

LOOK AT MY CHILDREN

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The lasting influence of Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke or Jean-Jacques Rousseau is most evident in the concept of the family as a nucleus formed by the bond between mother, father and children. From the mid-eighteenth century onward, childhood became associated with a period of preparation for adult life.¹ This changing attitude toward children influenced their depictions, at least for middle and upper class children, since they were no longer seen as a type but rather as individual beings with their own personalities. Covering oil paintings, pastel drawings and photographs, this virtual tour explores the implied relationships between the portrayed children (whether they are biological or surrogate as in the case of foster children) and their parents. The roots of the modern family can be seen in the attention paid to events concerning children and the desire to have portraits true to the character and appearance of the child.

In his book *Centuries of Childhood*, Philippe Aries emphasizes that the modern family is more about sentiment and privacy than sociability, meaning that the relation between children and parents is more important than preserving the family name or a lineage.² Beginning in the seventeenth century, childhood, as a concept of family life, came into being. Mothers started to play a much more active role in ensuring that their children become respectable adults, and the authoritative role of fathers became more and more symbolic.

A portrait is an object which reveals much about the social background of its sitter. The parental presence is felt in children's portraits and their depiction tells the story of their role models, whether they are related by blood or by circumstances. The portraits in this tour all imply a relation, a bond between the subject and the commissioner of the object.



Louis-Joseph Papineau, 10 years old, ca. 1796-1797

Louis Dulongpré (French, 1759-1843)

Pastel on woven paper, 38.2 x 30.5 cm

Library and Archives Canada / c096269k

<http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2836493&rec_nbr_list=2836493>

Louis Dulongpré was recently back from training in the United States where he had “improved in the Art of Drawing under the best Academicians” when he did the portrait of the then ten year old Louis-Joseph Papineau.³ The intensity of the boy’s gaze along with his clothing suggests his upper class upbringing as the son of Joseph Papineau, an influential politician in Lower Canada. Louis-Joseph sat for this portrait just before he began his education at the Collège de Montréal, which he attended from 1796 to 1802. The subject’s features seem to be those of an adolescent and not those of a ten year old boy. Dulongpré seems to have purposefully aged Papineau, perhaps in an attempt to represent the adult within, the one that will come out by the end of his studies as seen in the related portrait below. The portrait is most likely the only portrait of a child done by Dulongpré. The rarity of children portraits in eighteenth century New France can explain Dulongpré’s lack of experience in depicting children’s features and the rather old-looking Papineau.



Louis-Joseph Papineau, 1854

Antoine Plamondon (Canadian, 1804-1895)

Oil on canvas, 122 x 106,5 cm

National Gallery of Canada

<http://www.da-go.com/-monographies/PAPINEAU_Louis-Joseph.html>.



Céline and Rosalvina Pelletier, ca. 1838

James Bowman (American, 1793-1842)

Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.4 cm

Library and Archives Canada /c099707k

<http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=fr&rec_nbr=2897918&back_url=%28%29 >.

James Bowman is typical of a number of successful American itinerant painters travelling through the eastern United States and Lower Canada. Among the six portraits he did of the family of Pierre Pelletier, a wealthy merchant in Quebec City, this one depicting his two daughters, Celine and Rosalvina Pelletier, best represents the watchful eye of parents guarding children in the cloistered environment of an affluent home life. The dog is most likely a purebred miniature dachshund. The impeccable pedigree of the dog is synonymous with the girls' upper class and is also a symbol of fidelity—perhaps a thought on their future role as faithful wives. Complete with the red coral necklaces, worn for protection against childhood illnesses, this portrait symbolically represents their parents' expectation for them to become respectful bourgeois ladies. In this respect their education was much different from the one of their brother Charles-Pierre Pelletier, also painted by Bowman and shown below. While boys and girls were seen as innocent beings, girls were seen as inferior to boys and more prone to deviance and therefore needed to be more carefully restrained.⁴



Charles-Pierre Pelletier, c. 1831-1833

James Bowman (American, 1793-1842)

Oil on canvas, 58.7 x 49.6 cm

National Gallery of Canada /no. 5030

<<http://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artwork.php?mkey=2495>>.



Group of Immigrant Girls, 1908

Unknown photographer

Silver gelatin print, 14.8 x 10.4 cm

Library and Archives Canada /a020906

< <http://www.lac-bac.gc.ca/grosse-ile/021023-119.01->

[e.php?&gallery_id_nbr=158&interval=9&q1=2101&page_sequence_nbr=1&&PHPSESSID=iksesm9ki87uhi366shpkvean7](http://www.lac-bac.gc.ca/grosse-ile/021023-119.01-e.php?&gallery_id_nbr=158&interval=9&q1=2101&page_sequence_nbr=1&&PHPSESSID=iksesm9ki87uhi366shpkvean7) >.

Portraying this group of immigrant girls does not serve the same purpose as commissioning painted portraits of children to be hung in the family's home by parents. The girls' features in this photograph are poorly defined although their tired and sad expressions speak of their long journey. This group portrait was meant to confirm the welfare of these girls and encourage the sponsorship of philanthropic work that supported bringing to Canada these poor girls from England. It was widely believed that all these children, called "Home Children," were orphans, but in fact most had living parents, some of whom were unaware of their children's fate after they were left in care homes.⁵ The Canadian government has since acknowledged its controversial treatment of these children in the colonies, but it has not yet proclaimed a formal apology on the nation's behalf.⁶ All girls are in transition at a train station, waiting to be taken to Annie Macpherson's home, only to be placed again in another home where they would work most likely as maids. Macpherson, along with her female assistants and patrons, brought them to Canada to act as surrogate mothers to those girls.



Annie MacPherson's home in Stratford, Ontario, year unknown

Unknown photographer

Library and Archives Canada /e006611022

<http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3722643>.



Children of Mr. and Mrs. John A. Aylen, 18 May 1933

Yousuf Karsh (Canadian, 1908-2002)

Library and Archives Canada /Accession 1987-054, e010678716

<http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec_nbr=138426>.

Photographs might have been cheaper to produce than painted portraits, but this does not mean that they did not develop a prestige of their own. Yousuf Karsh's fame as the portrait photographer of politicians, artists, scientists, and other men and women of accomplishment was still to come when he did this photograph of the children of Mr. and Mrs. John A. Aylen in 1932 in his well-frequented Chateau Laurier studio. The poses and expressions of the boy and girl clearly show that they know how to act for the photographer. Compared to the previous portrait of upper class children, there is a sexual tension between the brother and sister that contrast the innocent look of the Pelletier children, for example. The closeness of Mr. and Mrs. Aylen's children, and the way the girl sits with her dress showing more of her legs than usual, indirectly references children's sexuality instead of their purity.



Dr. and Mrs. A.W. Grace, children, 29 August 1934

Yousuf Karsh (Canadian, 1908-2002)

Library and Archives Canada /Accession 1987-054, e010679459 to e010679463

http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3842201>.

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¹ Tamara K. Hareven, "The History of the Family and the Complexity of Social Change," *American Historical Review* 96:1 (Feb. 1991): 98, JSTOR, 15 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2164019>>.

² Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, New York: Vintage (1965): 44. While many authors agree with Aries' perspective, he has also attracted much criticism essentially from historians that reject his claim that childhood did not exist in medieval time and that it is an invention of modernity; and John Clark, "Histories of Childhood," in *Childhood Studies: An Introduction*, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell (2004): 6.

³ Jules Bazin, "Louis Dulongpré," *Dictionary of Online Bibliography Online*, 6 Dec. 2011 <http://www.biographi.ca/EN/009004-119.01-e.php?id_nbr=3360>.

⁴ Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid Walsh, eds. "Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia," 2 Westport: Greenwood (2008): 366.

⁵ Margaret McNay, "Immigrants, laborers, "Others," Loren Lerner, ed., *Depicting Canada's Children*, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press (2009): 155.

⁶ Nick Bryant, "Ordeal of Australia's child migrants," BBC News (15 Nov. 2009) 3 Feb. 2012 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8360150.stm>>.