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## An Examination of Artistic Expression Through Honoré Daumier's Le Fardeau

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AN EXAMINATION OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION  
THROUGH HONORÉ DAUMIER'S *LE FARDEAU*

by

Sarah Isak-Goode

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of

Arts in

Art History and Visual Culture

at Lindenwood University

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Lindenwood University  
School of Arts, Media, and Communication

**AN EXAMINATION OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION  
THROUGH HONORÉ DAUMIER'S *LE FARDEAU***

by

Sarah Isak-Goode

A Prospectus of a Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master Arts in Art History and Visual Culture

September 2024

### **Abstract**

Honoré Daumier, renowned for his career as a political cartoonist in 19th-century France, created a substantial body of personal works that have received comparatively little scholarly attention. This thesis focuses on Daumier's paintings, particularly those created during his midlife (1848-1864), examining their distinctively serious qualities and emotional depth. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining art historical analysis and psychobiography, this research explores the previously unrecognized connection between Daumier's paintings and his private life experiences. Central to this study is an in-depth analysis of *Le Fardeau*, a painting that exemplifies Daumier's artistic evolution and emotional expression during a period marked by personal tragedy and societal upheaval. The recurrence of family themes and motifs of struggle in Daumier's midlife paintings suggests a process of working through grief and societal observations through his art. Therefore, this thesis argues that Daumier's paintings, far from being mere depictions of observed scenes or extensions of his political commentary, were profound expressions of his inner emotional landscape. By integrating personal symbolism with social commentary, Daumier created works that resonated on both individual and universal levels. This interpretation challenges previous assumptions about Daumier's motivations for painting and offers a more nuanced understanding of his artistic legacy.

The research draws on events from Daumier's personal life and explores current understandings of the relationship between psychobiography and artistic creation. By applying psychobiographical methods to art historical analysis, this study provides new insights into Daumier's artistic process and the role of personal experience in shaping artistic output. This interdisciplinary approach not only enriches our understanding of Daumier's oeuvre but also

demonstrates the value of integrating psychobiographical perspectives into art historical research. The thesis contributes to broader discussions in art history about the relationship between an artist's life experiences and their creative work, the nature of Realism, and the importance of considering emotional and psychological factors in artistic analysis.

Keywords: Daumier, Realism, psychobiography, art history, 19th-century French art, *Le Fardeau*, artistic expression, interdisciplinary research

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Honoré Daumier, a prominent figure in 19th-century French art, is primarily remembered for his career as a satirical cartoonist. His incisive portrayals of Parisian life, particularly of the working class, coupled with his biting political humor, established him as a provocative and influential voice of his time. While scholars have extensively studied his readily available oeuvre of cartoons for decades, a significant portion of his artistic output—hundreds of paintings, drawings, and sculptures—has received comparatively little attention. This disparity in scholarly focus presents an intriguing opportunity for a deeper exploration of Daumier's lesser-known works, particularly his paintings.



Daumier's paintings stand in stark contrast to his public persona as a humorist. Often created in seclusion, these works lack the overt comedy and political commentary that characterized his cartoons. In his lifetime, Paris experienced two revolutions and several insurgencies. These experiences, coupled with his working-class upbringing and personal challenges, would contribute heavily to his artistic style. Instead, they reveal a more introspective, emotionally charged aspect of the artist. The absence of basic information such as dates and titles on many of these paintings further shrouds them in mystery, challenging researchers to piece together their significance within Daumier's broader artistic journey. It is strange, then, that more consideration has not been given in the creation of his sensitive and dynamic paintings; this is where his benevolence is most evident.

The divergence between Daumier's public and private artistic expressions raises compelling questions. What motivated Daumier, after long days of creating satirical cartoons, to return home and paint these often somber, emotionally laden scenes? Why did he choose to keep this body of work largely hidden from public view during his lifetime? The abundance of these private works, only widely discovered after his death, has puzzled and intrigued scholars for generations.

Traditionally, art historians have posited that Daumier aspired to become a professional painter, viewing his paintings as attempts to align himself with the Realist movement of his time. This interpretation seems logical at first glance, given the strong painterly style evident in works like *Le Fardeau* (Fig. 1), which aligns with the aesthetic of Realism. Scholars have often explained Daumier's paintings as extensions of his social and political commentary, similar to his cartoons but in a different medium.

Indeed, Daumier's career as a caricaturist was deeply intertwined with the social and political turbulence of 19th-century France. As Judith Wechsler notes in "Out of Sight: Political Censorship of the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France," Daumier's cartoons were "the most powerful and effective images of French and European political issues with a profound moral force and masterful style."<sup>1</sup> His work touched upon enduring themes such as urban life, greed, technological change, and political corruption, earning him both acclaim from the working class and scrutiny from those in power.

However, this interpretation of Daumier's paintings as merely an extension of his public work overlooks crucial aspects of his artistic development and personal life. While Daumier's cartoons became associated with the Realist movement, it was painters like Gustave Courbet and Jean-François Millet who were recognized as the movement's leaders. The art of Realism began as a detestation of heroized aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Dore Ashton explains in "Artists and Politics, Politics and Art," that "Many young painters... were on guard against inquisitions of the mind and when the populace surged up to overwhelm the oppressive government, they were

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there."<sup>2</sup> The art of Realism articulated what many people were afraid to say, and inspired change.

Importantly, it motivated social observations amongst artists and viewers alike. Realism, as Linda Nochlin explains in her seminal work, aimed "to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life."<sup>3</sup> Yet, as

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Wechsler, "Out of Sight: Political Censorship of the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France," *Yale French Studies*, no. 122 (2012): 77.

<sup>2</sup> Dore Ashton, "Artists and Politics, Politics and Art," *Social Text*, (Autumn, 1985): 72.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 13.

Nochlin also points out, Realism was a complex movement encompassing more than just visual reality; it was also a social movement with a distinct "stylistic attitude within its period."

The assumption that Daumier sought to establish himself as a professional painter through these works is contradicted by historical evidence. Bruce Laughton, in his biography of Daumier, reveals that "before the 1848 revolution only his close friends knew that he painted in his spare time."<sup>4</sup> Daumier's reluctance to publicly exhibit his paintings, coupled with his focus on introspective themes of family life, suggests a more personal motivation behind these works. These private pieces appear to be created primarily for himself, rather than for public consumption or commission. A. Hyatt Mayor supports this view, observing that "there are few artists whose public and commissioned works differ so deeply from their private productions."<sup>5</sup> Daumier's family-themed works also marked a distinct shift in his artistic imagery. The year 1848 represents a critical turning point in understanding Daumier's artistic evolution. Just before this time, his paintings depicted peaceful scenes of domestic life. However, 1848 brought significant changes both publicly and personally. Paris experienced a violent insurgency resulting in thousands of arrests and deaths, while Daumier suffered the devastating loss of his only child at the age of two. This confluence of societal upheaval and personal grief profoundly

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impacted Daumier's artistic themes and emotional tone, particularly evident in his paintings from this period onward. The period from 1848 to 1864 represents a crucial phase in Daumier's life and artistic development. Characterized at first by personal upheavals and continued societal

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Laughton. *Honoré Daumier*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>5</sup> A. Hyatt Mayor, "A Bequest of Prints by Callot and Daumier," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 17, no. 1 (Summer 1958): 16.

turmoil, this era saw a significant shift in Daumier's artistic output, particularly in his paintings of family life. These works, created in the aftermath of profound personal loss and amidst ongoing social unrest, offer a window into Daumier's inner world.

This thesis proposes a new approach to understanding Daumier's paintings, particularly those created during this tumultuous period of his life. By applying a psychobiographical method, which focuses on the inner motivations that drive behavior, this research seeks to uncover the personal and emotional impetus behind Daumier's private artistic endeavors. This interdisciplinary approach, combining art historical analysis with psychobiographical insights, allows for a more nuanced interpretation of Daumier's paintings of family life. Central to this analysis is *Le Fardeau*, a painting that exemplifies the emotional depth and symbolic richness of Daumier's private works. Created at a pivotal moment in Daumier's life, *Le Fardeau* serves as a case study for understanding how personal experiences and societal conditions influenced his artistic expression.

By examining Daumier's paintings not just for their representational content but also for the context in which they were created, this thesis aims to demonstrate that these works were primarily driven by a desire for self-expression. Rather than viewing them as attempts to establish a career as a painter or as extensions of his social commentary, this research posits that Daumier's private paintings arose from a deeply personal place, reflecting his inner emotional landscape and response to the world around him. In doing so, this thesis seeks to fill a significant

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gap in Daumier scholarship, offering a more complete understanding of this complex artist. By shedding light on the emotional and psychological underpinnings of Daumier's paintings, this research not only enriches our understanding of his artistic legacy but also provides valuable

insights into the intersection of personal experience, societal conditions, and artistic expression in nineteenth-century France.

This thesis argues that Honoré Daumier's paintings, particularly those created during his midlife period, were primarily motivated by a desire for self-expression rather than social commentary or professional ambition. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining art historical analysis and psychobiography, with a specific focus on *Le Fardeau*, this research demonstrates the profound connection between Daumier's personal experiences and his artistic output.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **A. Daumier: The Artist and His Legacy**

Honoré Daumier's prolific career as a satirical cartoonist has long overshadowed his equally significant work as a painter. As Howard Vincent observes in *Daumier and His World*, "The streets of Paris were his school and college, his occupation and pastime. They were his career. They formed him, made him aware, and out of the awareness he himself shaped Paris and her people in the thousand forms of his prints and paintings, all a devoted record of his city."<sup>6</sup> This observation underscores the deep connection between Daumier's lived experiences and his artistic output, a connection that is particularly evident in his paintings.

While Daumier's influence on subsequent generations of artists is well-documented, with his impact noted on figures such as Édouard Manet, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and Pablo Picasso, the influences on Daumier himself as a painter have been less thoroughly explored. In fact, there exists a persistent portrayal of Daumier as an underdeveloped painter which is often attributed to his demanding career as a lithographer.<sup>7</sup> In alluding to the idea that Daumier was unable to pursue this career path, most scholars choose to instead note his industrious character.<sup>8</sup> It is widely agreed that his career in cartoon lithography took precedence over painting, though this is hardly surprising, considering it was his livelihood. For the majority of his career, Daumier produced two to three lithographs each week.<sup>9</sup> The creation of a lithograph is a time-consuming, multi-step process requiring planning and precision. In "An Unpublished Daumier Panel in the Fogg Art Museum: Scapin and Géronte," author Catherine W. Blanton observes: "Indeed it would seem that the artist's early popularity as

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<sup>6</sup> Howard Vincent, *Daumier and His World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968): 5.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron Scharf, "Daumier the Painter," *The Burlington Magazine*, 103, no. 701 (August 1961): 356.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine W. Blanton, "An Unpublished Daumier Panel in the Fogg Art Museum: Scapin and Géronte," *The Burlington Magazine*, 108, no. 763 (October 1966): 511.

<sup>9</sup> Blanton, "An Unpublished Daumier Panel," 511.

a caricaturist has been in large degree responsible for the traditional slighting of his painted oeuvre.”<sup>10</sup> However, Daumier’s hard-working nature was more likely to have been an asset than a hindrance as he was able to both work and devote significant personal time to painting.

Nevertheless, Catherine W. Blanton's assertion that "the artist's early popularity as a caricaturist has been in large degree responsible for the traditional slighting of his painted oeuvre" highlights the need for a reevaluation of Daumier's paintings.<sup>11</sup> This gap in scholarship presents an opportunity for a more nuanced understanding of Daumier's artistic development. This thesis contends that Daumier's dedication to painting, despite his professional commitments, suggests a deeper, more personal motivation for his work in this medium. Rather than indicating a lack of skill or commitment, his style may be seen as a deliberate artistic choice, reflecting Daumier's focus on emotional expression over technical finesse.

Recent scholarship has begun to recognize the unique qualities of Daumier's painting style. Roger Kimball describes it as demonstrative, noting that "Just as Daumier's caricatures laid bare with a few deft strokes the personalities and pretension of their subjects, so his paintings conjugated a mood, an emotional reality with subtly modulated lozenges and triangles of color."<sup>12</sup> This observation aligns with the thesis's argument that Daumier's paintings may have served as a medium for emotional expression. The esoteric quality of Daumier’s paintings echoes that of his personal life. Kimball astutely observes that Daumier is “enigmatic also because he is largely unknowable.”<sup>13</sup> It is possible that, due to this enigmatic quality, most scholars have superfluously created a picture of Daumier based upon his political leanings. These make up the majority of historical accounts we have on Daumier and offer a linear explanation about his

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<sup>10</sup> Blanton, "An Unpublished Daumier Panel," 511.

<sup>11</sup> Blanton, "An Unpublished Daumier Panel," 511.

<sup>12</sup> Roger Kimball, "'Strange Seriousness': Discovering Daumier," *New Criterion* 18, no. 8 (April 2000), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Kimball, "'Strange Seriousness': Discovering Daumier."

creations. Artine Artinian and Margaret Woodbrige Artinian affirm this leaning by discussing his frequent observation of the working class: “Daumier painted over and over again the same scene or group of people. He portrays the class he best knows, succeeding best... with his own milieu.”<sup>14</sup> Though not inaccurate, the reliance upon his political leaning gleaned from his works only produces a fragmentary record of Daumier.

That most scholars have assessed Daumier from a political viewpoint is unsurprising; scholars have had little more than his caricatures on which to base their research. Interestingly, these caricatures are cited for their political references which were, in fact, written by other people.<sup>15</sup> This perspective has obscured a more complete analysis of his complexity as an artist. A synchronous examination of Daumier’s paintings and his life in Paris can facilitate the understanding of his drive to paint. In turn, this thesis focuses on Daumier’s paintings and life events in the period of 1848 to 1864. In this period, Daumier painted twenty-one family-themed solemn and often melancholy works of art. This thesis seeks to connect Daumier’s biographical events to this familial theme, with particular focus on *Le Fardeau*.

### **B. *Le Fardeau*: A Case Study in Daumier's Artistic Expression**

*Le Fardeau* is one of Daumier's most poignant works. The painting's recurring theme across multiple works (including sculptures and drawings) suggests its significance to the artist. The painting's composition is dominated by the central figures of a mother and child, their forms filling most of the canvas and immediately drawing the viewer's eye. The background, rendered

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<sup>14</sup> Artine Artinian and Margaret Woodbrige Artinian, "Daumier and 'L'Esprit Français'," *The French Review* 12, no. 1 (October 1938): 44.

<sup>15</sup> Wechsler, “Out of Sight,” 59.



in muted, muddy tones, creates an ominous atmosphere that contrasts sharply with the more defined figures in the foreground. This interplay between the vague, shadowy setting and the

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clearly delineated subjects enhances the sense of isolation and struggle that permeates the work. The indistinct nature of the background also serves to universalize the scene, making it a representation of a broader human condition rather than a specific location.

Daumier's use of color in *Le Fardeau* is particularly striking. The overall palette is subdued, dominated by earthy browns and grays that reflect the somber mood of the piece. However, Daumier introduces subtle pops of warmer tones, particularly in the flesh of the figures, which adds depth and vitality to the composition. This restrained use of color serves to focus attention on the emotional content of the scene rather than its visual spectacle. The artist's brushwork is a testament to his evolving style. Quick, visible strokes create a sense of urgency and movement, while also lending a sketch-like quality that heightens the emotional impact. The juxtaposition of softly bending yet heavily applied lines is particularly effective in conveying the weight and weariness of the figures. This technique, different from the more precise lines of his caricatures, suggests a more immediate, visceral approach to capturing emotion.

The figures themselves are masterfully rendered. The mother's hunched posture, with her face hidden from view, conveys a profound sense of weariness and anonymity that universalizes her struggle. The child, barely visible and clinging to the mother, creates a poignant image of dependence and protection amidst adversity. The fusion of these two figures into a single form symbolizes both the generational nature of hardship and the protective bond between parent and child. The laundry bundle carried by the woman serves as both a physical and metaphorical

burden. Its weight is palpable, bending the woman's form, yet it also represents the invisible weights of poverty, societal pressure, and personal responsibility. Daumier's mastery of juxtaposition is evident throughout the painting. The contrast between the detailed, careworn

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figures and the shadowy masses from which they emerge creates a powerful visual tension. Michael Moore's analysis of the spatial elements in *Le Fardeau* offers insight into Daumier's use of compositional techniques to convey emotion and social commentary. Moore suggests that the "rushed movement of the laundress and her child is greatly accentuated by the blind, silent, insensitive wall," emphasizing the stark contrast between the human figures and their environment.<sup>16</sup> This technique not only adds depth to the composition but also serves as a metaphor for the subjects' struggle to rise above their circumstances.

In *Le Fardeau*, Daumier achieves a delicate balance between realism and emotional expressionism. While the scene is grounded in the realities of working-class life, the artist's treatment elevates it to a statement about the human condition. The painting's power lies not just in its depiction of hardship, but in its ability to evoke empathy and recognition in the viewer. Through his innovative techniques and profound understanding of human experience, Daumier transforms a scene of daily struggle into a timeless representation of resilience and the weight of human existence. *Le Fardeau* stands as a testament to Daumier's ability to infuse seemingly mundane subjects with deep emotional resonance and universal significance. The Buffalo AKG Art Museum's review describes it as "a sympathetic portrayal of a dreary and difficult existence,"

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Moore, "On the Signification of Walls in Verbal and Visual Art," *Leonardo* 12, no. 4 (Autumn 1979): 312.

highlighting Daumier's empathetic approach to his subjects.<sup>17</sup> Scharf's interpretation of Daumier's paintings as reflections of his inner world is particularly relevant to this thesis. He states, "His people live in the harsh and dramatic illumination of the limelight or they materialize from the mellow shadows cast by the gaslight. In Daumier's paintings... washerwomen carry their bundles in a twilight zone of the artist's imagination... His painted world is a private

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world.”<sup>18</sup> This perspective aligns with the psychobiographical approach adopted in this research, which seeks to connect Daumier's personal experiences with his artistic output.

The literature review reveals a growing recognition of the emotional depth and personal significance of Daumier's paintings. However, there remains a gap in scholarship regarding the specific connection between Daumier's life events and the themes and styles of his paintings, particularly works like *Le Fardeau*. This thesis aims to address this gap by applying a psychobiographical approach to Daumier's work, exploring how his personal experiences, especially during his midlife period, influenced his artistic expression.

By examining *Le Fardeau* along with other family-themed works through the lens of psychobiography, this research seeks to offer a more comprehensive understanding of Daumier as an artist. It challenges the traditional view of Daumier primarily as a satirist and social commentator, proposing instead that his paintings served as a deeply personal form of expression, reflecting his inner emotional landscape and response to the world around him.

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<sup>17</sup> "Une Laveuse au Quai d'Anjou (Laundress on the Quai d'Anjou)," Buffalo AKG Art Museum, accessed June 5, 2024, <https://buffaloakg.org/artworks/19642-une-laveuse-au-quai-danjou-laundress-quai-danjou>.

<sup>18</sup> Scharf, "Daumier the Painter," 359.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

This research employs an interdisciplinary approach, combining art historical analysis with psychobiographical methods to examine Honoré Daumier's paintings, with a particular focus on *Le Fardeau*. The primary aim is to demonstrate how Daumier's paintings of family life were likely informed by key turning points in his life, revealing the artist's use of painting as a form of self-expression. As Claude Levi-Strauss identified, artistic expression can communicate emotions and thoughts.<sup>19</sup> Art historical methods are utilized to understand the historical context of Daumier's artworks, including their place within the Realist movement and nineteenth-century French society. This involves formal analysis of the paintings, considering elements such as composition, color, and brushwork. Additionally, the research examines Daumier's artistic development, tracing the evolution of his symbolic language throughout his midlife. The psychobiographical aspect of this study focuses on the inner drives and motivations that influenced Daumier's artistic output. This approach, pioneered by Freud and evolved by

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<sup>19</sup> Giovanni Schiuma, *The Value of Arts for Business* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 37.

contemporary scholars, allows for a deeper understanding of the connection between the artist's life experiences and his creative work.<sup>20</sup>

The methodology is informed by William Todd Schultz's *Handbook of Psychobiography*, which details the necessary qualities of a well-written psychobiography. The credibility and quality of the *Handbook of Psychobiography* makes this a touchstone reference for this thesis. The research identifies key moments, or "prototypical scenes,"<sup>21</sup> in Daumier's life that may have significantly influenced his artistic expression. These scenes, or moments, are described by Schultz as resulting from personal conflict and being emotionally charged. Further, Schultz states

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that these scenes can be found throughout the artist's expressions.<sup>22</sup> Particular attention is paid to the symbolism and emotional content in Daumier's paintings. This involves a close reading of the visual elements in his works, interpreting them not just as realistic depictions but as carriers of deeper personal and social meanings. Consideration is also given to how Daumier's use of symbolism evolved over time and how it reflected both his personal experiences and broader societal conditions. This is supported through Dan McAdams' "Levels of Personality" approach, which organizes personality into three levels: traits, active expressions, and personal narratives.<sup>23</sup> This framework helps to structure the analysis of Daumier's personality and its manifestation in his art.

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<sup>20</sup>Laurie Schneider Adams, "Art and Psychoanalysis," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Art History*, ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199920105-0030>.

<sup>21</sup> William Todd Schultz, *Handbook of Psychobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 49.

<sup>22</sup> Schultz, *Handbook of Psychobiography*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> William Todd Schultz and Stephanie Lawrence, "Psychobiography: Theory and Method," *American Psychologist* 72, no. 5 (2017): 434-445, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp000013>.

Some scholars question the value in examining artistic motivation.<sup>24</sup> The prominent analytic philosopher, Dale Jacquette, argues: “If we agree... that it is always a logical mistake to consult an artist’s intentions in order to interpret and understand an artwork, then, given the continuity between linguistic and artistic expression mediated by poetry, it should follow that we must also adopt the same attitude toward understanding meaning in language, refusing on every occasion to consider an author’s intentions as irrelevant to his or her meaning in linguistic expression.”<sup>25</sup> The examination of artistic self-expression, particularly when applied through psychobiography, can enrich the field of art history.

*The Handbook of Psychobiography* is an established resource, created by experts in the field of psychology. Although several of these contributing scholars have dedicated themselves to understanding the lives of artists, there is an absence of authoring art historians. In fact, some art historians discredit the psychobiographical method for its variability. Like so many

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approaches to art history, the psychobiographical method is not entirely without fault. Potential problems with the use of this method can include: legal and ethical questions, fabricated interpretation and overidentification with the artist.<sup>26</sup> Legal and ethical issues arise from working with living subjects; the current historical research avoids this problem. The issues of fabricated interpretation and overidentification, however, are always possible.<sup>27</sup> To deny these possibilities

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<sup>24</sup> César Alfonso and Marianne Eckardt, “Epilogue: Creativity and Polysemy— On the Limits of Pathography, Psychobiography and Art Criticism,” *American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, 33, (2005): 235-237.

<sup>25</sup> Dale Jacquette, “Art, Expression, Perception and Intentionality,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology*, 1, no. 1, (2014): 71.

<sup>26</sup> Zoltán Kövály, “Psychobiography as a Method. The Revival of Studying Lives: New Perspectives in Personality and Creativity Research,” *Europe’s Journal of Psychology*, 7 no. 4, (2011): 739-777. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v7i4.162>.

<sup>27</sup> Kövály, “Psychobiography as a Method,” 739-777.

is to assume irrefutable comprehension of the subject, an impossibility in analysis of a deceased subject. Evaluation and representation of the subject matter, therefore, are subjective.

This form of analysis is more fluid than stagnant. As Schultz asserts: “It is not as if the system suggested by McAdams is a sure path in psychobiography but as an a priori organizing structure, it guarantees auspicious beginnings. The model treats the person as complex and multilayered, and it emphasizes interaction between levels and processes.”<sup>28</sup> Agreeably, all research has limitations, and the thesis at hand is no exception. In seeking a more complete picture of Daumier, the applied analysis proposes an explanation rather than a certainty. While acknowledging the potential limitations of psychobiographical methods, including the risk of fabricated interpretation or overidentification with the subject, this research strives for objectivity by grounding interpretations in solid evidence from both Daumier's biography and his artwork.<sup>29</sup>

The integration of neuroscientific research, as exemplified by David Freedberg's work, further strengthens the psychobiographical approach.<sup>30</sup> While this study does not directly employ neuroscientific methods, it draws upon such research to inform its understanding of the relationship between emotion, artistic creation, and viewer response. David Freedberg, accomplished professor of art history at Columbia University, has inspired the field with his

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integrative research of neuroscience, emotion and art. In “Empathy, Motion, and Emotion” he observed: “The convention of excluding biology from the understanding of historical behaviors has outlived its usefulness. For how can one speak of context in the absence of knowledge of the

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<sup>28</sup> Schultz and Lawrence. “Psychobiography: Theory and Method,” 440.

<sup>29</sup> Kőváry, “Psychobiography as a Method,” 739-777.

<sup>30</sup> David Freedberg, “Empathy, Motion and Emotion,” in *Wie sich Gefühle Ausdruck verschaffen: Emotionen in Nahtsicht*, ed. Klaus Herding and Antje Krause Wahl (Berlin: Driesen, 2007), 17-51.

limits and possibilities of those aspects of human behavior that lie beyond conscious control? Or without considering the growing evidence for automatic aspects of somatic and emotional responses?”<sup>31</sup> Although he initially received pushback, his innovative ideas have led to valuable studies of aesthetic preference<sup>32</sup>, bias<sup>33</sup> and image composition<sup>34</sup> in the field of art history. Freedberg’s application of tests like MRI and EEG have measured emotional responses to art, thereby demonstrating that humanities and sciences can coexist in art historical research. Similar to Freedberg, this thesis has utilized an interdisciplinary method to examine the artist’s mind. However, where Freedberg would assess neuroscientific data, this thesis examines Daumier’s paintings. In the application of psychobiography to this art historical analysis, deliberate attention to the validity of the resources has been paramount.

This research draws upon both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative methods include case studies, literature reviews, and formal analysis of artworks. Quantitative methods incorporate historical statistics, such as those from the Parisian census in the nineteenth century, and contemporary psychobiographical research findings. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, this study consults a wide range of sources, including primary documents such as letters and genealogy records, secondary art historical texts, and contemporary psychological research.

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<sup>31</sup> David Freedberg, “Empathy, Motion and Emotion” In *Wie sich Gefühle Ausdruck verschaffen: Emotionen in Nahsicht*, edited by Klaus Herding and Antje Krause Wahl (Berlin: Driesen, 2007): 17-18. <https://arthistory.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/faculty/pdfs/freedberg/Empathy.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Ulrich Kirk and David Freedberg. “Contextual Bias and Insulation against Bias during Aesthetic Rating: The Roles of VMPFC and DLPFC in Neural Valuation.” In *Art, Aesthetics and the Brain*, edited by Joseph P. Huston, Marcos Nadal, Francisco Mora, Luigi F. Agnati, and Camilo J. Cela-Conde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 158-173.

<sup>33</sup> Ulrich Kirk, Lau Lilleholt, and David Freedberg. “Cognitive Framing Modulates Emotional Processing through Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex and Ventrolateral Prefrontal Cortex Networks: A Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Study.” *Brain and Behavior* 10, no. 9 (September 2020): 1-8.

<sup>34</sup> Beatrice Sbriscia-Fioretti, Cristina Berchio, David Freedberg, Vittorio Gallese, and M. Alessandra Umiltà. “ERP Modulation during Observation of Abstract Paintings by Franz Kline.” *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 10 (October 2013).



This diverse body of evidence allows for a nuanced interpretation of Daumier's work that goes beyond traditional art historical approaches. By integrating these various methodologies, this

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research aims to provide a more holistic understanding of Daumier's artistic process and output.

It seeks to demonstrate how personal experiences, societal observations, and artistic experimentation combined in Daumier's work to create paintings of profound symbolic and emotional depth.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

Honoré Daumier's lifelong devotion to painting, despite significant financial constraints, reveals a profound need for artistic expression that transcended mere professional ambition. His commitment to art, particularly painting, was evident in his creative approaches to overcoming material limitations. Jean-Philippe Chimot's observations are telling: "The formats are almost always small, the supports, canvas or wood paper, precarious, the preparations non-existent or hasty, the pictorial material deposited in very thin layers and/or in thick highlights. Some works are repeated a long time later, or painted on both sides of different subjects."<sup>35</sup> These inventive methods, often mistaken by art historians as signs of unfinished works, actually underscore Daumier's determination to create art despite his circumstances. The layers found in his paintings, now recognized as key signifiers of authenticity, speak to his persistent reworking and engagement with his subjects.

Daumier's reluctance to publicly display his paintings is particularly revealing. With only three Salon participations (1849, 1850-1851, and 1861) and a single solo exhibition in 1878, just months before his death, it's clear that public recognition was not his primary motivation. His playful comment about his leisure time pursuits inadvertently reveals his true incentive: "when I can get out of the daily toil to which I am condemned, then my laziness suggests to me the most

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<sup>35</sup> Jean-Philippe Chimot, "Daumier: emigrants or fugitives?", *Amnis*, 7 (2007) <https://doi.org/10.4000/amnis.817>.

astounding inventions.”<sup>36</sup> This statement suggests that for Daumier, painting was a form of personal expression of “inventiveness” rather than a means of “toil.”

The psychobiographical approach employed in this research offers new insights into Daumier's artistic motivation. As Noel Carroll argues, while artists operate within specific

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cultural contexts, their work is fundamentally rooted in universal human experiences.<sup>37</sup> This perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of Daumier as not just a satirist, but as a sensitive artist grappling with personal and societal challenges.

Psychobiography, as a method of studying historical figures through the lens of psychology, allows us to explore the intricate connections between Daumier's personal characteristics and his art. By examining his personality traits, particularly his conscientiousness and aesthetic engagement, we gain a deeper understanding of the forces that shaped his artistic journey and output. This approach, exemplified in Dan McAdams' "Levels of Personality" framework, highlights conscientiousness as a key factor in understanding an individual's life story.<sup>38</sup> In Daumier's case, the addition of aesthetic engagement to this psychobiographical analysis proves crucial, especially when examining the life of an artist.

Daumier's conscientiousness is evident in his professional conduct and work habits. A letter to his editor, Pierre Véron, demonstrates his commitment to deadlines and clear

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<sup>36</sup> Honoré Daumier, quoted in Bruce Laughton, *Honoré Daumier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>37</sup> Noel Carroll, "Art and Human Nature," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 95-107.

<sup>38</sup> Dan McAdams and Erika Manczak. "What Is a 'Level' of Personality?" *Psychological Inquiry* 22, no. 1 (2011): 40-44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23057281>.

communication, even when faced with illness.<sup>39</sup> He writes: “I’ve been sick these days, that’s what prevented me from delivering my stones last Friday as I promised you, I’m in purgations, things are better and I hope to send my stones on Tuesday at the latest.” This conscientious nature extended to his frugal use of materials, as observed by his friend Theodore de Banville, who noted Daumier’s tendency to use crayons until they were completely spent.<sup>40</sup>

Equally important to the psychobiographical understanding of Daumier is his profound aesthetic engagement. This trait, described in modern psychology as “the tendency to be moved

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by or absorbed in beauty, art, or nature,” was fundamental to Daumier’s identity and creative drive.<sup>41</sup> Baudelaire’s observation of Daumier’s exceptional memory for characters and forms underscores this deep aesthetic sensitivity.

The psychobiographical lens allows us to see how these traits intertwined and influenced Daumier’s artistic development. His conscientiousness likely contributed to his disciplined approach to art-making, while his aesthetic engagement fueled his keen observational skills and creative vision. This combination helps explain the perceptiveness and impact of his works, including pieces like *Le Fardeau* created during his midlife period. Moreover, psychobiography enables us to trace the evolution of these traits throughout Daumier’s life, providing context for

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<sup>39</sup> Honoré Daumier to Pierre Véron, Daumier Register, <https://www.daumier.org/biography/signatures-letters/>.

<sup>40</sup> Artinian and Artinian, “L’Esprit Français,” 46.

<sup>41</sup> Kimberly T. Johnson, Paula G. Williams, Timothy W. Smith, and Brian R.W. Baucom. “Individual Differences in Aesthetic Engagement and Proneness to Aesthetic Chill: Associations With Stress-Related Growth Orientation,” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts. American Psychological Association* 17, no. 6 (2023): 748.

his artistic choices and stylistic development. It helps us understand not just what Daumier created, but why and how he created it, offering a refined appreciation of his contributions to art history.

While these characteristics were crucial in shaping Daumier's artistic persona, they were also profoundly influenced by his early life experiences. To fully appreciate the development of Daumier's conscientiousness and aesthetic engagement, we must turn our attention to his formative years in Paris. The vibrant and often tumultuous environment of 19th-century Paris played a significant role in molding the young artist, providing rich material for his observant eye and conscientious nature to process and later express through his art.

Daumier's early life experiences significantly shaped his artistic vision. His family's move to Paris in 1816, when he was eight, exposed him to the stark realities of urban poverty.<sup>42</sup> As Bertrand and Jonathan Goupille-Lebret note, there were "significant financial discrepancies

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between the working class and the upper class, with the upper class owning the majority of the wealth."<sup>43</sup> This early exposure to social inequality would become a recurring theme in his work, particularly evident in paintings like *Le Fardeau*. Yet, despite the challenges of poverty and political turmoil, Daumier's commitment to art led him to self-education through visits to the Louvre. His apprenticeship with lithographer Zephirin Belliard in 1825 proved pivotal, providing

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<sup>42</sup> Laughton, *Honoré Daumier*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Bertrand Garbinti and Jonathan Goupille-Lebret, "The Evolution of Wealth Inequality in France From 1800 to 2014," *Rue de la Banque* 66 (July 2018).

him with skills that would form the foundation of his career.<sup>44</sup> Within just a few years of his apprenticeship, he would make a name for himself as a satirical lithographer.<sup>45</sup>

Daumier worked hard to support his parents and sisters in Paris.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, the government faltered; political powers shifted incessantly between imperialism and democracy, and citizens feared potential censure or castigation from their government. His keen eye on the tumultuous politics of Paris is apparent in his early lithograph *L'epicier qui n'était pas bête...* (Fig. 2) Published in 1830, it shows a shopkeeper shooting at royal guards during the July Revolution. Daumier's experiences during the July Revolution of 1830 and his subsequent imprisonment and institutionalization in 1832 had a profound impact on his artistic development.<sup>47</sup> The series of drawings and watercolors created during his time in the asylum, including *La Colique*, reveal a complex interplay between social criticism and personal catharsis.<sup>48</sup> These works "simultaneously initiate social criticism, offering mental cathartic relief to the oppressed artist through artistic realization."<sup>49</sup> Daumier's paintings serve a dual purpose: they not only offer social commentary but also provided him with an outlet, allowing him to process his experiences and emotions through the act of artistic creation.

### A. Early 1840s: Financial Struggles and New Beginnings

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<sup>44</sup> Laughton, *Honoré Daumier*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Laughton, *Honoré Daumier*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Laughton, *Honoré Daumier*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Julius Ruff, *Honoré Daumier: Political Caricaturist of the Nineteenth Century*, Marquette University: Haggerty Museum of Art, Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, organized by and presented at the Haggerty Museum of Art, February 13- May 18, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Alexander Smith and Michael Liebrez, "L'imagination (1833) by Honore-Victorin Daumier (1808-1879)," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 222, no. 3 (2023): 123-124.

<sup>49</sup> Smith and Liebrez, "L'imagination," 123-124.

Daumier understood from experience the complexity of difficulties faced by the working class. By the 1840s, statisticians began to reveal that lower socio-economic status equated with poorer health outcomes. In “Parisian Social Statistics: Gavarni, ‘Le Diable a Paris,’ and Early Realism,” Aaron Sheon asserts that: “the industrial policies of the July Monarchy had affected mainly the poorest classes and afflicted them with much greater susceptibility to death and disease.” He adds: “The highest mortality occurred in the poorest arrondissements...workers had the highest rate of mental illness and that the second highest rate was found in the group of poorest citizens.” Living in a poor part of Paris, Daumier was among the many who were susceptible to death and disease.<sup>50</sup> Social support was few and far between, and the working class were often unprotected. As a member of the working class, Daumier often encountered difficulties. In one letter, he pleads to his landlord: “it is impossible for me to give you money before eight days, please do me the pleasure of waiting until then...”<sup>51</sup> In the meantime, Paris had doubled in size. Overcrowding forced the working class to find residences in more affordable but overcrowded and unsanitary neighborhoods.<sup>52</sup> Daumier moved several times in this period, and faced financial difficulties.<sup>53</sup> Yet, during this period he created *Ouvriers Dans La Rue*. (Fig. 3) This small oil painting shows the struggles of the working class. As the staid workmen look out into the street, their frowns and furrowed brows suggest apprehension. From this painting, Laughton compares him to Delacroix or Millet.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, from his first painting to his last, Daumier painted powerful, emotional imagery.

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<sup>50</sup> Mayor, “Callot and Daumier,” 11.

<sup>51</sup> Honoré Daumier to his landlord, November 18, 1842. Daumier Register, <https://www.daumier.org/biography/signatures-letters/>.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Traugott, *The French Worker: Autobiographies from the Early Industrial Era*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 18.

<sup>53</sup> Daumier Register, <https://www.daumier.org/biography/daumiers-life/>.

<sup>54</sup> Laughton, *Daumier*, 26.

## B. 1845-1848: A Brief Period of Personal Joy

By 1845, Daumier's personal life had begun to improve dramatically. He had met and fallen in love with a young, dark-haired seamstress by the name of Marie-Alexandrine Dassy. He affectionately called her pet names including Didine, Nini, and Negresse.<sup>55</sup> (Though offensive in modern day language, the word Negresse was used by Daumier as a term of endearment). Very little of her is known of her otherwise, in keeping with Daumier's preference for a private home life. Together, they moved to Ile Saint-Louis, a tiny and quiet island on the Seine river located within Parisian city limits.

In 1846, Daumier and Marie-Alexandrine Dassy had a child and married shortly thereafter.<sup>56</sup> Carefree images of infants, bathers, and mothers began to pepper his works, from lithographs to paintings. Indeed, historian Elisabeth Luther Cary noted: "It is not surprising that Daumier's humor and his caricatures of family life was of the gayest and kindest (mood)."<sup>57</sup> Laughton observed that during this period, Daumier expanded his artistic repertoire to include landscape painting, a genre that allowed him to indulge in a more relaxed and spontaneous form of artistic expression, distinct from his usual rigorous work.<sup>58</sup>

Around this same time, he painted *Le Baiser*. (Fig. 4) Created between 1845 and 1848, this work coincides closely with the birth of Daumier's own son, lending a deeply personal

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<sup>55</sup> Honoré Daumier to Marie-Alexandrine Dassy, August 28, 1849, Daumier Register, <https://www.daumier.org/biography/signatures-letters/>.

<sup>56</sup> Daumier Register, <https://www.daumier.org/biography/daumiers-life/>

<sup>57</sup> Elisabeth Luther Cary, *Honoré Daumier*, (New York: Putnam, 1907), 9.

<sup>58</sup> Laughton, *Daumier*, 22.



dimension to the piece. It was first purchased by the artist Hippolyte Lavoignat, a friend who bought many works and encouraged Daumier's solo exhibition at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris.<sup>59</sup> Although *Le Baiser* portrays an intimate, tender moment between a father and his infant child, capturing the essence of paternal love and joy. In this painting, Daumier's keen

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observational skills and his mastery of physiognomy come to the fore. The artist's ability to convey complex emotions through subtle facial expressions and body language is evident in every brushstroke. The father's posture – slightly stooped to meet his child's level – speaks volumes about the care and gentleness inherent in this interaction. His arms, portrayed as strong yet gentle, create a protective cocoon around the infant, symbolizing both the father's strength and his tender affection. The infant's depiction is equally nuanced. The child's excited demeanor, with arms and legs curled up as if in anticipation of embracing the father, adds a dynamic quality to the scene. This subtle detail not only captures the physicality of an infant but also suggests the reciprocal nature of the love between parent and child.

Daumier's artistic technique in *Le Baiser* further enhances the emotional resonance of the scene. He employs a muted palette, dominated by soft, warm tones that create a sense of intimacy and comfort. The subdued colors – gentle browns, muted yellows, and subtle grays – evoke a feeling of warmth and tenderness, mirroring the emotional content of the scene. This restrained use of color allows the viewer to focus on the emotional core of the painting without distraction.

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<sup>59</sup> Daumier Register, [https://www.daumier-register.org/sammlungenlist\\_popup.php?key\\_m=7006](https://www.daumier-register.org/sammlungenlist_popup.php?key_m=7006)

The soft brushwork Daumier uses in this piece is equally significant. His strokes are gentle and diffuse, creating a slightly hazy, dreamlike quality that perfectly captures the ephemeral nature of such tender moments. The edges are softened, forms are suggested rather than sharply delineated, lending the painting an air of memory or reverie. This technique not only showcases Daumier's versatility as an artist but also serves to underscore the fleeting, precious nature of the moment depicted. Daumier's choice of subject matter for *Le Baiser* is particularly poignant when considered in the context of his broader body of work. Known

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primarily for his satirical lithographs and paintings that often critiqued society, this intimate family scene stands out as a rare glimpse into Daumier's personal life and emotions. It is, in fact, the only known painting in his entire oeuvre that explicitly celebrates the joy and love of new parenthood. The fleeting nature of the moment captured in *Le Baiser* adds another layer of significance to the work. It not only represents a brief, precious instant in the life of a parent and child but also marks a fleeting period in Daumier's own life and artistic focus. This transient quality is further emphasized by the knowledge of the personal tragedy that would soon follow – the loss of Daumier's son at the age of two in 1848.

In the broader context of art history, *Le Baiser* serves as a bridge between Daumier's public persona as a social commentator and his private life as a father. It offers viewers a rare, intimate look into the artist's personal world, making it a uniquely valuable piece for understanding Daumier not just as an artist, but as a man experiencing the emotions of parenthood. The muted palette and soft brushwork serve to reinforce this intimate, personal quality, creating a visual language that speaks directly to the heart of the viewer.

For the first time, Daumier had a small family, regular work and desire to publicize his paintings. Daumier's friends, including author and art critic Charles Baudelaire, playwright Honoré de Balzac.<sup>60</sup> Romantic artist Eugène Delacroix also enthusiastically believed in his abilities.<sup>61</sup> Delacroix lauded: "There is not a man I value and admire more than you."<sup>62</sup> Hopeful and open to this new experience, he gathered with several other famous artists to plan a salon for 1848.

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### **C. Daumier's Midlife Period: A Crucible of Personal and Artistic Transformation**

The period from 1848 to 1864 marks a pivotal phase in Honoré Daumier's life and artistic career, characterized by personal tragedies and societal upheavals that profoundly influenced his work. This era witnessed a stark shift in Daumier's artistic themes and emotional tone, particularly evident in his family-themed paintings. In particular, the year 1848 served as a critical juncture in Daumier's life. As Kimball astutely notes, "There is a delicate but ineradicable sadness infusing many of his paintings," and this underlying melancholy began to dominate Daumier's work.<sup>63</sup> February 1848 saw a violent insurgency in Paris, resulting in the abdication of King Louis Philippe and leaving approximately 1,500 dead.<sup>64</sup> Nightmarishly, Daumier's peaceable home life collapsed this same year when his only child died unexpectedly

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<sup>60</sup> Ruff, *Honoré Daumier*.

<sup>61</sup> Peter J. Beck, "Pages of History: Daumier's Political Eye," *History Today* 58, no. 2 (February 2008): 41.

<sup>62</sup> Beck, "Daumier's Political Eye," 41.

<sup>63</sup> Kimball, "'Strange Seriousness': Discovering Daumier," 20.

<sup>64</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "June Days." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 23, 2010.  
<https://www.britannica.com/event/June-Days>.

at the young age of two years old.<sup>65</sup> Shortly thereafter, a deadly cholera outbreak endangered Parisians. “It likely came via Britain to Paris, where during 169 days of public health crisis, it killed 18,500 people, or roughly 2% of the city’s population... Delivering a swift, grisly death to around half of those who contracted it, cholera also brought Paris’ economy to a standstill.”<sup>66</sup>

When this deadly cholera outbreak endangered Parisians, Daumier made the difficult decision to prioritize his wife's safety over his own comfort. Demonstrating both his love and his conscientious nature, he sent Marie-Alexandrine to the coast of France, away from the epidemic's epicenter in Paris.<sup>67</sup> This act reveals Daumier's capacity for self-sacrifice and his deep concern for his wife's well-being, traits that are rarely associated with his public image as a sharp-witted satirist. Their bond was characterized by affection and mutual care, as evidenced by

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Daumier's actions and correspondence during tumultuous times. The depth of Daumier's affection and the emotional toll of their separation is poignantly captured in a rare, emotive letter he wrote to his wife during her stay at the coast. In this letter, Daumier writes: "My dear Didine, I am writing you only a very small word today, I am excessively in a hurry. Your last letter made me very happy, I see that your health is good, try that it goes better and better, it depends on you and when you return, we will not recognize you anymore... Farewell, my negress, I kiss you well."<sup>68</sup> This brief yet touching missive offers valuable insights into Daumier's emotional state and his relationship with his wife. The use of affectionate nicknames like "Didine" and "my

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<sup>65</sup> Daumier Register, <https://www.daumier.org/biography/daumiers-life/>.

<sup>66</sup> Feargus O’Sullivan, “Pandemic Lessons from the Era of ‘Les Misérables’”, Bloomberg, April 26, 2021 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-04-27/how-paris-transformed-after-cholera>

<sup>67</sup> T.J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 103.

<sup>68</sup> Honoré Daumier to Marie-Alexandrine Dassy, August 28, 1849, Daumier Register, <https://www.daumier.org/biography/signatures-letters/>.

negress" (a term of endearment in nineteenth-century France, though offensive by modern standards) reveals the intimate and loving nature of their relationship. The urgency and brevity of the letter, coupled with Daumier's expression of happiness at receiving news of his wife's good health, suggest a man torn between his daily responsibilities and his longing for his partner. Daumier's statement that "when you return, we will not recognize you anymore" could be interpreted as a playful reference to her improved health, but it might also hint at the anxiety of separation and the fear of change that often accompanies prolonged absences. The closing "I kiss you well" further emphasizes the physical and emotional intimacy the couple shared, despite the distance between them.

This letter, in conjunction with Daumier's decision to send his wife away for her safety, paints a picture of a man deeply in love and committed to his partner's well-being. It provides a stark contrast to the public perception of Daumier as a caustic social critic, revealing instead a tender, caring individual capable of deep affection and sacrifice. Understanding this aspect of

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Daumier's personal life adds depth to our interpretation of his art, particularly his paintings of family life and struggling couples. It suggests that these works may not only be social commentary but also reflections of his own experiences, fears, and emotional attachments. The tenderness and concern evident in his letter to his wife may well have informed the empathetic portrayals of human relationships in his more personal artistic works.

In the aftermath of these personal and societal tragedies, Daumier's artistic output underwent a profound transformation, taking on a distinctly somber tone that sharply contrasted with his earlier work. The period between 1848 and 1864 marks a critical phase in Daumier's

artistic journey, during which he created twenty-one family-themed pieces. Of these, thirteen depict scenes of evident distress, while eight portray a sense of solemn contemplation. This significant shift in subject matter and emotional tone provides rich material for psychobiographical analysis, offering a window into Daumier's inner world during this tumultuous period. The preponderance of distressing scenes in these works suggests a preoccupation with themes of struggle, loss, and hardship. Paintings such as *Le Fardeau* and *Le Sauvetage* (Fig. 5) exemplify this trend, their burdened figures and somber atmospheres seemingly mirroring Daumier's own sense of grief and societal disillusionment. The recurring motif of mothers with children, often depicted in states of poverty or distress, may be interpreted as Daumier processing his own loss of a child, projecting his unfulfilled paternal role onto these poignant scenes. Even in the eight works characterized by solemnity rather than overt distress, there's a palpable undercurrent of melancholy. Pieces like *Un Homme Lisant, et un Petit Garçon* (fig. 6), and *La Leçon de Lecture* (Fig. 7), while more subdued, still carry a weight of contemplation congruous to Daumier's life events. These works might represent moments of respite or attempts at finding meaning amidst personal and societal turmoil.

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From a psychobiographical perspective, this body of work can be viewed as Daumier's attempt to navigate and process his grief through artistic expression. The consistent return to family themes suggests a preoccupation with the domestic sphere, perhaps as a site of both loss and potential solace. The varying degrees of distress and solemnity in these works might reflect the oscillating nature of the grieving process, with moments of acute pain interspersed with periods of somber reflection. Moreover, the focus on working-class families and their struggles suggests that Daumier was also grappling with broader societal issues. This intersection of

personal and social concerns in his art aligns with psychobiographical theories that posit artistic creation as a means of working through both individual and collective adversities.

The sheer volume of family-themed works produced during this period further underscores the significance of these themes to Daumier. Humanities expert Ellen Handler Spitz reflects: "When artists return repeatedly to certain subjects or themes, it often signals a deep personal connection or a persistent societal concern that they feel compelled to explore through their art."<sup>69</sup> In essence, this body of work provides a visual diary during a pivotal period in Daumier's life. Through the lens of psychobiography, these paintings offer invaluable insights into the interplay between personal experience, societal observation, and artistic creation.

The years 1850 and 1851 saw Daumier produce three versions of *Le Fardeau* paintings and the painting *Déplacement de Saltimbanques* (Fig. 8). These works uniformly depict parents and children in states of destitution and fear, a stark contrast to the tenderness of *Le Baiser*. In *Le Fardeau*, Daumier's signature theme of the laundress emerges, symbolizing the struggles of the working-class. Moreover, *Le Fardeau* not only reflects the societal issues of 19th-century Paris

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but also serves as a window into Daumier's inner world, marked by personal loss and a deep empathy for the struggles of the working class.

The composition of *Le Fardeau* is a masterclass in emotional storytelling through visual means. At the center of the painting, a mother figure dominates the canvas, her body bent under the weight of a large bundle of laundry. Her hunched posture, with her face hidden from view,

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<sup>69</sup> Ellen Handler Spitz, "Art and Psyche: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Aesthetics" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 76.

conveys a profound sense of weariness and anonymity that universalizes her struggle. This anonymity likely represents the collective struggle of the working class, particularly women. Clinging to the mother is a child, barely visible yet integral to the composition. This figure creates a powerful image of dependence and protection amidst adversity. The child's presence adds layers of meaning to the work, speaking to the generational nature of poverty and the additional burdens faced by working-class families. It's worth noting that Daumier painted this work shortly after the loss of his own child, lending a deeply personal dimension to this depiction of the mother-child relationship.

The symbolism in Daumier's *Le Fardeau* is multi-layered and richly evocative, offering a profound commentary on both personal and societal struggles. According to writer and critic Susan Sontag: "The metaphor of weight recurs throughout the history of art, often symbolizing the burdens of human existence, both physical and psychological."<sup>70</sup> *Le Fardeau* epitomizes Sontag's concept of weight as a metaphor in art, with the central figure's laundry bundle symbolizing both physical hardships and psychological burdens. This visual representation poignantly captures the multifaceted struggles of human existence in 19th-century France, from poverty and labor to societal pressures and personal responsibilities.

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The intimate portrayal of the mother and child reflects not only the generational nature of hardship but also the protective bond between parent and child. This imagery takes on added poignancy when considered in light of Daumier's recent loss of his own child, perhaps reflecting his personal sense of loss and unfulfilled desire for protection. The indistinct, shadowy

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<sup>70</sup> Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 15.



background is far from a mere backdrop; it suggests a world of uncertainty and struggle surrounding the central figures, mirroring Daumier's own sense of instability in a time of personal grief and societal upheaval. E.H. Gombrich suggests that: "Shadows in art often function as more than mere absence of light; they can represent the unconscious, the unknown, or the ominous aspects of existence."<sup>71</sup> These scholarly perspectives underscore the depth and complexity of Daumier's symbolic language in *Le Fardeau*, reinforcing its status as a powerful personal and social reflection.

Daumier's use of color and brushwork in *Le Fardeau* further amplifies its emotional impact. The muted, earthy tones dominate the canvas, creating a somber atmosphere that reflects the gravity of the subject matter. However, Daumier's mastery is evident in his use of light. A strong light from the left illuminates the woman and her burden, symbolizing a glimmer of noble intentions and humble valor amidst the gloom. This interplay of light and shadow adds depth to the painting's emotional landscape. The brushwork itself is a testament to Daumier's artistic evolution. His technique here shows the influence of his background in lithography, with sweeping, curving lines defining the volumes of the woman's body. The visible, sometimes agitated brushstrokes convey a sense of urgency and struggle, reflecting both the subject's physical exertion and the turmoil of Daumier's own life. This technique, seen across many of his

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midlife works, marks a departure from the more precise lines of his caricatures, suggesting a more immediate, visceral approach to capturing emotion. It is noteworthy that Daumier often created three-dimensional figurines as preparatory exercises for his paintings. For *Le Fardeau*, a 14-inch tall figurine marks the artist's thought process as he considered how to most successfully

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<sup>71</sup> E.H. Gombrich, "Shadows: The Depiction of Cast Shadows in Western Art," in National Gallery Publications (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 17.

translate this archetypal figure into two dimensions.<sup>72</sup> This practice underscores Daumier's commitment to capturing the essence of his subjects, not just their outward appearance.

From a psychobiographical standpoint, *Le Fardeau* can be seen as a prototypical scene, representing a pivotal moment in Daumier's emotional and artistic life. The recurring themes of struggle and family in Daumier's work during this period suggest a process of working through his grief and societal observations through his art. This is poignantly evident in a rare, emotive letter Daumier wrote to his wife while she was at the coast, having been sent away for safety during a cholera outbreak. The brevity and urgency of this letter, coupled with its terms of endearment, reveal Daumier's complex emotional state - a mixture of concern, longing, and a desire for normalcy in the face of overwhelming circumstances. The concept of cognitive dissonance, as explored by Catherine H. Rogers et al. in their study of parental grief, provides a valuable framework for understanding Daumier's artistic process. Rogers et al. note that "the death of a child defies the expected order of life events, many parents experience the event as a challenge to basic existential assumptions."<sup>73</sup> This dissonance between expectation and reality can lead to profound distress and a need to reconstruct one's worldview. In Daumier's case, his paintings of struggling families and burdened individuals can be seen as attempts to reconcile his personal loss with his understanding of the world. Moreover, the shift in Daumier's artistic focus

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to more somber, emotionally charged paintings aligns with what grief researchers term as "meaning-making" - the process by which individuals attempt to make sense of their loss and

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<sup>72</sup> The Walters Art Museum, *The Burden*, <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/17005/the-burden/>, accessed July 1, 2024.

<sup>73</sup> Catherine H. Rogers, Frank J. Floyd, Marsha Mailick Seltzer, Jan Greenberg, and Jinkuk Hong. "Long-Term Effects of the Death of a Child on Parents' Adjustment in Midlife." *Journal of Family Psychology* 22, no. 2 (2008): 203-211.

integrate it into their life narrative.<sup>74</sup> Through his art, Daumier seems to be engaging in this meaning-making process, using his paintings as a medium to explore and express the profound changes in his emotional landscape following the loss of his child and the societal upheavals he witnessed.

*Le Fardeau* stands as a testament to Daumier's artistic genius and emotional depth. It transcends mere observational representation, serving as a poignant reflection of Daumier's emotional landscape, where personal struggles and societal concerns intertwine on canvas. By integrating deeply personal symbolism with broader social commentary, Daumier created a work that resonates on both individual and universal levels. This analysis challenges previous interpretations of Daumier's motivations, offering a more nuanced view of his artistic legacy. It presents Daumier not just as a satirist or social commentator, but as a complex individual using art as a means of navigating personal adversity and societal upheaval, creating in the process a work of enduring power and relevance.

Daumier's art often served as a vehicle for processing both personal adversity and societal upheaval. This is vividly illustrated in his oil painting *Déplacement de Saltimbanques*, which depicts a small family of dejected and destitute performers in “an atmosphere of despair and misery.”<sup>75</sup> Clark adds that: “The saltimbanque stands for more than he is: he stands for the artist in general... The clown is a tragic hero... And that... is the essence of Daumier.”<sup>76</sup> Clark's interpretation of *Déplacement de Saltimbanques* employs contextual analysis and a biographical

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<sup>74</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, "Meaning Reconstruction & the Experience of Loss," (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001).

<sup>75</sup> Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois*, 120.

<sup>76</sup> Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois*, 123.

approach to reveal Daumier's deep connection with his subjects. By depicting the struggling saltimbanques, Daumier reflects both his personal hardships as an artist and the broader societal challenges of 19th-century France. The "atmosphere of despair and misery" in the painting serves as a metaphor for the artist's own experiences, aligning Daumier's personal struggles with his social critique. Clark's assertion that the clown represents "the essence of Daumier" underscores how the artist's life experiences informed his portrayal of marginalized figures, blending personal expression with commentary on the precarious status of artists in a changing society. Through this poignant image, Daumier captures the hardships faced by marginalized groups during times of social and economic turmoil, while also potentially reflecting his own experiences of struggle and displacement.

Certainly, Daumier understood suffering both from personal and observational experiences. Created shortly after the loss of his son, some seem to explore themes of fatherhood and loss. For example, *Le Bain* offers a contemplative scene of a dark-haired man bathing his child in a river. (Fig. 9) An identical dark-haired man appears in *Le Baiser* and *Le Sauvetage*; this recurring figure could be interpreted as Daumier working through his grief, imagining moments of fatherhood he would never experience. A deeper examination of the pivotal events in Daumier's life provides crucial insights into the emotional depth and thematic evolution of his paintings, offering a more nuanced interpretation of his artistic legacy.

1855 was a particularly prolific year, with Daumier producing eight paintings, including two more versions of *Le Bain*. Interestingly, many of these works feature a high cliff background, also seen in *Le Fardeau* and *Le Sauvetage*. While some have argued that these scenes depict Ile Saint-Louis, Daumier's home, the dramatic cliffs are more reminiscent of

Marseille, where both he and his wife were born, or Normandy, where his wife stayed during a cholera outbreak.<sup>77</sup> The cliffs featured in Daumier's paintings evoke landscapes of personal significance, potentially reflecting his preoccupation with family ties. The towering cliffs could symbolize the overwhelming nature of his personal struggles. Biographer Robert Rey suggests that "Daumier's landscapes, particularly his depictions of stark cliffs and turbulent seas, often serve as metaphors for psychological states, reflecting the artist's inner turmoil and societal concerns."<sup>78</sup> Among the works from this period, *Départ Pour L'école* also stands out (Fig. 11). Similar to *Le Fardeau*, it depicts a mother figure with children, but the street setting adds an element of transition or liminality, perhaps reflecting Daumier's own sense of being between states - between joy and sorrow, between his public persona and private self. The allegorical piece *Satyre Tenant un Enfant* from this period is particularly intriguing (Fig. 12). The unsettling image of a devilish satyr cradling an infant creates a sense of unease, prompting questions about the nature of care and threat in the parent-child relationship. This work could be interpreted as Daumier grappling with darker aspects of life, like fear and grief.

In 1857, Daumier's work took a slight turn with *Un Homme Lisant, et un Petit Garçon* and *La Leçon de Lecture*, both depicting a small boy reading with a father figure. These more composed, simple works might reflect Daumier's reminiscence about his own childhood and his relationship with his poet father.<sup>79</sup> The theme of reading also underscores Daumier's intellectual side and his friendships with literary figures like Charles Baudelaire.<sup>80</sup> 1858 saw a return to more

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<sup>77</sup> Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois*, 103.

<sup>78</sup> Robert Rey, *Honoré Daumier*, trans. J. Emmons (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), 127.

<sup>79</sup> Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois*, 100.

<sup>80</sup> Arsène Alexandre, "An Unpublished Daumier," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 44, no. 252 (March 1924): 143.

somber themes with the mixed media painting, *La Soupe* (Fig. 10). This work depicts the harsh reality of impoverished families subsisting on soup, what Laughton calls a "grim exposé of the

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hungry working class."<sup>81</sup> The repeated exploration of this theme suggests Daumier's deep empathy with the struggles of the poor, perhaps intensified by his own experiences of financial hardship.

*Le Sauvetage*, created around 1860, is particularly poignant. In his midlife, Daumier would produce three similar versions of this subject, each depicting a father rescuing a child from water – a theme that stands in stark contrast to his earlier, more lighthearted caricatures of swimming and bathing scenes. In this striking version of *Le Sauvetage*, Daumier portrays a couple – a man carrying a small, unresponsive child from the sea, with a woman walking closely beside him. The composition is heavy with emotion; the figures move slowly and ponderously, their bodies seeming to bear the weight of more than just the child. This is not the urgent, hopeful movement of a rescue, but rather the solemn, grief-laden procession following a tragedy. The repetition of this theme in Daumier's work during this period is particularly poignant when viewed through a psychobiographical lens. While there is no official record of the cause of Daumier's child's death, the creation of these emotionally charged scenes coincides with the loss of his own two-year-old son. This temporal connection suggests that these paintings may have allowed Daumier to explore and express his grief through his art.

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<sup>81</sup> Laughton, *Honoré Daumier*, 108.

The Daumier Register's observation that "It seems difficult to understand that Daumier treated this dramatic subject so often in his paintings"<sup>82</sup> points to the enigmatic nature of these works. However, when considered in the context of Daumier's personal loss, the motivation becomes clearer. These paintings likely served as a means for Daumier to grapple with his own experience of loss and the universal fear of losing a child. The shift from comedic caricatures to

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these somber, emotionally resonant scenes marks a significant evolution in Daumier's artistic expression. It reflects not only his personal tragedy but also a deeper engagement with themes of mortality, parental anguish, and the fragility of life. The recurring motif of the unresponsive child could be interpreted as Daumier's attempt to symbolically rescue or preserve the memory of his lost child through his art. Moreover, the inclusion of the mother figure in some versions adds another layer of complexity. It could represent Daumier's acknowledgment of shared grief, or perhaps his attempt to imagine a family unit that was now lost to him.

The difficulty in precisely dating these works, due to Daumier's habit of drawing "at various times in a variety of styles," adds to their intrigue.<sup>83</sup> This fluidity in style and timing suggests that Daumier may have revisited this theme repeatedly as part of his ongoing process of grief and artistic exploration. The *Sauvetage* series stands as a powerful testament to Daumier's ability to channel personal anguish into profound artistic expression. These paintings not only deviate from his earlier, more satirical works but also offer a window into his emotional landscape during a period of intense personal loss. The recurring theme of rescue, juxtaposed

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<sup>82</sup> Daumier Register, [https://www.daumier-register.org/hintergrundlist\\_popup.php?key\\_m=7228](https://www.daumier-register.org/hintergrundlist_popup.php?key_m=7228), accessed July 1, 2024.

<sup>83</sup> Kimball, "Strange Seriousness": Discovering Daumier," 20.

with the somber reality depicted, encapsulates the complex interplay of hope and despair that often characterizes the experience of grief. Through these works, Daumier invites viewers to engage with universal themes of loss, parenthood, and the human struggle against forces beyond our control.

The period from 1862 to 1864 saw Daumier continue to struggle financially and emotionally.<sup>84</sup> During this time, he painted *Un Wagon de Troisième Classe* (Fig. 13) and *La Laveuse* (Fig. 14). *Un Wagon de Troisième Classe* is a masterful depiction of the discomfort and

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cramped conditions of early railroad travel for the poor. The painting's composition, with its tightly packed figures of varying ages, creates a sense of shared struggle and familial bonds forged through hardship.

#### **D. The Artist's Burden: Daumier's Mid-Career Masterpieces as Personal and Social Reflection**

From 1848 to 1864, Daumier's works consistently return to themes of family, struggle, and the weight of societal pressures. The recurring motifs of burdened women, vulnerable children, and weary travelers speak to Daumier's deep empathy for the working class and his acute awareness of societal inequalities. From a psychobiographical perspective, this body of work can be seen as Daumier's attempt to process his personal tragedies within the broader context of societal upheaval. The shift from the joyful intimacy of *Le Baiser* to the somber, often heartbreaking scenes of his later works mirrors Daumier's journey through grief and hardship. This period of Daumier's work offers a window into the artist's psyche as he navigated personal loss, societal upheaval, and financial hardship. His paintings serve not just as social commentary

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<sup>84</sup> Cary, *Honoré Daumier*, 9.



but as a form of self-expression. Through his art, Daumier may have found a way to voice the unspoken struggles of his time, both personal and societal, while also challenging previous interpretations of Daumier's motivations, which often focused primarily on his role as a social commentator.

Honoré Daumier's paintings, from *Le Baiser* to *Le Fardeau*, represent a deeply personal journey of self-expression. These works transcend mere depictions of familial scenes, instead serving as visual narratives of the artist's emotional landscape. Through his evolving subject matter and technique, Daumier chronicled his experiences of joy, loss, and societal upheaval. His

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paintings became a medium through which he processed personal tragedy and reflected on broader social issues, offering intimate glimpses into both his private world and his perspective on the human condition. This transition in his work showcases Daumier's ability to infuse seemingly simple domestic scenes with profound emotional and social commentary. In doing so, Daumier created a body of work that resonates with profound human empathy and understanding, making his paintings powerful vehicles for self-expression and reflection on the shared experiences of humanity. His art not only expresses his personal journey but also invites viewers to connect with universal themes of love and struggle. This nuanced view not only enriches our understanding of Daumier's artistic legacy but also provides a compelling case study in the power of art as a medium for emotional expression.

## Chapter 5: Discussion of Results

The analysis of Honoré Daumier's oeuvre, particularly his paintings, reveals a profound and multifaceted engagement with the human condition. As Scharf astutely observes, "In his oils, even more than in the water-colours or the lithographs, Daumier reveals his lack of interest in anything but nature of man. All the descriptive accoutrements of the lithographs and water-colours are extraneous to the expressive purpose of the oils..."<sup>85</sup> This observation underscores Daumier's unwavering focus on humanity, especially in his paintings, suggesting a depth of engagement that goes beyond mere representation.

Daumier's artistic journey, particularly his commitment to painting despite numerous personal and professional challenges, offers valuable insights into the role of artistic expression in his life. Artinian and Artinian aptly note, "So it is remarkable that this son of the people, who saw his aspirations shattered daily, kept on vigorously striving."<sup>86</sup> This persistence, especially

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<sup>85</sup> Scharf, "Daumier the Painter," 359.

<sup>86</sup> Artinian and Artinian, "L'Esprit Français," 40.

evident in works like *Le Fardeau*, suggests that for Daumier, painting served as more than a professional pursuit or a means of social commentary; it was a vital form of personal expression and, potentially, a coping mechanism.

The significance of Daumier's artistic practice gains new dimensions when viewed through the lens of recent neuroscientific and psychobiographical research. Julia F. Christensen's assertion that the human brain has an inherent need for art provides a compelling framework for understanding Daumier's compulsion to paint. Christensen states, "An artist might not be aware of these effects while creating an artwork, and they might not be consciously aiming their art at these effects. This does not impede these neurocognitive mechanisms from being triggered."<sup>87</sup>

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This perspective suggests that Daumier's dedication to painting, particularly in his private moments, may have been driven by deep-seated psychological needs beyond his conscious awareness.

The concept of art as a form of cognitive and emotional processing is further supported by C. Boyd Hegarty's research on creative leisure. Hegarty notes, "A small body of research indicates that when both creativity and leisure occur together, peak experience and subject well-being may be associated. Beyond this, self-expression emerges when creativity is done for its own sake."<sup>88</sup> Daumier's practice of painting during his free time, often without the intention of public display, aligns closely with this concept. His paintings, therefore, can be viewed not just as artistic products but as artifacts of self-expression. This perspective sheds new light on the

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<sup>87</sup> Julia F. Christensen, "Is War on the Arts War on Human Psychological Systems? A View from Experimental Psychology and Affective Neuroscience," *Leonardo* 53, no. 2 (April 2020): 201.

<sup>88</sup> C. Boyd Hegarty, "The Value and Meaning of Creative Leisure," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 3, no. 1 (2009): 11.

emotional depth and symbolic richness of works like *Le Fardeau*. The recurring themes of struggle, family, and human dignity in Daumier's paintings take on additional layers of meaning when considered as reflections of his inner world. The fusion of mother and child in *Le Fardeau*, for instance, may be interpreted not only as a commentary on social conditions but also as a manifestation of Daumier's own experiences of loss and vulnerability, particularly following the death of his child.

The interdisciplinary approach employed in this study, combining art historical analysis with insights from psychobiography, offers a more comprehensive understanding of Daumier's work. As David Freedberg observes, "The lesson from pictures is that we should no longer refuse to understand the minds of others, on the grounds that they are not ours, or that their condition is

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always and inevitably different."<sup>89</sup> This perspective encourages a more empathetic and nuanced approach to art historical inquiry, one that considers the artist's lived experiences as integral to the creative process.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue about the role of art in society and individual well-being. Recent studies have shown that engagement with art can have significant positive effects on mental health and cognitive function.<sup>90</sup> Daumier's case provides a historical example of how artistic practice can serve as a means of navigating personal and societal challenges, offering potential insights for contemporary discussions about the therapeutic value of art. Moreover, the evolution of Daumier's style and subject matter over time,

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<sup>89</sup> Freedberg, "Empathy, Motion, and Emotion," 43.

<sup>90</sup> Girija Kaimal, Kendra Ray, and Juan Muniz, "Reduction of Cortisol Levels and Participants' Responses Following Art Making," *Art Therapy* 33, no. 2 (2016): 74-80.

from the more lighthearted caricatures of his early career to the somber, emotionally charged paintings of his later years, can be seen as a visual record of his artistic journey. This trajectory aligns with the concept of art as a form of emotional regulation and cognitive processing, as described in contemporary psychological literature.<sup>91</sup> The study of Daumier's work through this lens also raises important questions about the relationship between an artist's public and private personas. The contrast between Daumier's public identity as a satirist and his private, more emotionally vulnerable artistic expression in paintings like *Le Fardeau* highlights the complexity of artistic identity. This dichotomy invites further exploration of how artists navigate personal expression within the constraints of public expectations and societal norms.

This expanded analysis of Daumier's work, particularly his paintings, reveals them as powerful artifacts of both personal and societal significance. They stand as testament to his deep empathy for the human condition, and his use of art as a means of navigating personal adversity

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and societal upheaval. By recognizing the emotional dimensions of Daumier's work, we gain not only a richer appreciation of his contributions to art history but also a deeper understanding of the role of artistic creation.

This research thus opens new avenues for art historical inquiry, demonstrating the value of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding the complexities of artistic creation. It suggests that by considering the psychobiographical aspects of art-making, alongside traditional formal and contextual analyses, we can develop a more holistic understanding of art's role in human experience. As we continue to explore these intersections, Daumier's work serves as a

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<sup>91</sup> James C. Kaufman and Seana Moran, "Examining the Creative 'Cost' of Conformity," *The Journal of Creative Behavior* 49, no. 2 (2015): 141-149.

compelling case study in the power of art as a medium for emotional expression, processing, and societal reflection.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

Oliver Larkin's assertion in "The Daumier Myth" that "Daumier's intercourse with the world about him was continuous and complete, that everything he did has qualities and meaning only to be felt and understood as an extraordinary synthesis"<sup>92</sup> serves as a fitting frame for this thesis's conclusions. This research, through the interdisciplinary application of art history and psychobiography, has illuminated the previously unrecognized connection between Honoré

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<sup>92</sup> Oliver Larkin, "The Daumier Myth," *Science & Society* 1, no. 3 (1937): 354.

Daumier's personal life and his paintings, with a specific focus on his midlife period and the creation of *Le Fardeau*.

Daumier's life was marked by tumultuous events: multiple insurgencies and wars, two cholera epidemics, persistent poverty, and the loss of many loved ones, including his young child. The application of psychobiography to the study of Daumier has revealed the profound significance of these life experiences in shaping his artistic output. As Tim Lomas argues, "the power of great art resides partly in its ability to articulate messages of existential importance and provide an opportunity to reflect on these."<sup>93</sup> This thesis has demonstrated that Daumier's paintings, far from being mere expressions of political and social views (which he readily conveyed through his public works), served as profound windows into his personal experiences and emotional landscape.

The analysis of *Le Fardeau* has been particularly revealing. The painting's symbolism, emotional depth, and artistic techniques suggest a reflection of Daumier's inner turmoil and his desire for self-expression. The recurring motif of the burdened figure, the fusion of mother and child, and the use of muted colors and expressive brushwork all point to a deeply personal

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engagement with themes of struggle, loss, and resilience. The compositional choice to bring the figures into close view while allowing the background to recede creates a tension that mirrors Daumier's own internal conflict between immediate personal experiences and broader societal issues.

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<sup>93</sup> Tim Lomas, "Positive Art: Artistic Expression and Appreciation as an Exemplary Vehicle for Flourishing," *Review of General Psychology* 20, no. 2 (2016): 171-182.

This research challenges the prevailing narrative that Daumier painted primarily to establish himself as a professional artist or to extend his social commentary. Instead, it argues that Daumier's paintings, especially those created in private and rarely exhibited during his lifetime, served a more intimate purpose of emotional processing and self-expression. This perspective offers a new understanding of Daumier not just as a satirist and social commentator, but as a complex individual using art as a means of navigating personal adversity and societal upheaval.

The interdisciplinary approach employed in this study, combining traditional art historical analysis with insights from psychology and neuroscience, has proven to be a significant strength. This methodology aligns with contemporary trends in scholarly research, which increasingly recognize the value of interdisciplinary perspectives. By integrating art history and psychobiography, this thesis has offered a nuanced explanation for Daumier's motivation to paint, one that goes beyond simplistic career-driven or politically motivated interpretations.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The scarcity of primary resources on Daumier's private life has been a significant challenge. Many contemporary secondary sources rely heavily on conjecture from older, seemingly more reliable resources. The disputed nature of evidence regarding provenance, materials, and dates in Daumier's work has

further complicated the research process. These limitations underscore the need for continued scholarly investigation and potentially new methodologies for studying artists with limited primary documentation.



Furthermore, while the psychobiographical method has been invaluable, it also presents certain limitations. It is impossible to irrefutably prove Daumier's emotional responses or intentions. However, as Andrew Huebner argues, "Bringing forth the emotional component of the past only gets us closer to that full picture the study of history promises."<sup>94</sup> This thesis contends that considering the emotional and psychobiographical aspects of an artist's life is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of their work. The psychobiographical approach, when applied judiciously and in conjunction with solid art historical analysis, can provide insights that traditional methodologies might miss.

Recent neuroscientific research supports the importance of artistic expression in emotional processing and mental health. Studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging have shown increased activity in certain brain areas during creative expression, suggesting a neurological basis for art's therapeutic effects. This modern understanding provides a framework for interpreting Daumier's artistic practice as a form of emotional regulation and cognitive processing. It also opens up new avenues for understanding the relationship between creativity and mental health in historical contexts.

The implications of this research extend beyond Daumier studies. It contributes to ongoing discussions about gender and mental health in art. The creative process, as demonstrated in Daumier's case, has distinct implications for individuals struggling with mental health issues,

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particularly within the constraints of nineteenth-century masculinity. As Shane O'Donnell et al. suggest, artistic engagement can provide unique opportunities for emotional expression and

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<sup>94</sup> Andrew Huebner, "Writing History with Emotion," *Organization of American Historians* (August 2014). <https://www.oah.org/tah/august/writing-history-with-emotion/>.

identity transformation.<sup>95</sup> This perspective invites further exploration of how artists throughout history may have used their work as a means of coping with personal and societal challenges.

This psychobiographical approach to art history aligns with broader contemporary perspectives on collective trauma, such as Dr. Lynne Friedli's World Health Organization report, suggesting that Daumier's paintings can be interpreted not just as individual expressions, but as visual testimonies to the broader social and psychological conditions of nineteenth-century France.<sup>96</sup> Daumier's art, viewed through this lens, becomes not just a personal expression but a reflection of broader societal issues affecting mental well-being in nineteenth-century Paris. This approach to understanding historical art in its social context offers valuable insights for contemporary discussions about art, society, and mental health. The study of Daumier's work through this lens also raises important questions about the relationship between an artist's public and private personas. The contrast between Daumier's public identity as a satirist and his private, more emotionally vulnerable artistic expression in paintings like *Le Fardeau* highlights the complexity of artistic identity. This dichotomy invites further exploration of how artists navigate personal expression within the constraints of public expectations and societal norms.

This research contributes to a more holistic understanding of Daumier's artistic legacy and opens new avenues for exploring the intersection of art, emotion, and personal experience in art historical studies. It challenges us to look beyond surface interpretations and consider the deep, personal motivations that drive artistic creation. By doing so, it not only enriches our

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<sup>95</sup> Shane O'Donnell et al., "Men's Mental Health and The Arts: Perceived Benefits and Dynamics of Engagement," *Health Promotion International* 38, no. 4 (August 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daad092>.

<sup>96</sup> Lynne Friedli, "Mental Health, Resilience and Inequalities," World Health Organization (2009).

understanding of Daumier but also provides a model for approaching the study of other artists whose personal lives and motivations may have been overlooked or misunderstood. Future research could build on this approach, applying similar interdisciplinary methods to other artists of the period or exploring how the insights gained from this study might inform our understanding of contemporary art practices. Additionally, further investigation into the neurological and psychobiographical aspects of artistic creation could provide even deeper insights into the therapeutic and expressive functions of art across different historical and cultural contexts.

Just as Realism in art advocated for the representation of the commonly underserved, this thesis has advocated for the study of a neglected aspect of Daumier's artistic output. By examining Daumier's paintings as personal, emotional expressions rather than purely social or political statements, we gain a more nuanced understanding of both the artist and the art movement he was part of. This approach aligns with contemporary art historical methodologies that seek to contextualize art within the full scope of its creation, including personal, social, and historical factors.

Ultimately, this thesis offers a new perspective on Honoré Daumier, presenting him not just as a satirist and social commentator, but as a complex individual using art as a means of emotional expression. Through the consideration of his personal history, experiences, and the societal context in which he lived, a more complete image of Daumier as both an artist and a man emerges. As McCloskey poetically states, "The proper image of a work of art is, I am suggesting, not a mirror to be held to nature, but a kaleidoscope where the bits of glass are bits of

unrelated experience, which we put together in the form of this or that pattern."<sup>97</sup> By considering the artist's potential emotional landscape alongside their cultural and historical context, we can develop a richer, more nuanced understanding of art and its creators. In the case of Honoré Daumier, this approach has revealed a depth and complexity to his work that extends far beyond his public persona, offering a new appreciation for his contributions to art and our understanding of the human experience.

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<sup>97</sup> Mary A. McCloskey, "Some Suggestions in Aesthetics," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 12, no. 46 (January 1962): 23.

## Figures

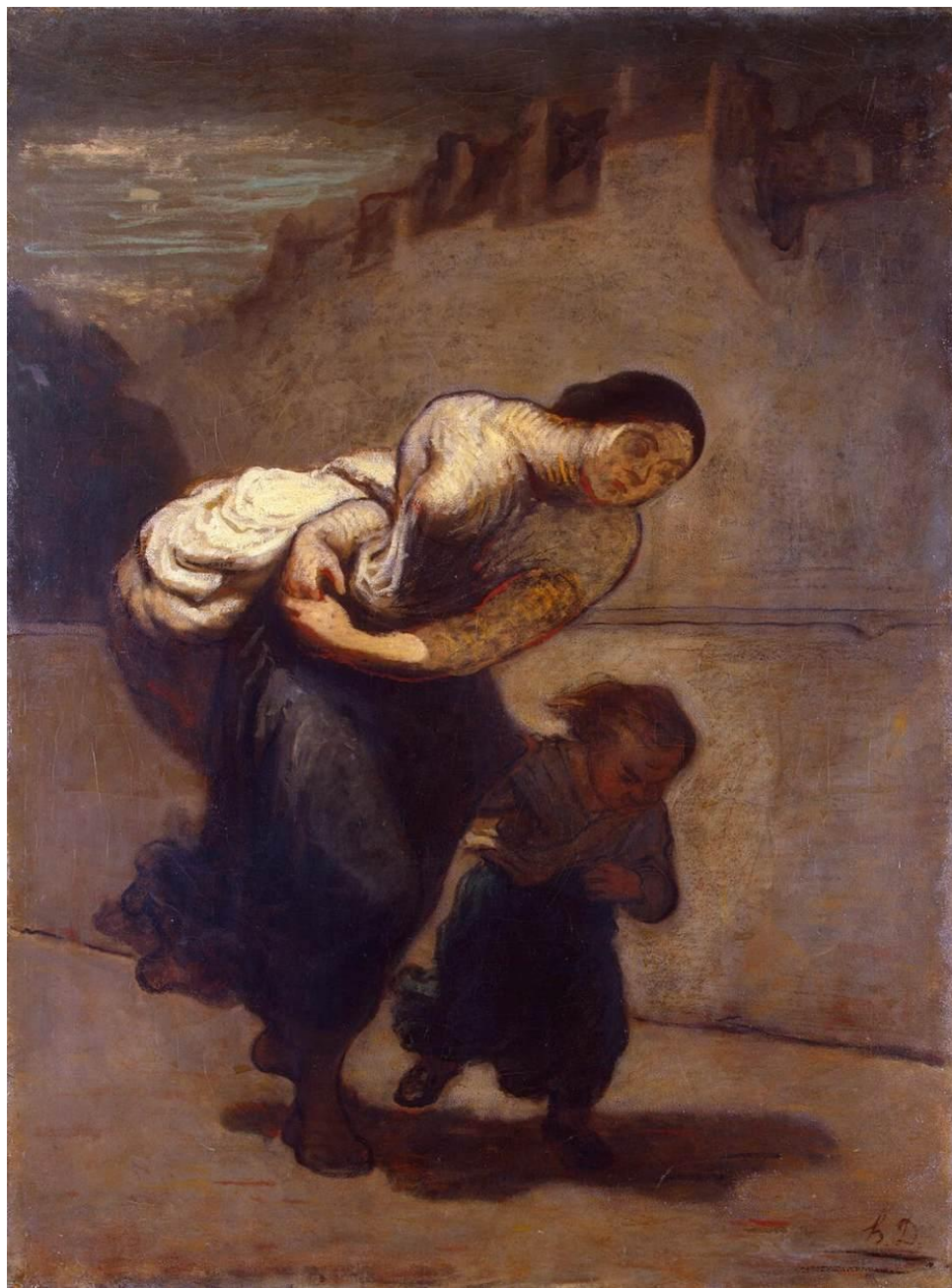


Figure 1. Honoré Daumier. *Le Fardeau*, 1851. Oil on canvas, 130 x 98 cm. Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

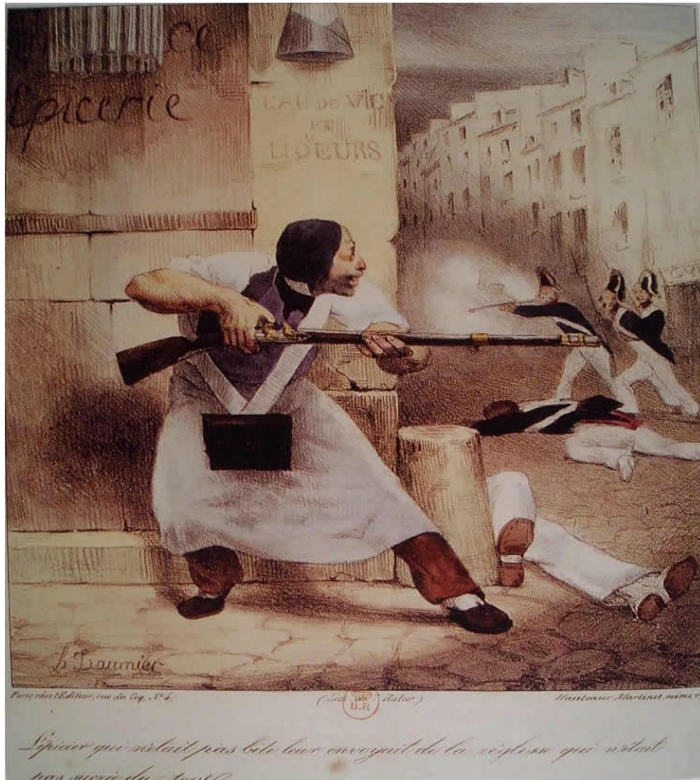


Figure 2. Honoré Daumier. *L'epicier qui n'était pas bête...*, August 1830. Lithography. 17 x 20 cm. 1830. Published by *Hautecoeur Martinet*.





Figure 3. Honoré Daumier. *Ouvriers Dans La Rue*, 1838-1840. Oil painting. 12 x 17 cm.

Amgueddfa Cymru, Cardiff, Wales.



Figure 4. Honoré Daumier. *Le Baiser*, 1845-1848. Oil painting. 37 x29 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France.





Figure 5. Honoré Daumier. *Le Sauvage*, 1860-1862. 343 X 280, Oil on canvas. 34 x 28 cm.

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany.



Figure 6. Honoré Daumier. *Un Homme Lisant, et un Petit Garçon*, 1857. Oil painting. 22 x 28 cm. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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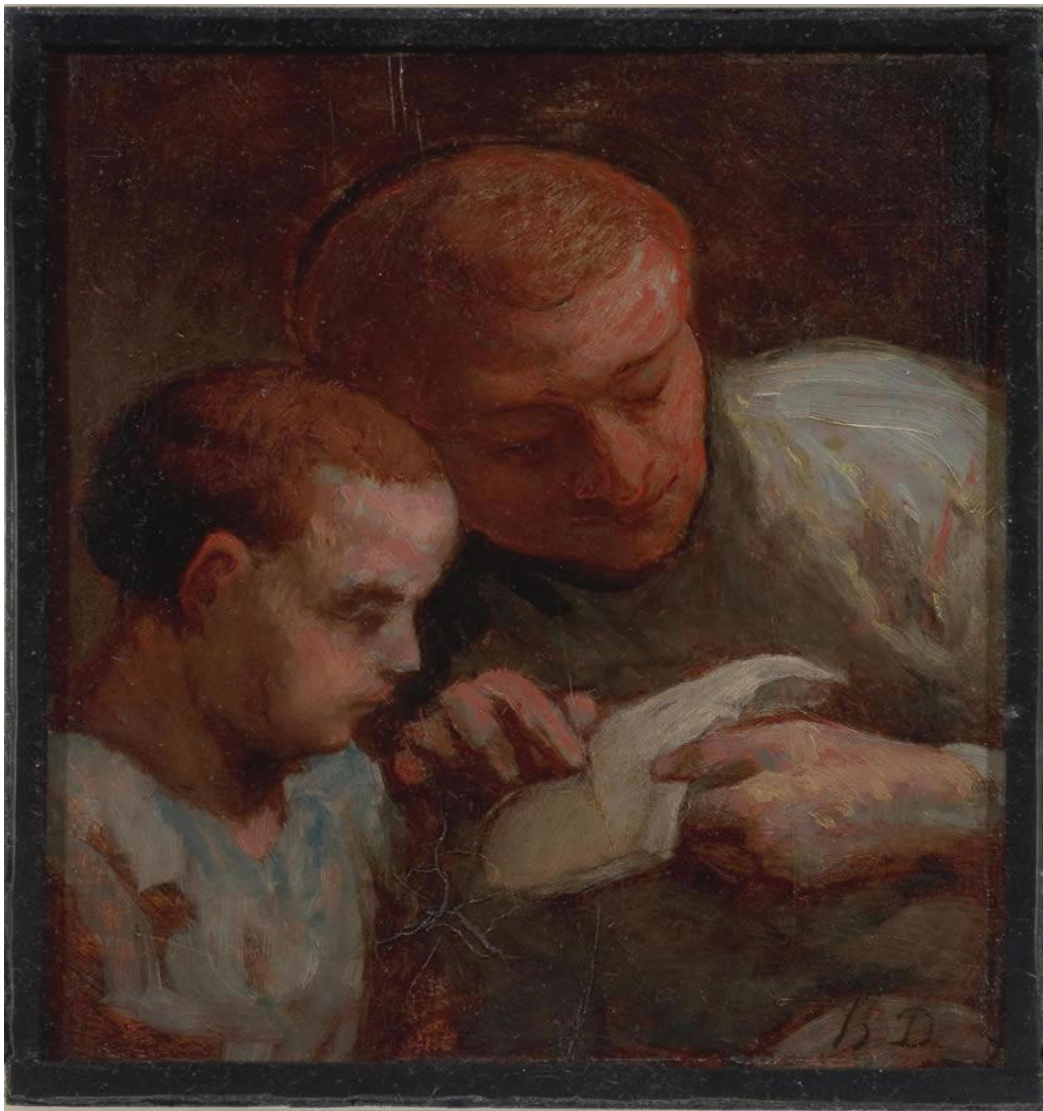


Figure 7. Honoré Daumier. *La Leçon de Lecture*, 1857. Oil painting on panel. 42 x 38 cm. Armand Hammer Daumier Museum, Los Angeles, United States.





Figure 8. Honoré Daumier. *Déplacement de Saltimbanques*, 1850. Oil painting on panel. 33 x 25 cm. National Gallery of Art. Washington D.C., United States.

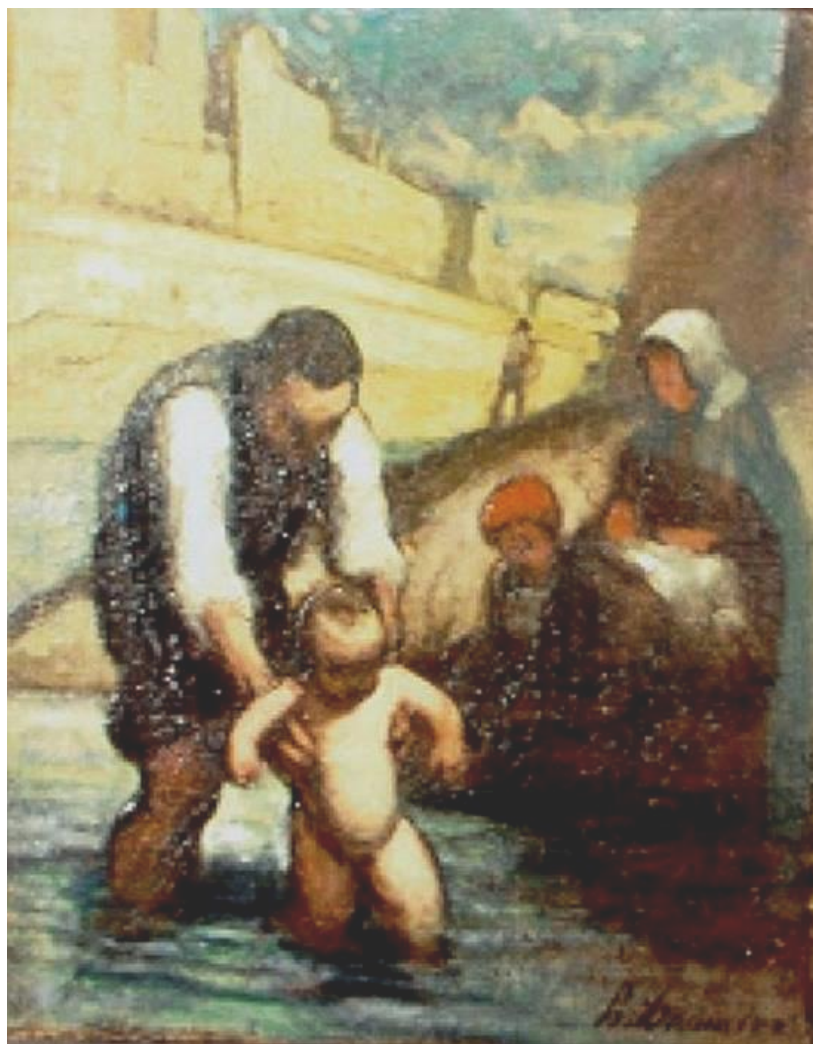


Figure 9. Honoré Daumier. *Le Bain*, 1852-1855. Oil painting. 25 x 19 cm. Julietta Scharf Collection, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 10. Honoré Daumier. *La Soupe*, 1853-1857. Mixed media painting on paper. 30 x 49 cm.

Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.





Figure 11. Honoré Daumier. *Départ Pour L'école*, 1855. Oil painting on panel. 27 x 21 cm.

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands.



Figure 12. Honoré Daumier. *Satyre Tenant un Enfant*, 1855. oil painting. 25 x 18 cm. Scharf Collection, Berlin, Germany.





Figure 13. Honoré Daumier. *Un Wagon de Troisième Classe*, 1862-1864. Oil painting. 65 x 90 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts du Canada, Ottawa, Canada.



Figure 14. Honoré Daumier. *La Laveuse*, 1863. Oil painting. 49 x 34 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France.

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