortunately, women Impressionists' artistic ambitions did not always prove successful because very often, when women engaged seriously in artistic and intellectual life, they were considered "masculine."[110] This was the case of Cassatt, an American-born artist, originally from Pittsburgh that unlike most women Impressionists, was trained in an official institution: the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. [111] She later settled in Europe and started participating to Impressionist exhibitions from 1879 onwards. She was initially attracted to Realism as an artistic style and also to modern life as main subject matter. However, she was mostly known for her numerous *maternité* paintings which she started to produce in the 1890s.[112] Although achieving wide success for choosing scenes of quotidian maternal experience, almost paradoxically she was criticized for being too "masculine." This was because her predilection for a linear style and strong compositional structure were qualities associated with men's innate and intellectual

[109] Garb, 5.
[110] Garb, 6.
[111] Garb, 12.
[112] Garb, 12-13.

qualities.[113] More specifically she was attracted to Degas whose fascinating paintings constituted a true source of inspiration after she settled in Paris in 1866. Therefore, Cassatt's "masculinity" was explained by the belief that she was attempting to usurp a masculine mode of seeing by mimicking works of male artists, in her case, Degas.[114] She was seen as a dangerous female artist, by contrast to Morisot whose interest in color over drawing, as we will see further in this chapter, allegedly respected innate female sensibility and women's psychological characteristics.[115]

Another factor that explains why Cassatt did not emerge as a moving spirit of Impressionism, contrary to Morisot, is her firm independence in professional and personal matters even after joining the Impressionist group.[116] While her determination can be identified with Impressionist "intransigence," the very fact of her militant Republicanism was perceived as masculine.[117] On the contrary, according to other art critics, her artistic independence was deeply fascinating, as Gustave Geffroy explained in *La Vie Artistique*.[118] However, it was the discrete, elegant and suggestive work created by Morisot that was, by contrast, considered appropriate for a woman Impressionist. Cassatt's work, and public political position, was largely dismissed as being unnaturally brusque, frank and too "rational" for a woman.[119]

As we have seen in this first section, in order to properly understand Morisot's negotiation between her professional and private spheres, it seems, first, necessary to situate her

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[113] Tamar Garb, "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism" in *Perspectives on Morisot*, edited by Kathleen Adler, T. J Edelstein, and Mount Holyoke College. Art Museum1st ed., (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), 61.
[114] Garb, "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism", 59.
[115] Garb, 61.
[116] Garb, *Women Impressionists*, 8.
[117] Eisenman, "The Intransigent Artist or How the Impressionists Got Their Name" 55.
[118] Geffroy, *La Vie Artistique,* 278.
[119] Garb, "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism", 59.

own difficulties in accessing artistic education by presenting the institutional limitations shared by all women Impressionists.

A visual comparison

It is now important to consider, from a visual point of view, how women Impressionists' renegotiation between artistic aims and femininity took place. Thus, a visual distinction must be made to understand how, differently from their male counterparts, they managed to reinvest traditional scenes of domesticity with new meanings.

In order to expand upon this, it is fundamental to recall Pollock's article "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" presented in the first chapter of this thesis when analyzing the situation of women artists in the late 19th century. Pollock makes an important point about the way women artists, and specifically women Impressionists, managed to renegotiate typical feminine representations, such as domestic settings, and at the same time claim their own artistic independence.[120] Contrary to male Impressionists that depicted women as objects of male gaze, their female counterparts asserted the authority of women subjects through a sureness of knowledge of the rituals represented in the paintings. In other words, although both Morisot and Cassatt respected the conventions associated with femininity by showing women in a private sphere, their female figures evoked a sense of truthfulness and are not mere objects of desire.[121] Indeed, the female figures included in these scenes are involved in concrete aspects of daily life that are experienced by Morisot and Cassatt themselves. In this light, I will therefore compare the paintings *The Wet Nurse and Julie* by Berthe Morisot and *Mother Nursing Her Child* (Fig. 7)

[120] Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity", 260.
[121] Pollock, 254.

by Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Although they represent much the same scene — a woman breastfeeding an infant — their purposes and means are completely different.

With regards to *The Wet Nurse and Julie,* it is possible to view this painting not as an imagined and sensual scene where the nurse and infant appear as mere models. Instead, they are part of a real experience which is lived by Morisot herself. She is indeed witnessing, with a sense of inner pain, an anonymous woman nursing her own tender daughter. By contrast, Renoir's 1885 *Mother Nursing Her Child,* although it presents a similar scene, represents Renoir's mistress, Aline Charigot, who is breastfeeding their first child Pierre. Therefore, the relationship between artist and subject matter can be perceived as a male painter interacting with a sensuous model, as I will further explain in this section.

The context in which Renoir's work was painted is undoubtedly different from Morisot's. Indeed, Renoir experienced a shift in style starting in the late 1870s, following his departure from the Impressionist group and his first exhibitions in the official Salons.[122] The pursuit of a better understanding of the relationship between line and color, led him to Italy in 1881 where he began studying Renaissance art. Renoir also started looking at Ingres, through whom he became interested in the importance of drawing, based on a careful study of the subject matter and the use of a clear line.[123] Therefore, it is very likely that the painting *Mother Nursing Her Child,* belonging to this new style, led Renoir to paint such artwork as a pretext to practice his new style. The return to a "classical" style, can be perceived not only in terms of lines and firm contours, but also in terms of subject matter. As a matter of fact, Aline nursing Pierre in a

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[122] Rubin, *Impressionism*, 300.
[123] *Maternité dit aussi L'Enfant au sein [Maternity also called Child at the breast],* Musée d'Orsay, https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting/commentaire_id/maternity-10799.html?S=1&tx_commentaire_pi1%5Bfrom%5D=841&tx_commentaire_pi1%5BpidLi%5D=509&cHash=16646757a6

rural setting was conceived by Renoir as a re-interpretation, through modern eyes, of the Renaissance Madonna and Child image where the Virgin nurses a semi-nude male infant, identified with the young Pierre.[124] He developed a sort of obsession with this new style, considering the numerous preparatory oil sketches, drawings and versions he made for *Mother Nursing Her Child*. His Ingresque linear style caused him difficulty which he had never faced before in his artistic career.[125] This new style can be observed in the painting by looking at the use of smooth outlines in order to create a delicate delineation of the figures. More specifically it is used to delineate Aline's hat, loose shirt, folds of the gown, facial features and Pierre's white cap, fingers and folds of the skin. Therefore, it seems that the stylistic elements of Renoir's painting acquired for the artist an obsessive importance that almost surpassed the meaning of the subject matter.

Apart from the continuous experimentation with this style, the way the figures appear represents the most striking and important difference with *The Wet Nurse and Julie.* Indeed, we learn from a diary entry by Morisot, who visited Renoir's studio on January 11th, 1886, that by seeing the numerous drawings of a young mother nursing a child, she assumed the represented figures to be mere models.[126] Although she admired the charming subtlety and gracefulness of his drawings, she did not perceive the artist's closeness to the figures. By considering the subjects as models we see that, contrary to *The Wet Nurse and Julie,* there is no “sincerity" or personal connection to the models which transpire from Renoir's maternal scene. This is quite odd considering the lengthy and strong relationship between Renoir and his mistress Aline. From the moment they met, in September 1878, Aline became a key woman in the painter's life and

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[124] Barbara E. White, *Renoir: An Intimate Biography*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017), 311.
[125] White, *Renoir: An Intimate Biography*, 338.
[126] White, *Renoir,* 338.

through her strong will, she supported and helped him produce some of his most superb and joyous paintings.[127] However, at the same time, Renoir kept his relationship secret, including the birth of Pierre, as a way of maintaining autonomy and control of his life. In addition, considering the important role that Aline played for Renoir's prolific work as a primary model, it is easy to perceive the sensuality of this young woman, as caught by the artist himself. This sensuality, returning to Pollock's argument on male gaze, is visible in various points of *Mother Nursing Her Child*: the revealed breast which is tightly pressed by Aline's hand and the direct engagement with the audience that is read as objectified.

To sum up, to further understand how women Impressionists dealt with both femininity and artistic ambitions, the visual comparison between *The Wet Nurse and Julie* by Morisot and *Mother Nursing Her Child* by Renoir, provides a good case study. By analyzing both paintings one can perceive how women Impressionists managed to reinvest traditional subjects with a new understanding of femininity, and with a new sense of truthfulness. On the other hand, Renoir avoided presenting these scenes as emotionally compelling or lived experiences and decided instead to distance the viewer from the subject matter, preferring an eroticized gaze to an empathetic one. This was possible in part due to reworking Ingres' style as we can see in the representation of an illusionistic and objective image obtained through a classicizing modelling and delineation of the figures.

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[127] White, 176.

Morisot's public reception

After having considered how Morisot treated a scene of intimate domesticity, differently from Renoir, we can now move to analyze the specific professional environment to which she belonged. Taking into consideration the numerous reviews that constituted her critical reception, and the letters that she exchanged with family members and close friends, we learn that in the public realm her reception by art critics and writers was extremely diverse. Depending on the male artist or male critic, Morisot was either praised for her artistic potential despite being a woman or discouraged from being a female artist. This is visible in the *Correspondance De Berthe Morisot Avec Sa Famille Et Ses Amis,* reordered by the French art historian Denis Rouart, who is Morisot's grandson.

In the letters that Morisot wrote to her sister Edma, we learn that in the vernissage of a Salon exhibition in 1869, she encountered numerous male artists.[128] What she noticed, and which took her by surprise, was that several male painters that she deeply admired and knew personally, such as Puvis de Chavannes, Jacquemard and Fantin-Latour, quickly disappeared after meeting her. This gave her the impression of being ignored and unwelcomed in the venue where she was herself exhibiting. In addition, when she very confidently expressed her judgement of the paintings she saw displayed, she had the feeling of not being taken seriously for openly expressing her opinions.[129] Another, similar event occurred at one of the several dinners held at her house, where Fantin-Latour was extremely contradictory in his judgements about Morisot's art. He denigrated her artistic practice but also stated that he expected she would gain

[128] Berthe Morisot, and Denis Rouart, *Correspondance De Berthe Morisot Avec Sa Famille Et Ses Amis: Manet, Puvis De Chavannes, Degas, Monet, Renoir Et Mallarme: Documents Réunis Et Présentés* (Paris: Quatre Chemins-Éditart, 1950), 26.
[129] Morisot, *Correspondance De Berthe Morisot Avec Sa Famille Et Ses Amis,* 27.

unprecedented success at her next exhibition.[130] It is obvious that the professional realm to which she belonged was not easy to manage given the lack of recognition of her artistic skills. Contrary to most public figures, one illustrious French writer and poet did support her both professionally and personally: Stéphane Mallarmé.

After they met in 1873 through Manet's common acquaintance, Morisot and Mallarmé regularly exchanged letters in which they expressed mutual admiration. Mallarmé proved to be a close friend who showed affection in the warm tone of his letters and in his tender feelings for the young Julie.[131] Very often, Morisot invited him to informal dinners at her house, where a number of contemporary artists such as Renoir and Monet gathered at the same event. Mallarmé's professional esteem of Morisot was concretized when he personally asked her to illustrate one of the poems of his new volume of poetry entitled *Le Tiroir de Laque*.[132] In addition, Mallarmé's deep admiration for Morisot's artistic career can be observed in regularly providing her with the latest news regarding exhibitions and recent artistic trends that took place in Paris in the late 1880s.[133]

In addition to Mallarmé's esteem, the art critics Gustave Geffroy, Albert Flament and Thadée Natanson praised Morisot's painting, but mainly for the "intrinsic feminine quality" that transpired in her artworks. Geffroy, describing Morisot's artworks exhibited in May 1892, presented very clearly the peculiar sensation and the special atmosphere that the colorful surfaces of her canvases evoked.[134] He described the fascinating and vibrating brightness which

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[130] Morisot, 35.
[131] Olivier Daulte, and Manuel Dupertuis, *Correspondance De Stéphane Mallarmé Et Berthe Morisot, 1876-1895* (Collection Pergamine. Lausanne: Bibliothèque des arts, 1995), 13.
[132] Daulte and Dupertuis, *Correspondance De Stéphane Mallarmé Et Berthe Morisot, 1876-1895,* 19.
[133] Daulte and Dupertuis, 40-41.
[134] Geffroy, *La Vie Artistique*, 261.

constituted a "tender" form of luminosity. The latter penetrated the walls creating little drops of diamonds and contributing to a strong theatrical effect that took the audience by surprise. According to Geffroy, it was the light that penetrated in the walls which created a harmony of colors, animated the vague forms of life and contributed to defining Morisot's personal and unique artistic authenticity.[135]

A similar idea was expressed by Flament in the monthly magazine *Les Modes,* in which he described Morisot's retrospective exhibition held at the Hôtel des Modes in Paris in 1896. He insisted that Morisot was one of the few female painters that emerged artistically due to her aristocratic, refined, and elegant manner.[136] This refined quality, he argued, was due to the influence of Edouard Manet, and the French 18th century painter Francois Boucher who was master of the Rococo artistic style.[137] Morisot managed to reinterpret their styles, Flament argued, and to develop a distinctive artistic mark. A similar comment was also expressed by Natanson, regular contributor to *La Revue Blanche.* For him, Morisot's talent consisted in being able to capture from her surrounding colleagues, such as Manet, Degas and Renoir, only the most fascinating factors of their styles and re-elaborate them in a triumphant manner.[138] Lastly, an idea that Natanson highlighted is referred to Morisot's intrinsic, female painterly qualities, visible in her delicacy, lightness, charm and undisputable radiance of sweetness.[139]

To conclude, it is clear that the environment in which Morisot tried to emerge artistically, was discouraging given the continuous comments referred to feminine intrinsic qualities. However, at the same time this situation also provided her a possibility of being publicly

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[135] Geffroy, *La Vie Artistique*, 265.
[136] Albert Flament, "Berthe Morisot." in *Les Modes* (May 1914), 4.
[137] Flament, "Berthe Morisot.", 4.
[138] Thadée Natanson, "Berthe Morisot" in *La Revue Blanche* 30 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), 252.
[139] Natanson, "Berthe Morisot", 251.

recognized for her art. In other words, Morisot managed to transform the insistence on feminine inner delicacy to her own professional advantage, as we will discuss in the further section.

Morisot's professional realm

Morisot's reception by Geffroy, Flament and Natanson participates in understanding her complex and wide professional realm. Her work was both hindered and facilitated by artistic and social contemporaries. This is what led me to ask: how do Geffroy, Flament and Natanson's receptions of her "feminine painting qualities" relate to Morisot's larger public reception? A possible answer to this question can be explained by referring to the phenomenon that has been termed the "Femininizing of Impressionism." The latter became fully operative in political and aesthetic terms starting in the 1890s. More specifically, it was the critic Camille Mauclair that openly discussed, in an article written in 1896, the correlation between women and Impressionism while considering both Morisot's posthumous exhibition and the inevitable failure of Impressionism.[140] The politically reactionary Mauclair deeply believed, in the 1890s, that Impressionism came to an end for several reasons: the misguided aim of restricting oneself to visual sensations; the mechanical activity of making "marks" on the surface; and the subsequent sense of both decadence and artificiality. He denigrated Impressionism for representing a "feminine art" of fleeting impressions that were suited only to the superficiality of women's temperament, Morisot included.[141]

For Geffroy, Flament and Natanson, Morisot's quintessentially "feminine" artistic qualities accounted for her originality and singularity. In addition, as observed by the art critic

[140] Garb, "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism", 57.
[141] Garb, 57.

Albert Wolff, the delicacy of her brushwork, clarity of the color, refinement and natural, unfinished touch, were attributed to a primordial feminine weakness.[142] More specifically, Impressionism, because of its sensibility to sensorial stimuli and the nervous brushworks typical of this movement, it was the most legitimate mode of expression for a woman such as Morisot.[143]

In other words, Morisot eventually emerged professionally because of the appropriateness of her artistic ambition, based on the essential virtues of sex.[144] She also represented an acceptable model for women Impressionists because she did not adopt the "masculine vision" as other female painters did, like Cassatt, who instead threatened the traditional social values of French femininity. More specifically, the appropriateness of Morisot's Impressionist style was seen in the adoption of color used to convey fluid and changing qualities, an aspect thoroughly discussed in the formal analysis of *The Wet Nurse and Julie*.[145]

Chromatic effects came to be considered intrinsically feminine, not only for their fluid and unstable meaning, but also because, as the art critic Charles Blanc believed, they are subservient and secondary to the stability and rigidity of the line.[146] As further explained by the French philosopher Diderot, drawing is masculine, as it is strongly based on the use of line, whereas color is the province of the feminine sex.[147] Women's subaltern position became throughout the 19th century also a matter of medical and specifically craniological studies. The aim was to show through the pseudoscience of comparative brain measurements, that women's

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[142] Garb, 58.
[143] Garb, 60.
[144] Garb, 59.
[145] Garb, 61.
[146] Garb, 61.
[147] Garb, 61

mental capacities were stunted to fulfil their maternal role.[148] Having considered the beliefs held by Blanc, Diderot and pseudoscientists, it is possible to understand why in the 1890s, Morisot's strong use of color was accepted by art critics: it was seen as a reflection of her limited intellectual capacities. Therefore, Wolff, Geffroy and many other critics celebrated Morisot's work as the realization of a well-adjusted, socially and ideologically acceptable form of femininity.

Another important aspect when considering Morisot's public reception is her professional relationship with Edouard Manet. According to Rouart's edition of the *Correspondance,* Manet and Morisot first met in 1867 while she was copying one of the artworks exposed at the Louvre.[149] From that moment on, she immediately cultivated a deep admiration towards the widely celebrated painter Manet. Something that further helped build a strong and trusted relationship between both Manet and Morisot was the connection between their two families that very often met for informal and friendly dinners. Morisot immediately learned a great deal of techniques about painting thanks to his trainings, especially given the impossibility of her frequenting the Café Guerbois, the place where most Impressionists gathered.[150]

An aspect that she clearly had in common with Manet and that further increased her esteem for him, was the preference for figure paintings over landscapes. This explains why in the aforementioned 1869 Salon exhibition, Morisot was attracted by the display of Manet's works, that according to her evoked a deep expressive physiognomy.[151] She cultivated such a deep

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[148] Garb, 62.
[149] Morisot and Rouart*, Correspondance De Berthe Morisot Avec Sa Famille Et Ses Amis: Manet, Puvis De Chavannes, Degas, Monet, Renoir Et Mallarme: Documents Réunis Et Présentés*, 21.
[150] Beatrice Farwell, "Manet, Morisot, and Propriety", in *Perspectives on Morisot*, edited by Kathleen Adler, T. J Edelstein, and Mount Holyoke College. Art Museum, 1st ed. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), 46.
[151] Morisot and Rouart, *Correspondance De Berthe Morisot Avec Sa Famille Et Ses Amis,* 26.

fascination towards his art that, as the critic Flament affirmed, his theories were directly absorbed by her own painting.[152] The artistic influence of Manet, also led Morisot to re-elaborate his techniques and to eventually overcome his strong use of chromatic obscurity. Manet was also supportive, as during Morisot's period of artistic uncertainty that prevented her from finishing many of her artworks, he often encouraged her to exhibit.[153] Sometimes, he even personally intervened by adding last touches to the paintings made by Morisot. When the Franco-Prussian ended in 1871, Manet also promoted Morisot's work in Paris by finding new and wealthy commissioners for her, as Morisot revealed to her sister Edma in a letter written towards the end of 1871.[154] Although it is true that Manet did represent the most supportive colleague among the male Impressionists, he still treated Morisot from a certain distance, professionally speaking. In other words, he believed her artistic potential was not completely fulfilled because of her female gender. This explains why he very often tried to improve Morisot's paintings prior to a Salon exhibition, and at the same time, almost paradoxically, predicted her professional failure.[155]

Having considered Morisot in relation to the phenomenon of the "Femininizing of Impressionism" and the artist Manet, it seems crucial to further analyze Morisot's professional reputation, not from the point of view of the writers, critics and artists of her time, but from a commercial point of view. This helps us to understand how she was actively engaged in the late 19th century art market in Paris.

Although she was often denied the recognition of a professional status mainly because of her conventional life as bourgeois mother and wife, Morisot managed to adopt certain

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[152] Flament, "Berthe Morisot.", 4.
[153] Morisot and Rouart, *Correspondance De Berthe Morisot Avec Sa Famille Et Ses Amis,* 37.
[154] Morisot and Rouart, 73.
[155] Morisot and Rouart, 35.

promotional strategies that allowed her to achieve commercial success.[156] The roots of her professional career are firstly linked to her own family. The latter actively encouraged their daughters to pursue artistic careers by hiring French master painters as private tutors, and by building a small studio in their house garden.[157] Berthe and Edma's mother, *Madame* Morisot, was also crucial in launching her daughters' careers in the public domain as she deeply believed in the primacy of public opinion. *Madame* Morisot's ambition was to seek financial security for her daughters, and this is why she found it necessary to expose only artworks that could be sold as a way to ensure the bourgeois mandate of income and earning occupation.[158]

Berthe Morisot learned to accept this faith and became eager to submit her works both to dealers and auctions in Paris, starting in 1872. Morisot immediately earned success by seeing her own paintings circulating on the art market, also as a way to promote her artistic agency, widely praised by Geffroy, Natanson and Flament. The same year, the art critic and Impressionist gallerist Paul Durand-Ruel bought her first and largest lot, becoming one of her most consistent dealers throughout her career.[159] At the same time, the Hôtel Drouot accepted and sold most of Morisot's paintings during their auctions in the 1870s.[160] In the same years, and more specifically throughout the 1874, her husband Eugène Manet was a crucial figure and an empathetic helpmate who urged his wife to persist with her exhibitions in Paris.[161] In addition to Durand-Ruel, Alphonse Portier, who was a modest dealer of modern art, contributed to

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[156] Suzanne G. Lindsay, "Berthe Morisot: Nineteenth Century Woman as Professional", in *Perspectives on Morisot*, edited by Kathleen Adler, T. J Edelstein, and Mount Holyoke College. Art Museum, 1st ed. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), 80.
[157] Suzanne Lindsay, "Berthe Morisot: Nineteenth Century Woman as Professional", 80.
[158] Lindsay, 80.
[159] Lindsay, 81
[160] Lindsay, 82.
[161] Lindsay, 83.

promoting Morisot's artworks by selling them for maximum profits.[162] Lastly, in 1894, her largest triumph took place: the French government bought the painting *Young Woman in Ball Gown,* made in 1874, for the prestigious museum of living artists at the Luxembourg Palace.[163] She was paid 4,500 francs, an amount which she had never earned before for a single work.

Although her pricing scale was largely lower than her male counterparts', suggesting how female painters were usually hindered by such biased art market, she was fully integrated in the art commercial forum of the time and enjoyed financial success for being a woman artist. Her main motivation, apart from the desire to earn from selling, was the equivalence in meaning between the commercial value of her paintings and her *succès d'estime* or professional worth, among her peers and in the larger public's eye.[164] This meant that the higher the material gain, the wider the public esteem the artist received, in the form of a true public tribute.

Therefore, it is clear that Morisot' artistic career, on the whole, can be seen as a model for how a woman artist's success emerged within a professional realm, and more specifically the commercial one, despite prejudices against female artistic abilities. Indeed, these biased judgements, such as seeing Impressionism as suitable to innate female qualities, were eventually overcome by Morisot in the way she used them to her own advantage.

Renegotiation between "feminine" values and modern art practices

Having considered Morisot' artistic career from the perspective of her professional success, we must now consider it from a more personal point of view. More specifically, we will

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[162] Lindsay, 84.
[163] Lindsay, 85.
[164] Lindsay, 87.

understand how she managed to emerge publicly by absorbing the typical female notions of intimacy, fashion and elegance in relation to the amateur tradition and mass visual culture of the late 19th century.

The tradition of feminine amateur painting was crucial for Morisot in the way it constructed her assumptions, starting in the 1860s, about how images functioned for expressing women's experience in relation to their social role.[165] Thus, in keeping with the amateur tradition, Morisot insisted on depicting scenes that highlighted the notion of domesticity. Indeed, she quickly moved from representing landscapes in the Barbizon style, to more intimate spaces that evoked a sense of pleasure.[166] She often depicted children in backyards, from her country house at Mézy or from the gardens of her rented residences. Morisot was clearly looking for signs of home in the act of painting, and this led her to depict contained and personal spaces, even when the scenes were set outside. The Bois de Boulogne provides a perfect example, as in for instance *Summer's Day* of 1879. In this painting the familiarity of the green space evokes a reassuring social space, suitable to the presence of other women. This external setting reflects domestic interiors in a perfect amateur tradition and by focusing on intimate spaces, both physically and socially, this pictorial tradition bounded women's creative energies to one's own home.

A connection can be made with the discourse on the "cult of true womanhood" and, specifically, the notion of domesticity discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Barbara Welter. In particular, Morisot's amateur domestic imagery can perfectly be seen in the depiction of upstairs parlor, where Morisot included her female figures; the pieces of furniture which echo

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[165] Anne Higonnet, and Berthe Morisot, "Heiress to the Amateur Tradition", in *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 61.
[166] Higonnet and Morisot, "Heiress to the Amateur Tradition", 62.

emblems of gender; and the *deshabillé* clothing, in which the painted figures entertain close friends and family members.[167] Morisot also clearly expressed her espousal to these feminine values, and to that of respectability, by representing women withdrawn from the outside world, even when in the company of other figures, as way to stress their intimate form of sociability and interiority, by opposition to the public, male realm.[168] By taking advantage of a popular pictorial tradition for "feminine" painters, Morisot was able to repurpose it in order to both assert her artistic agency and also be considered as a suitable woman artist, thanks to her clear pictorial references to widely accepted notions of femininity.

The same logic was used later on to join the Impressionist group. Indeed, Morisot used to her advantage the lack of specialized training, the unfinished appearance, and atmospheric effects of her works as devices to be accepted into the avant-gardist group.[169] Continuing through the 1870s, when Morisot was a praised member of the Impressionists, she continued to be influenced by the amateur tradition and its focus on domesticity. She was eager to work from home, in order not to isolate her works from the private sphere. At certain instances, she also felt wrong about trading pictures which were invested with family love and friendship, by putting them on the market.[170] However, as I have previously explained, she eventually included her collections in the wide art market of the time to achieve professional worth.

Another cultural factor that for Morisot represented a pretext to negotiate her art practice with widely accepted feminine values, is seen in the advent of mass culture, and specifically in fashion plates. In the age of mechanical reproduction, the clients of the popular lithographs,

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[167] Higonnet and Morisot, 67-69.
[168] Higonnet and Morisot, 71.
[169] Higonnet and Morisot, 78.
[170] Higonnet and Morisot, 81.

wood engravings and photographs eventually contributed to the spread of fashion plates which were widely distributed and marketed to mass audiences.[171] Popular prints were designed for women starting in the mid 19th century and furthered the development of new feminine identities. Morisot was undoubtedly exposed to these popular prints and in particular to the style and subjects of Paul Gavarni, who led the first generation of draftsmen for mass circulation periodicals.[172]

Fashion plates were included in women's magazines that targeted a female audience as a potential market. As forms of advertisement, they promoted and recommended current luxury brands, designers, shops and retail stores.[173] These fashion illustrations quickly appealed to a female audience due, in part, to the imagery that recalled amateur's women imagery. Not only did these fashion plates draw from tradition, but they also contributed to fostering a modern image of bourgeois femininity, the so-called "physionomie Parisienne".[174]

The capitalist marketplace, symbolized by the birth of department stores, also fostered a "democracy of appearances".[175] This is seen in the way fashion magazines helped to release women from their domestic interior, to buy in shops and even to earn money. Morisot was deeply impacted by the idea of democracy promoted by the advent of mechanically reproduced fashion plates but sought a different type of democracy.[176] She was not interested in class advancement, represented by the development of modern bourgeois femininity, but in cultural advancement. Thus, she was encouraged to look for new art practices, as way to overcome the

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[171] Anne Higonnet, and Berthe Morisot. "Feminine Visual Culture in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 84.
[172] Higonnet and Morisot, "Feminine Visual Culture in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", 87.
[173] Higonnet and Morisot, 92.
[174] Higonnet and Morisot, 90.
[175] Higonnet and Morisot, 98.
[176] Higonnet and Morisot, 98.

amateur tradition that prevented women from becoming professional artists. Impressionism was an art practice that allowed Morisot to advance her claims of individual creative prerogatives.[177]

However, Morisot soon realized that it was impossible for her to repudiate feminine visual culture of the amateur tradition, and this is why, I am arguing, she started looking at fashion plates again while cultivating the avant-garde. This allowed her to continue creating modern feminine paintings, largely accepted by art critics, and to maintain the privileges of painting by joining the Impressionist group. She was inspired by many visual motifs included in fashion illustrations, such as gestures and clothing, that suggested a respectable bourgeois domesticity. In addition, she replicated the intellectual meaning of such plates: the way the static figures seem self-absorbed, unable to communicate and unwilling to invite the viewer into their intimacy.[178] Morisot was deeply influenced by the feeling of distance evoked by fashion illustrations. Indeed, the self-absorbed figures of female popular prints came to represent for her deep psychological figures. Just like the modern women of fashion magazines, Morisot's female subjects have attained self-sufficiency through which they command pictorial space. Morisot managed to negotiate modern feminine values with her own painting in this way too.[179] By doing so, she was able to maintain her artistic independence, as shown by her recent admission to the Impressionist group, and at the same embrace a fashionable modern femininity.

To sum up, Morisot dealt with pictorial practice and different notions of femininity by harnessing both amateur art and modern visual culture. In this way, Morisot showed an

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[177] Higonnet and Morisot, 99.
[178] Higonnet and Morisot, 110-11.
[179] Higonnet and Morisot, 117.

adherence to the feminine values dictated by well-to-do society and at the same time pursued her artistic ambitions.

Morisot's inner reality

After having considered the ways in which Morisot combined both femininity and modern art cultural practices, I turn to signs of her inner state about such a negotiation. It is important for this to distinguish between those who tried to capture her inner state, specifically Paul Valéry and Edouard Manet, and Morisot herself, whose letters and self-portraits reveal her deepest inner reality.

The poet, critic and dramaturge Paul Valéry wrote numerous texts on his conception of art. In general, he believed that a work of art was the most human of actions, allowing one to pass from a non-being state to one of fulfillment.[180] According to him, art enabled a reconciliation between the real and an achievement of the self. In support of this idea, he also believed that materiality helped the spirit to exist.[181] This materiality corresponded to "great art" that used all human faculties to offer the maximum development of freedom. Through this conception of art, Valéry treated Berthe Morisot as an intriguing psychological figure. According to him, most contemporary critics and artists spoke of her in terms of artistic development, but they hardly knew the existential attributes of her life.[182] Valéry believed she was a unique artist who was deeply secretive and imposed an explicable distance to people surrounding her. The most important feature for Valéry was her gaze, and magnetic eyes that revealed her inner self.[183]

[180] Paul Valéry, and Jean Clarence Lambert, *Ecrits Sur L'art*, Destins D L'art, 11 (Paris: Club des libraires de France, 1962), 12.
[181] Valéry and Lambert, *Ecrits Sur L'art,* 15.
[182] Valéry and Lambert, 142.
[183] Valéry and Lambert, 142.

It was through her eyes that she led her existence: her eyes were extraordinarily attentive and gave her an unusual and distant look.

In addition, Valéry stated that, for Morisot, art and life were perfectly intertwined, unlike other Impressionist artists whose refinement of visual sensibility led to extreme “abstraction”.[184] Painting was vital for her, he claims, and this explains why habitual objects and close family members or friends, were included in her artworks. However, this is where I find Valéry’s conception of Morisot debatable as although he seems to be praising her, at the same time he connects her artistic practice to women’s domestic sphere. He gives the impression to be stressing a mainstay of the amateur pictorial tradition by reading her work as being the result of intimate domesticity. This peculiar reading may be connected to the amateur pictorial practice which prevented women from becoming professional artists. This issue was justified by the belief that women were capable only of painting contained and domestic spaces, to which they belonged according to social conventions. Another debatable aspect mentioned by Valéry is connected to the way people, and thus painters, live and move according to what they see.[185] They see only what they desire and dream of. More specifically, for Valéry, everyone deals with systems of colors differently, transforming these chromatic elements into signs that reflect one own’s spirit. The strong correlation between seeing and desiring can be perfectly applied to Manet’s portraits of Berthe Morisot.

In support of this critique, we can consider Valéry’s analysis of the portrait *Berthe Morisot with a Bouquet of Violets* (Fig. 8), made in 1872 by Manet. Valéry believed that Manet's strength laid in his ability to capture the charm and the spirit of his subjects.[186] The evocative

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[184] Valéry and Lambert, 147.
[185] Valéry and Lambert, 143.
[186] Valéry and Lambert, 167.

power of the painting is seen, he argues, in the predominance of black, evident in Morisot's hat, ribbons and short cape, and which is used to capture her psychological complexity.[187] Her mysterious character is heightened by the depiction of big, magnetic, dark eyes. In addition, Valéry affirmed that Manet was also able to represent a tender and precious lady, as we can see from the delicate lights and transparent shadows reflected on her face.[188] The delicate features are also emphasized by her young appearance that does not correspond to her actual age. This sensual gaze seems to suggest a distortion of the actual model. Indeed, Manet believed that Morisot was a delightful young woman that gave him strong visual pleasure, especially in the first years following their encounter at the Louvre.[189]

The idea of misrepresenting the model is openly expressed by Higonnet when she affirms that Manet's portraits of Morisot were made to represent a woman as a man saw her: a lady showing signs of propriety and respectability.[190] Manet's own representations of Morisot were also filtered by his early works, depicting friends' mistresses reclining on sofas and appearing as bohemian women.[191] Therefore, whether Manet represented respectable or fallen women, they were not truthful depictions of the model's identity.

By contrast, Morisot's inner state revealed self-doubt, continuous loneliness, and anxiety about external judgement. As expressed in the numerous letters exchanged with her sister Edma, Morisot started developing a sense of insecurity about her own art following the marriage of her

[187] Brodskaia, "Berthe Morisot", 242.
[188] Valéry and Lambert, *Ecrits Sur L'art*, Destins D L'art, 11, 169.
[189]Anne Higonnet, and Berthe Morisot. "An Image of One's Own", in *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 201.
[190] Higonnet, "An Image of One's Own", 204.
[191] Beatrice Farwell, "Manet, Morisot, and Propriety", in *Perspectives on Morisot*, edited by Kathleen Adler, T. J Edelstein, and Mount Holyoke College. Art Museum, 1st ed., (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), 47.

sister and her subsequent departure in 1869.[192] This feeling of self-doubt, mainly due to a sense solitude and need for affection, also contributed to rejecting her own artistic career.[193] As she revealed in a letter written in 1869, Morisot started suffering from the pressure of her artistic inactivity due to a lack of motivation. However, in the same letter, she paradoxically manifested great positivity in wishing Edma a joyous and romantic marriage with her new husband Adolphe Pontillon.[194] It is curious to notice how most of Morisot's comments on artistic self-doubt and discouragement are usually accompanied by discourses on sentiments and a search of affection. The latter was, according to Morisot, a basic aspect which enabled one to conduct life in pure joy. The feeling of anxiety and confusion towards her own art reached its peak on the occasion of Salon exhibitions and encounters with her fellow colleagues. As previously discussed, at the 1869 Salon exhibition, she had the feeling of not being taken seriously when she openly expressed her judgement about the artworks she observed. These demonstrations of self-confidence were immediately followed by a loss of faith in her own painting. She declared in a letter to Edma, written on May 11th of the same year, that she started seeing art as an unpleasant form of expression which blocked her from completing artworks or finding new subjects to paint.[195] It is clear that she was extremely sensitive to her works' reception and each subtle negative comment was interiorized by Morisot and caused her artistic skills to atrophy.

Criticism made by her male colleagues prevented her from reacting and eventually contributed to a feeling of abandonment, loneliness, and disenchantment. The period of the Franco-Prussian war definitely did not help her recover self-confidence and inner stability. She

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[192] Morisot and Rouart. *Correspondance De Berthe Morisot Avec Sa Famille Et Ses Amis : Manet, Puvis De Chavannes, Degas, Monet, Renoir Et Mallarme : Documents Réunis Et Présentés,* 22.
[193] Morisot and Rouart, *Correspondance De Berthe Morisot Avec Sa Famille Et Ses Amis,* 24.
[194] Morisot and Rouart, 25.
[195] Morisot and Rouart, 29.

learned that her brother Tiburce had been taken prisoner by the Prussians and that her own studio in France had been destroyed upon the arrival of the German enemies in Paris.[196] In addition, following the end of the war, her mother shared her continuous preoccupation of finding a husband for her only unmarried daughter.[197] *Madame* Morisot often stressed the fact that marriage would be the proper solution to end her daughter's suffering and would help her overcome solitude. It is therefore clear why the accumulation of anxiety, primarily due to her patriarchal mother, and the social expectations of the time regarding women's maternal roles, caused Morisot deep inner conflict.

Fortunately, melancholy and uncertainty towards painting were overcome by her marriage to Eugène Manet, brother of Edouard Manet, in December 1874. In a letter addressed to her brother Tiburce, written on January 24th, 1875, Morisot revealed how she had finally started a positive and bright phase of her life, given Eugène's strong affection and deep love which he constantly manifested for her.[198] Not only was she revitalized by romance, but also by her husband's deep encouragement and support for her artistic career. He praised her paintings and strongly believed that she would soon achieve huge success in her following exhibitions.[199] An even more joyful phase of her life, which helped her achieve inner reconciliation between her professional and personal self, was the birth of her daughter Julie, in 1879.[200] Julie became a focal point of Morisot's existence and enabled her to find inner fulfillment. Although, she sometimes expressed maternal anxiety over Julie's physical appearance, in most of her letters she revealed how she was utterly mesmerized by her daughter's features: her laughter, small

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[196] Brodskaia, "Berthe Morisot", 242.
[197] Morisot and Rouart, *Correspondance De Berthe Morisot Avec Sa Famille Et Ses Amis,* 61.
[198]Morisot and Rouart, 80.
[199] Morisot and Rouart, 77.
[200] Morisot and Rouart, 99.

shimmering eyes, and constantly smiling mouth.[201] According to Morisot's letters, raising her daughter and the act of painting, together, finally allowed Morisot to achieve the active and fulfilled life she had longed for throughout her whole existence.

According to Morisot, the period following the birth of Julie forced her to take into consideration and challenge the opposition between high art and femininity.[202] As stated numerous times throughout this thesis, especially in relation to the feminist scholar Nochlin, no-one thought in the late 19th century that a professional artist could take up the position of a responsible mother. This was a time when women's intellectual capacities were, again, believed to be stunted in order to be suitable for maternity.[203] Within this context, and specifically in the period from 1880 to 1885, Morisot tried to deal with the confrontation between her private and professional roles by producing multiple self-portraits.

Although among these self-portraits there is a pastel that shows signs of anxiety and exhaustion, I have decided to focus on another version. It highlights inner reconciliation which largely reflects a late phase of her life. *Self-Portrait with Julie Manet*, of 1885 (Fig. 9), is an example of the embodiment of both self-revelation and professional agency. This embodiment reflected Morisot's awareness of how maternity and artistic genius should not be considered contradictory, as dictated by the social order, but actually synonymous. In the canvas, Morisot dominates the scene as we can see from her solid body that fills the space with physical presence. Furthermore, she is calmly gazing out, with her head placed in relief against a dramatically brushed background. With regards to her posture, she is martially erect and stabilized by jutting elbows. Torso and head meet confidently at the high neck piece which joins the plastic modeling

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[201] Morisot and Rouart, 100.
[202] Higonnet and Morisot, "An Image of One's Own", 201.
[203] Garb, "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism", 62.

of the face. The posture suggests a moment of self-assertion and confidence. This is also visible in the application of colors that reveals a sure touch of execution. Indeed, the canvas flaunts her pictorial skill, using minimal means to represent the subject matter. This is particularly evident in the depiction of the young Julie who is depicted through the merest sketch. However, her presence is fundamental and contributes to the psychological reading of the image.

In this painting, according to Morisot, Julie and the act of painting enabled her to face outward with great vigor and self-confidence, both from a physical and intellectual point of view.[204] Indeed, Morisot fills the space with her erect posture suggesting an inner stability and reconciliation of artistic creativity with femininity. By including Julie in her self-portrait, Morisot also seems to have reinterpreted 19th pedagogy, asserting that mothers were in charge of teaching their daughters lessons of femininity, as the "cult of true womanhood" also confirmed. She used this social convention to test the possibility of a triangular relationship between the self, her daughter and the image.[205] This was for Morisot a way to explain that both pictorial self-assertion, which was for Morisot a matter of survival and family, which contributed to her emotional fulfilment, could not only coexist but foster each other. Although the triangular relationship deeply challenged hierarchical distinction between the private and the public role of women which pushed Morisot to hide the self-portrait until her death, this specific phase of life represented a huge personal achievement. She also reconciled herself with the fact that Julie had been "taken away" by a faceless nursemaid in *The Wet Nurse and Julie*. In other words, Berthe Morisot had finally achieved control of her life.

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[204] Higonnet and Morisot, "An Image of One's Own", 206.
[205] Higonnet and Morisot, 208.

To conclude, we have learned how Morisot was able to emerge in the artistic realm of the late 19th century. Despite the impossibility of attending official art institutions, and the idea that women artists were perceived to be "threatening" when they seriously pursued artistic ambitions, Morisot found alternative ways to be accepted in the professional realm. Firstly, she was naturally praised for the delicacy of her painting and was considered a suitable representative of "feminine" Impressionism. She also created professional ties with a male Impressionist that allowed her to be fully integrated into, and also promoted by, the public artistic circles of the time. In addition, she found ways to be integrated in the art market in order to gain professional esteem and economic worth. Apart from pursuing her artistic ambitions, she also believed it was essential to incorporate and maintain "feminine" values in her artistic practice, by marshalling the amateur pictorial tradition and mechanically reproduced fashion plates. Although it is true that she faced deep moments of uncertainty and self-doubt throughout her artistic career, especially due to her lack of affection, she eventually overcame this miserable phase of life. Especially after her marriage with Eugène and the birth of Julie, Morisot claimed to have found inner stability by reconciling self, art and family.

Conclusion

The complex figure of Berthe Morisot continuously reconsidered her artistic practice in order to benefit from the latest avant-gardist trends and appease social demands to be accepted as a woman artist.

As we saw at the beginning of the thesis, understanding the common educational constraints and social prejudices faced by women in the history of art, and especially in the late 19th century, helped us clarify the complex methodological approaches to such artists. In the second chapter we analyzed in depth the Impressionist avant-garde and its influence on *The Wet Nurse and Julie* painted by Morisot in 1879. There is an evident use of contrasting colors, applied according to Chevreul's law of simultaneous contrast, and broad brushstrokes which create a strong impastoed effect. At the same time, by adopting Impressionist devices, Morisot filtered the luminous sensations through an inner turmoil visible in the extreme disembodiment of forms which characterizes Morisot's paintings starting in the late 1870s. By highlighting this pictorial effect, it was possible to address her internal pressure in relation to several social factors: the phenomenon of the wet-nursing industry, the commodification of modern workers, and the social demands dictated by the "cult of true womanhood."

The Wet Nurse and Julie allowed me to consider Morisot's constant internal struggle and the ways she tried to find a compromise between being an active painter and an affectionate mother. More specifically, my attempt was to show how despite being denied access to official art institutions and the hindered pursuit of professional artistic careers, Morisot found alternative paths to be accepted both artistically and socially. Indeed, Morisot took advantage of the unfinished touch of her paintings in order to gain access to the Impressionist group that

frequently used loose brushstrokes. The unblended chromatic effects and the subsequent connotations of femininity, as conceived by art critics, led her to achieve a prominent position in the artistic circles of the 1870s and 1880s. To gain artistic praise, she also understood that it was necessary to cultivate professional ties with recognized male artists and to access the contemporary art market so that her paintings could obtain artistic and economic worth. Morisot also realized it was crucial to repurpose traditional notions and images of femininity in her works. For example, this was done by adopting amateur pictorial traditions and mass visual culture, so that she could be viewed as a respectable, modest, and modern feminine artist.

Lastly, apart from considering Morisot's wide professional realm, it was also essential for me to expand upon her deepest inner reality, as revealed by her letters and self-portraits. Through a deep analysis of Morisot's internal reaction to the complex professional realm of her time, I have attempted to expose that her renegotiation between art and affection, as Morisot herself recognized, manifested through a triangular, intersectional relationship between her profoundest identity, pictorial practice, and family affection.

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Appendix 1: Figures

Figure 1 Berthe Morisot, *The Wet Nurse and Julie*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 50.2 x 61 cm. Private collection, New York. Source: British Library on Flickr.

Figure 2 Berthe Morisot, *Psyche*, 1876. Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Source: Artstor.

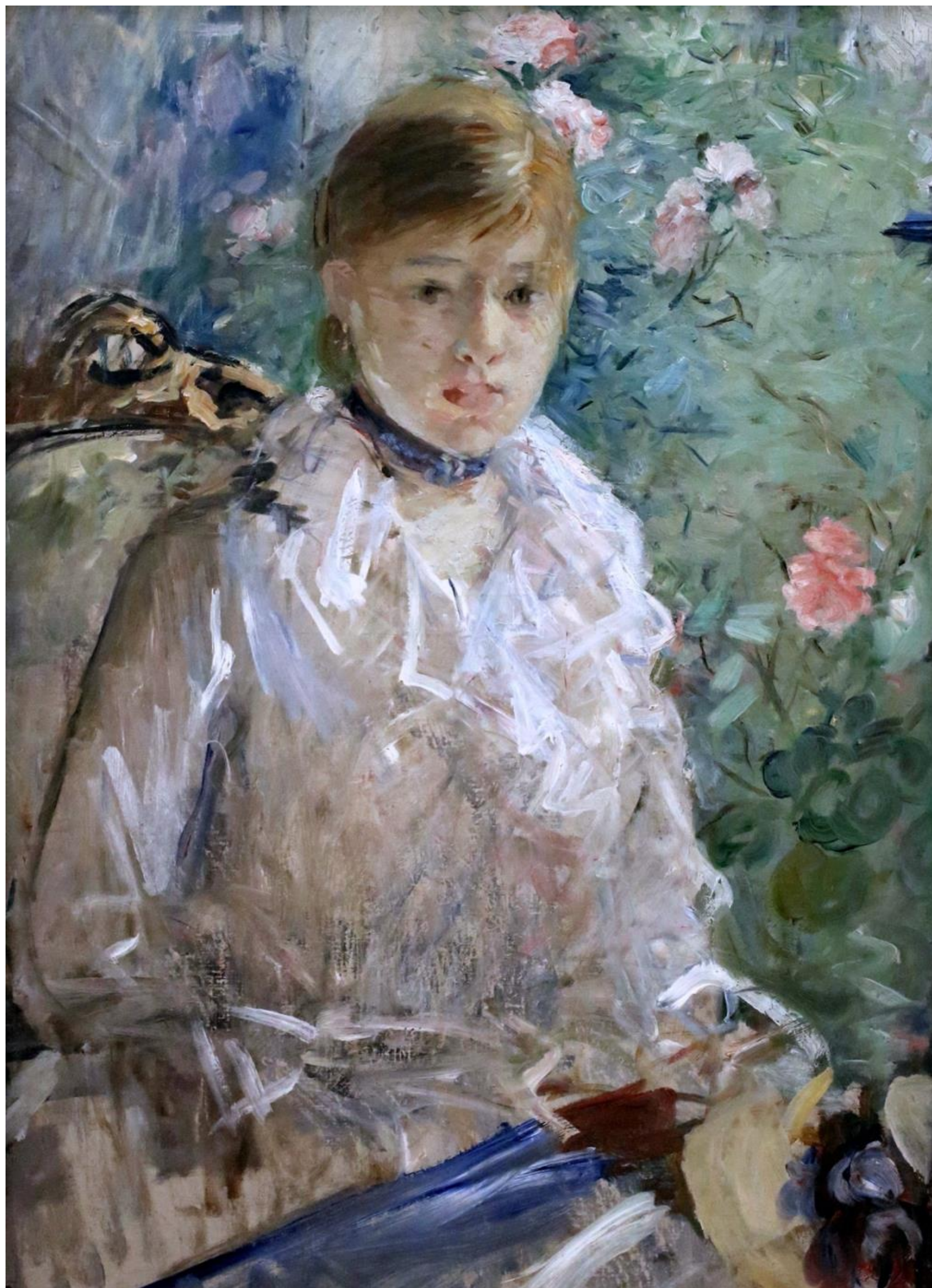

Figure 3 Berthe Morisot, *Young Woman Sitting by the Window,* 1878. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm. Musée Fabre, Montpellier. Source: British Library on Flickr.

Figure 4 Berthe Morisot, *Summer's Day*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 75.2 cm. The National Gallery, London. Source: Artstor.

Figure 5 Berthe Morisot, *Eugène Manet and His Daughter in the Garden at Bougival*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm. Private Collection, Paris. Source: British Library on Flickr.

Figure 6 Berthe Morisot, *Reading*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 46 x 71.8 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland. Source: Artstor.

Figure 7 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Mother Nursing Her Child*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 91 x 72 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Source: Artstor.

Figure 8 Edouard Manet, *Berthe Morisot with a Bouquet of Violets*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 55 x 38 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Source: Artstor.

Figure 9 Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait with Julie Manet*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 72 x 91 cm. Private Collection. Source: British Library on Flickr.