

## The Ethical Development of Boys in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* and Jean-Baptiste Greuze's Artworks

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### Résumé de l'article

This article considers the ways in which a series of artworks by French artist Jean-Baptiste Greuze focus on the father's ethical education of his male children, reading these as a close visualization of the pedagogical theories of Rousseau. Through paintings that contemplate family life, religious sentiment, filial piety, obedience versus disobedience, illness, and death, Greuze's images of male youth coalesce with the ethics promoted in Rousseau's novel *Emile*—stressing in particular the compassion and good conscience that a boy should develop under the guidance of his father to become a man of virtue. In so doing, the artist responds to some of the key historic issues and social beliefs affecting male youth during his era: the necessity of apprenticed boys to leave home; an idealization of country living and farming as the best occupation for the adult male; and an overwhelming concern, widespread during this heightened period of warfare and unrest preceding the French Revolution, that young men go astray when they become soldiers.

# The Ethical Development of Boys in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* and Jean-Baptiste Greuze's Artworks

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Jean-Baptiste Greuze, one of the most popular artists in pre-revolutionary France, was well known in his time for his moralistic depictions of family life. In this article, I suggest that the artist's moralistic works are not simply ideological representations of the virtues of family life but focused meditations on a father's ethical education of his male children. I read Greuze's moralistic artworks in two connected ways: in conversation with the writings of the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and as a response to specific aspects of French society during this era. Rousseau, who was instrumental in defining familial love and devotion, probably had more impact on the public's conception of a child's education than any other writer of his day. In *Emile, ou de l'éducation* [*Emile, or On Education*], a text originally published in French in 1762, he wrote extensively on the proper education of a boy, following each stage of his development.<sup>1</sup> Rousseau's book functions as an educational manual for raising a male child, as a philosophical prescription for an ideal civil society, and as a novel that chronicles the ethical upbringing of the protagonist. Greuze's artworks featuring male youth can be productively linked to *Emile*, as the painter illustrates moral principles akin to those espoused by Rousseau. This

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1. All quotations are from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Education* (1762), trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1921); available online at <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/rousseau-emile-or-education>, accessed May 21, 2020. Subsequent quotations from this edition will be cited in text.

interpretative approach affirms that the artist and the philosopher shared a set of values and beliefs informed by the same social reality. In drawing on the contemporaneous writings of Rousseau to elucidate Greuze's works, I follow the advice of Michael Baxandall, who asks art historians to consider their role as interpreters of visual objects and challenges us to contemplate the limitations of our scholarly vision. Baxandall reminds us that at certain times and in certain places, viewers have noted and understood aspects of an image that in later times or other places have gone unrecognized. Aided by historically significant texts and other pertinent evidence from ages past, art historians can develop a "period eye," a cognitive and aesthetic competence enabling them to see the relevant features of a period's culture, awareness, style, knowledge, and methods of production.<sup>2</sup>

Demonstrating the intertextual relationship between the written word and the drawn image, my analysis uncovers connections between Greuze and Rousseau in how they deal with key aspects of a male youth's life. My methodology is narratologically informed, insofar as the artworks I study tell a story that unfolds through a sequence of paintings. This viewpoint—seeing art through its narrative structure—is one of many lenses through which we can interpret these works, which contain multilayered meanings. Naturally, different works and methodological approaches lead to a variety of interpretations, since meaning—or rather *meanings*, meaning being rarely singular—is not inherent in an image; instead, we actively engage in its construction, bringing our individual and cultural knowledge to bear on the art object. With these considerations in mind, I move closer to the crux of this article: a study of the impact of Rousseau's writings on Greuze's artworks.

### **Precursor to My Analysis: Greuze's Paintings of Women in Reference to Rousseau's Writings**

My approach to interpreting Greuze's moralistic family paintings is indebted to the women art historians who demonstrate the influence of Rousseau's writings on Greuze's pictures of mothers and girls. These

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2. Michael Baxandall, "The Period Eye," in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29–57.

critical writings begin in 1973 with Carol Duncan's "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art," in which the critic argues that, according to Rousseau, and also to Greuze as shown in works such as in *The Beloved Mother* (ca. 1770), women should be "subject to the will of men," and "girls should become accustomed from the first to restrictions and constraints. Their own fancies must be crushed in infancy so that they will become habitually docile and feel that they were 'made' to obey."<sup>3</sup> She adds that the heroine of Rousseau's *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), a very popular novel in eighteenth-century Europe, "is the perfect embodiment of the new feminine ideal."<sup>4</sup> As a loving, dutiful daughter, Julie marries the aristocrat her parents selected for her rather than her tutor whom she truly loves. Still, she is content and fulfilled as a wife and mother, Rousseau making a point about women's role in upholding the patriarch's moral authority.

Kathleen Russo, in 1987, also introduces Rousseau as relevant to her analysis of Greuze's paintings, embarking on a comparison of the philosopher's Julie with the painter's heroines. The French artist, she explains, was familiar with the ideas of Rousseau, who believed that humanity was innately good but could be corrupted by a society that embraced superficial beliefs and customs due to its lack of a solid moral foundation.<sup>5</sup> Russo emphasizes the philosophical and aesthetic influence of Rousseau on the painter: "Greuze specialized in sentimental, moralizing narratives, often revolving around young women. Called the Rousseau of the brush, his works often parallel in sentiment and philosophy the characters described in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*."<sup>6</sup> Martha Wolff, for her part, adds to the case for linking Greuze and Rousseau in the evolving scholarly record. In her 1996 study of *A Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abelard* (1758), a work at one time attributed to Greuze, Wolff writes that the philosopher and the painter had a good many friends and patrons in common. For example, Elisabeth Françoise Sophie Lalive de Bellegarde, Comtesse d'Houdetot, was not only one of Greuze's important patrons but also a friend of Rousseau.

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3. Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art," *The Art Bulletin* 55, no. 4 (1973): 582.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Kathleen Russo, "A Comparison of Rousseau's 'Julie' with the Heroines of Greuze and Fuseli," *Woman's Art Journal* 8, no. 1 (1987): 3.

6. *Ibid.*, 5.

Denis Diderot, French philosopher and co-editor of the influential *Encyclopédie* (1751–1765), who interestingly was also an art critic and writer, was an avid reader of Rousseau’s writings and at the same time showed a high appreciation for Greuze’s moralistic paintings.<sup>7</sup> While demonstrating that Rousseau’s and Greuze’s social and intellectual worlds overlapped, these close connections strengthen claims to notable affinities in their beliefs and interests as creators.

In her 2012 discussion of Greuze’s painting *The Broken Mirror* (1763), Emma Barker also draws an important connection between the writer and the artist, pointing out that the young woman’s seductive attire was, not surprisingly, denounced by Rousseau. Barker notes that, in his bestseller *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, “Rousseau condemns the low-cut bodices and rouged cheeks of fashionable Parisian women, along with their bold stares, which (so he claims) disconcert the unhabituated male spectator.”<sup>8</sup> The broken mirror on the floor, at which the young woman stares with a look of distress, is a conventional symbol of the loss of virginity in the eighteenth-century iconographic repertoire; by contrast, representations of the Virgin Mary use an intact mirror as a sign of purity and perfection. In Greuze’s painting, the young woman’s loss is reinforced by her unkempt appearance, the disarray of the room, as well as erotic elements such as the pearl necklace and her lover’s letter—the sole material trace of the seducer who has defiled and then left her. Eloquently, Barker observes that Rousseau’s modest and graceful protagonist in *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* is the opposite of the woman depicted in *The Broken Mirror*, who inhabits a room whose “elegance suggests an urban milieu rather than the safety of the countryside, where the heroine’s family home is invariably situated.”<sup>9</sup> These are only some of the publications that consider the relationship between Rousseau’s writings and Greuze’s paintings of girls and women.<sup>10</sup> Missing from art history scholarship, however, is

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7. Martha Wolff, “An Early Painting by Greuze and Its Literary Associations,” *The Burlington Magazine* 138, no. 1122 (1996): 585.

8. Emma Barker, “Reading the Greuze Girl: The Daughter’s Seduction,” *Representations* 117, no. 1 (2012): 96.

9. *Ibid.*, 100.

10. See also the following publications by Emma Barker: “Painting and Reform in Eighteenth-Century France: Greuze’s ‘L’Accordée de Village,’” *Oxford Art Journal* 20, no. 2 (1997): 42–52; “Putting the Viewer in the Frame: Greuze as Sentimentalist,” *Studies in the History of Art* 72 (2007): 104–27; “Imaging Childhood in Eighteenth-

research that explores the influence of Rousseau's *Emile* on Greuze's depictions of boys, representations that likewise evidence the period's wider social issues and anxieties.

### Greuze's Paintings of Boys in Relation to Rousseau's *Emile* and Contemporary Issues

Found among Greuze's papers after his death were notes describing twenty-six works on the lives of two boys, Bazile and Thibault.<sup>11</sup> The paintings were never completed and only a few preparatory drawings from this project suggest the contours of the artist's vision. Greuze's concept, largely borrowed from the series *Industry and Idleness* (1747) by British artist William Hogarth, traces the parallel lives of two weaving apprentices. Hogarth's simple story of Francis Goodchild and Tom Idle contrasts what is morally right and wrong: self-control versus delinquency, devotion versus blasphemy, good company versus bad, respect versus disdain, and fidelity versus betrayal. Greuze's interest in Hogarth's works is confirmed by Barker, who has discovered diverse French sources that link the two artists in the 1750s and 1760s.<sup>12</sup> These clues include a letter penned by Mme d'Épinay, who requests to purchase all the engravings by Hogarth and Greuze devoted to moral conduct, planning to use them in the education of her children. Significantly, the engravers Jacques-Philippe Le Bas (active in

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Century France: Greuze's Little Girl with a Dog," *The Art Bulletin* 91, no. 4 (2009): 426–45; and "From Charity to *Bienfaisance*: Picturing Good Deeds in Late Eighteenth-Century France," *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* 33, no. 3 (2010): 285–311. For other perspectives, refer to the following sources: Bernadette Fort, "Peinture et féminité chez Jean-Jacques Rousseau," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 104, no. 2 (2004): 363–94; Marie-Hélène Chabut, "Les Julie et Sophie de Charrière: Chassé-croisé avec Rousseau sur l'éducation des femmes," *Lumen* 24 (2005): 121–34; and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Genre and Sex," in *French Genre Painting in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Philip Conisbee (New Haven, CT and London: Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art Publications/ Yale University Press, 2007), 201–19.

11. Originally published by Philippe de Chennevières as "Un roman de Greuze," in *Annuaire des artistes et des amateurs*, ed. Paul Lacroix (Paris: Veuve Jules Renouard, 1861), 265–73. The English translation is by Anita Brookner, *Greuze: The Rise and Fall of an Eighteenth-Century Phenomenon* (London: Elek, 1972), 162–63.

12. Emma Barker, "Greuze and England," in *Intellectual Journeys: The Translation of Ideas in Enlightenment England, France and Ireland*, ed. Lise Andries, Frédéric Ogée, John Dunkley, and Darach Sanfey (SVEC 2013, no. 12; Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013), 133–34.

France) and Johann Georg Wille (practicing in Germany and France) were both known by Greuze and were also collaborating with British printmakers.<sup>13</sup>

Greuze's twenty-six paintings were also intended as a detailed visualization of the pedagogical theories of Rousseau. The artist's objective was to compare the natural state of humanity (embodied by Bazile's childhood, during which moral and familial virtues triumph), with the misguided society responsible for Thibault's flawed upbringing (which is replete with corrupted relationships). As a young child, Thibault receives no correction from his adoring parents. Soon, he develops an evil character that, unchecked, leads him as a youth from minor offences to major crimes and finally to the gallows. Bazile, on the other hand, is a paragon of virtue from an early age. He possesses a child's natural goodness as it is defined by Rousseau in *Emile*, and this original, pure state is safeguarded by the scrupulous care and attention of his mother and father. Bazile's parents are determined to protect their son from the corrupting influences of society and guide him through the stages of his educational development.<sup>14</sup> Thibault, in contrast, is the victim of parental neglect and, as a result, becomes an evil man.

The drawing for *The Return of the Nurse* (ca. 1763) (Figure 1) fits within the larger arc of Thibault's story: a private history of neglect. Greuze depicts the moment when the wet-nurse who breastfed Thibault from birth brings the child home. Greuze offers this helpful commentary: "Young Thibault arrives home with his wet-nurse and all his luggage; the nurse presents him to his mother who runs to welcome him; the child draws back fearfully into the arms of the only mother he has known, and in this way reproaches his real mother for her indifference."<sup>15</sup> The pattern of familial apathy is set, precipitating the boy's moral deterioration. Having been denied the maternal breast and sent away to be fed by a wet-nurse, Thibault was poorly educated and by the age of six became a bad person, whereas Bazile, who was breastfed by his mother, received a good education and grew into a tender and charitable young man. By depicting Thibault's mother

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13. Ibid.

14. For an in-depth discussion of Rousseau's interpretation of natural goodness, see Arthur M. Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

15. Quoted in Brookner, *Greuze*, 162.



Figure 1. *Return from the Wet Nurse*, ca. 1763, brush and black, brown and grey wash over black chalk under-drawing. British Museum, London.

being punished for sending her son to be fed and cared for by another person, who then becomes the object of the boy's love, Greuze thus draws parallels to Rousseau's critical position on child-rearing as voiced in *Emile*. Viewing the mother's body as primarily generative, Rousseau believes that she nurses her child not just out of duty but also as a matter of profound instinct, and through this act she forms a powerful natural bond with her child. A baby who is wet-nursed by a stranger, according to the ideas expressed in *Emile*, suffers from debased blood ties with his mother. Furthermore, "fathers, mothers, children, brothers, and sisters cease to exist" when a child's "blood" (13) has not been



empowered by the loving attentions of the woman who gave him life. However, “when mothers deign to nurse their own children, then will be a reform in morals; natural feeling will revive in every heart; there will be no lack of citizens for the state; this first step by itself will restore mutual affection” (13).

By the late eighteenth century, emotional attachment through mother-infant breastfeeding was considered foundational to family life and deemed an essential component of early childhood education.<sup>16</sup> This romantic ideal emerged just when the middle and lower classes were beginning to employ wet-nurses, taking their cue from wealthy families who had long hired peasant women to suckle their infants. Rousseau was not the only voice encouraging women to return to what was viewed as their rightful role of devoted mothers. Another major influence was Carl Linnaeus, a Swedish physician, botanist, and zoologist who had seven children between 1741 and 1757, each of whom was breastfed by their mother. Linnaeus wrote a medical treatise, entitled *Step Nurse*, on the evils of wet-nursing and the importance of *mammalia*, a term he coined to describe the natural act of humans and animals suckling their infants. In 1770, the treatise was published in France as *La nourrice marâtre, ou Dissertation sur les suites funestes du nourrisage mercenaire*. Among his ideas was the notion that wet-nursing hurt newborns by depriving them of the colostrum in their mother’s milk (which cleansed the child of any feces ingested in utero), and therefore violated natural law. The views advocated by Rousseau and Linnaeus were reflected in numerous contemporary paintings<sup>17</sup> that visually exhort mothers to breastfeed; they were also supported by positive images of breastfeeding mothers that were published in newspapers, magazines, novels, and conduct manuals. In fact, the era’s high infant mortality rate likely fomented public support for denunciations of wet-nursing, and it was increasingly perceived as unhealthy to have

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16. See Nancy Senior, “Aspects of Infant Feeding in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 16, no. 4 (1983): 367–88.

17. A notable example is Etienne Aubry’s *Farewell to the Nurse* (ca. 1776–1777), which portrays an infant’s expression of fear and despair when his wealthy city mother retrieves him from his country-dwelling wet-nurse. The painting visualizes the inappropriate maternal bonding between the child and his wet-nurse criticized by Rousseau.

infants nursed by women who were basically strangers or outsiders.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, breastfeeding was seen as the duty of the mother for the health of the child, the nurturing of mutual affection, and the cultivation of the child's natural goodness. When the male child was no longer an infant, the responsibility for the boy's ethical development transferred to the father.

Rousseau's *Emile* considers the teachings, beliefs, and skills that should be handed down from one male generation to the next.<sup>19</sup> The book establishes that the movement of knowledge through the masculine line is the father's role, beginning when the child's infancy ends, at around the age of five; Rousseau writes: "The real nurse is the mother and the real teacher is the father. Let them agree in the ordering of their duties as well as in their method, let the child pass from one to the other" (16). Rousseau's lessons are an intervention in debates about parental roles, and an attempt to repair the breakdown of the father-son relationship, which a corrupt society instigates. Janie Vanpée explains that in Rousseau's text the father is the "rightful and natural pedagogue"; Emile, at the end of the book, "authoritatively makes the decision to take on the responsibilities of both father and tutor to his child. In so doing, he exerts the authority that proves that his tutor Jean-Jacques has successfully transmitted that authority and responsibility to him."<sup>20</sup> As Emile is an orphan, the tutor takes the place of the father.

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18. Bernadette Fort discusses Greuze's paintings of breastfeeding mothers in relation to the widespread use of wet-nurses in "Greuze and the Ideology of Infant Nursing in Eighteenth-Century France," in *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: Age and Identity*, ed. Anja Müller (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 117–34. Fort's essay "focuses on the imagery of early childhood that [Greuze] pioneered, the infant years, and considers a few select pieces in his important contribution to a cultural debate that fascinated public opinion in the mid-1750s and 1760s, the debate on maternal vs. what was then called 'mercenary' nursing" (117). According to Fort, "[b]efore 1740, few philosophers, educators and doctors had shown interest for the newborn child, nor had French painters, for that matter, except in images of the Christ child or mythological putti. Greuze's debut in genre painting coincides with the high point of the campaign in favour of maternal nursing that gained tremendous popularity with Rousseau's *Emile*" (117). For a discussion of the practices and politics of wet-nursing in this era, see George D. Sussman, *Selling Mothers' Milk: The Wet-Nursing Business in France 1715–1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

19. Janie Vanpée, "Rousseau's *Emile ou de l'éducation*: A Resistance to Reading," *Yale French Studies* 77 (1990): 156–76.

20. *Ibid.*, 174–75.

Rousseau's pedagogical emphasis is on educating boys to develop their moral qualities, namely compassion and a sense of right and wrong. In Book IV of *Emile*, Rousseau's Savoyard vicar explains why Emile must listen to his conscience as opposed to the voice of passion.<sup>21</sup> Only by examining his own moral principles can Emile know how he should act. The soul—where his moral sentiments of goodness, virtue, and justice reside—is the source of his ability to sense whether an action does or does not befit his nature. The vicar explains:

Conscience is the voice of the soul, the passions are the voice of the body. Is it strange that these voices often contradict each other? And then to which should we give heed? Too often does reason deceive us; we have only too good a right to doubt her; but conscience never deceives us; she is the true guide of man; it is to the soul what instinct is to the body; he who obeys his conscience is following nature and he need not fear that he will go astray. (249–50)

According to Rousseau's moral philosophy, a boy who is attentive to his conscience listens to the natural goodness of his soul, which exists in harmony with the good order God has created. In another compelling passage of *Emile*, the vicar articulates the distinction between good and evil men as well as the role of compassion: "the good man orders his life with regard to all men; the wicked orders it for self alone. The latter centres all things round himself; the other measures his radius and remains on the circumference. Thus his place depends on the common centre, which is God, and on all the concentric circles which are His creatures" (255). Ideally, compassion comes into play when the boy develops an awareness of his relationship to other people.<sup>22</sup> When Emile, as an older child, identifies with a suffering man and through direct actions strives to relieve his pain and distress, he is establishing a bond with his fellow human beings that cannot be disrupted. In his defence of compassion as it is cultivated by education, Rousseau asserts

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21. For more on this topic, see Zdenko Kodolja, "The Voice of Conscience in Rousseau's *Emile*," *Ethics and Education* 10, no. 2 (2015): 198–208; and Arthur M. Melzer, "The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (1996): 344–60.

22. Jonathan Marks, "Rousseau's Discriminating Defense of Compassion," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 4 (2007): 727–39.



Figure 2. *Father Reading the Bible to His Children*, 1755, oil on canvas. Louvre Museum, Paris. (Wikimedia Commons)

that “the child must know that he has fellow-creatures who suffer as he has suffered, who feel the pains he has felt” (184). In Rousseau’s estimation, only in this way will a youth become a sensitive and compassionate adult.

In the remainder of my analysis of Greuze’s moralistic works, I show the ways in which the artist captures iconographically Rousseau’s emphasis on boyhood conscience and compassion. I argue that Greuze decided not to pursue the story of Bazile and Thibault, letting this series go unfinished, instead distilling aspects of Rousseau’s philosophy into a visual narrative comprised of a series of paintings representing family life. Rather than embark on a new storyline, he builds on the family theme he had begun in *Father Reading the Bible to His Children* (1755) (Figure 2), a painting he produced well before the publication of *Emile*. In this composition, a mother and her children are gathered closely around the table in their humble rural home listening to the elderly father read from the Bible. The composition suggests the

exemplary attachment among all those who are present, the emotional ties that naturally arise when there is moral order within the family. The rustic walls and utilitarian objects evoke the virtue, humility, and self-sufficiency of this family of farmers. Greuze's brush illustrates that love, compassion, and piety are present in a home that is humbly devoted to God and family.

Greuze and Rousseau agree on the conditions of an ideal pedagogical environment. It is fitting that in *Father Reading the Bible to His Children*, the boy's good education occurs at the hands of his father, taking place in their unpretentious cottage away from city life. One can surmise that both father and son spend their whole lives in the countryside, away from Paris. Rousseau explains his belief in "home training" in *Emile* (295). "Take a young man," he writes:

carefully educated in his father's country house, and examine him when he reaches Paris and makes his entrance into society; you will find him thinking clearly about honest matters, and you will find his will as wholesome as his reason. You will find scorn of vice and disgust for debauchery; his face will betray his innocent horror at the very mention of a prostitute.... See the same young man six months later, you will not know him; from his bold conversation, his fashionable maxims, his easy air, you would take him for another man.... How greatly has he changed in so short a time!... These changes are merely the result of changed ideas. His heart is the same, but his opinions have altered. His feelings, which change more slowly, will at length yield to his opinions and it is then that he is indeed corrupted. He has scarcely made his entrance into society before he receives a second education quite unlike the first, which teaches him to despise what he esteemed, and esteem what he despised.... (295)

City life, according to Rousseau, thus damages the moral fortitude of a young man from the country and ultimately destroys his virtue.

Greuze's *Father Reading the Bible to His Children*, which depicts a farmer's family with enough land to secure a modest livelihood, presents the antithesis of urban corruption and rural poverty. Nine family members spanning three generations are portrayed, providing Greuze with ample opportunity to demonstrate his skill at individualizing features and communicating nuances of expression. Despite the skill with which he conveys a particular socio-economic milieu, his main concern is with depicting interiority—a character's thoughts,

sensations, and inner struggles.<sup>23</sup> The artist communicates this interiority by particularizing each character according to age and sex, and by emphasizing faces and poses that impart feeling. The artist's attention in this composition is focused on the boys, three of whom are particularly arresting to the viewer. The first is the small fellow seated to the father's left, whose pensive demeanour suggests that he is attempting to comprehend the reading. The next is the second-oldest child who looks out from behind his father's chair to seek our gaze and draw us into the composition. This directness invites us to notice his posture, which indicates his closeness to his father, and suggests a laudable seriousness, Greuze intimating that the boy invests his innermost thoughts and feelings into the interpretation of the text. His older brother, on the other hand, with his frown and clasped hands, visually communicates that he stands slightly apart from the others, both literally and figuratively. The open door and his military hat apprise viewers that is about to leave home. For him, this is a precarious moment, close as he is to a time when he is independent from the family and vulnerable to the societal influences that could cause him to forget the teachings of the man who raised him. It is important to add that Rousseau, a lifelong reader of the Bible, did not subscribe to the idea that biblical texts simply provide us with templates and rationales for our future actions; rather, he believed that they help us develop sentiments that are essential in preserving social bonds and overriding self-interest and manipulative reasoning.<sup>24</sup> In many of his writings, he reflects on religion as a means to encourage moralistic modes of behaviour.<sup>25</sup> Greuze's family paintings frequently include a member of the household reading a Bible or prayer book, the artist considering it his purpose to connote the moral feelings that are the foundation of a good society.

*Filial Piety* (1763) (Figure 3) was painted eight years later and appears to be a sequel, in a representational sense, to *Father Reading*

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23. I borrow this key notion from a seminal study: Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

24. Michael S. Kochin, "Living with the Bible: Jean-Jacques Rousseau Reads Judges 19–21," *Hebraic Political Studies* 2, no. 3 (2007): 301.

25. For more details on this subject, see Jeffrey Macy, "'God Helps Those Who Help Themselves': New Light on the Theological–Political Teaching in Rousseau's 'Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar,'" *Polity* 24, no. 4 (1992): 616.



Figure 3. *Filial Piety (The Paralytic)*, 1763, oil on canvas. The State Hermitage Museum, Moscow. (Wikimedia Commons)

*the Bible to His Children*. The father, now in a state of paralysis, lies on his bed surrounded by his wife and children. Here, too, the focus is on male youth. A well-dressed young man, either the father's son or son-in-law, is visually prominent, absorbed in caring for him, as are four boys of different ages. With a look of heartfelt concern, the young man leans over to offer a spoonful of soup, his imploring gaze fixed on the patriarch's unresponsive face. The boys who encircle their father are each responding to his indisposition according to their age. The youngest gently presents his pet bird in the hope it will bring pleasure and relief. The next in age looks out from behind the pillow, worried by what he is seeing but not yet comprehending the severity of his father's condition. The two older boys, having reached puberty, are emotionally responsive, aware of the tragic character of the scene, but containing their feelings as they do what they can to help. The younger of the two precariously carries a cup of tea or other nourishing liquid as he approaches the scene. His brother, also nervously attentive, kneels to arrange the blanket that covers his father's legs. The filial

piety these boys have for their infirm father—prompting them to be good to him, show him tenderness and respect, and take care of him in sickness—epitomizes reciprocal love.<sup>26</sup> They feel devotion for the man who has looked after them, the father who has provided them with the right teachings. Throughout their life, he has functioned as the agent of the sympathetic sensibility that has bound the family together, and despite being paralyzed, he continues to teach them a lesson by being a morally virtuous force that vivifies the group and informs their warm-hearted actions.

The preparatory drawing for *Filial Piety*, also titled *The Paralytic Cared for by His Children* or *The Fruit of the Good Education* (1761), thus can be read as consonant with the good education of Emile at various stages of his development.<sup>27</sup> In *Emile*, Rousseau writes that the older boy “begins to perceive himself in his fellow-creatures, to be touched by their cries, to suffer in their sufferings” (183). His conscience enables him “to generalize his individual notions under the abstract idea of humanity, and add to his individual affections those which may identify him with the race” (195). Greuze shows the older sons responding to their sickly father in exactly this way. For Rousseau, when a child is guided by the right moral instruction, this capacity for sympathy surfaces much earlier. The infant, he remarks in *Emile*, “breaks and smashes everything he can reach; he seizes a bird as he seizes a stone, and strangles it without knowing what he is about” (34). He has no sense of conscience or compassion. Yet soon after infancy, the child becomes sensitive to pain and suffering, although he cannot comprehend its cause or meaning: “the convulsions of a dying animal will cause him I know not what anguish before he knows the source of these impulses” (184). In Greuze’s story of Bazile and Thibault, this sentiment is lacking in the latter boy, whose sour disposition has been allowed to develop without correction. In moving terms, Greuze narrates an incident of animal cruelty involving Thibault: “in his mother’s

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26. Kevin Chua, “Painting Paralysis: ‘Filial Piety’ in 1763,” *Studies in the History of Art* 72 (2007): 152–77.

27. See Gareth Matthews and Amy Mullin, “The Philosophy of Childhood,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, entry first published in 2002 and substantially revised in 2018; online publication at the following URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/childhood/>, accessed May 21, 2020. The authors refer to Rousseau’s theory that a child’s development progresses in stages and that his mental capacity to perceive and comprehend depends on his age.



room he holds a live bird by the claws and tears its feathers off. His grandmother who is present at this barbarous scene seems to object strongly; she is pushed out of the way by the child's mother who roars with laughter ... the father seated by a window and writing at a small table seems to be paying no attention to the scene."<sup>28</sup> In Greuze's moral schema, the mother is partially at fault for Thibault's behaviour, but the father, as the head of the family, is more to blame for ignoring his paternal responsibilities. Critical of this neglect and alive to its consequences, Greuze indicts Thibault's father for failing to teach his child what is right and what is wrong. The youngest boy in *Filial Piety* is the antithesis of the destructive Thibault. Unlike his vicious counterpart, this child holds the bird tenderly, for even at his young age he already knows how to properly treat a delicate creature. By offering his pet bird to his father, he shows his capacity for compassion, although he is too young to know the cause of his parent's pain or how to give him the care he requires.

*The Paralytic*, the original title of *Filial Piety*, is surely a reference to the divine healings celebrated by the Catholic Church and often depicted in works of art.<sup>29</sup> Miraculous cures like Christ healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda abound in the New Testament. For instance, when Jesus saw that Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever, he touched her hand and her temperature went down, so she was able to stand up and began to serve him. When people with demons were brought to Jesus one evening, he spoke and the demons left. Throughout the scriptures, sickness is associated with sinning and lack of faith, as shown in this passage from the Gospel of James: "Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven."<sup>30</sup> The Hebrew Bible also correlates health with prayer and belief, and illness with a

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28. Quoted in Brookner, *Greuze*, 162.

29. See K. Ohry-Kossoy and A. Ohry, "The Portrayal of Paralysis in Some Masterpieces by European Painters," *Spinal Cord* 28 (1990): 489–95. Examples of paintings devoted to this subject include Tintoretto's *Christ Healing the Paralytic* (1567), Murillo's *The Healing of the Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda* (1668), and Tiepolo's *Jesus Healing the Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda* (1759).

30. James 5.14–15.

rejection of God: “Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you.”<sup>31</sup> Both Greuze and Rousseau oppose this belief in faith and miracles,<sup>32</sup> and insist that we do not need to believe in these inexplicable events to recognize God. Rousseau maintains that the proof of God’s existence lies in the excellence of humanity’s moral nature, which does not die when a person passes away. In *Emile*, he explains this belief in clear terms: “I know that the body is worn out and destroyed by the division of its parts, but I cannot conceive a similar destruction of the conscious nature, and as I cannot imagine how it can die, I presume that it does not die” (246). *Filial Piety* shares this conviction, also affirming the moral soul’s immortality. Even in his debilitating illness, the father in Greuze’s painting unites his family. Although his bodily senses are waning, his soul remains with his family and continues to be an example to his sons who have been shaped by his influence.

Environment is also key to the success of the educational enterprise. The locale of the boys’ education in *Father Reading the Bible to His Children* and *Filial Piety* is the homestead of a farming family who, as landowners with sufficient land to sustain their families and modest lifestyles, are among the more fortunate peasants. In a study dealing with the peasants’ situation in pre-revolutionary France, Peter Jones notes that by this era they owned about one-third of all land; the rest was owned by the clergy and nobility.<sup>33</sup> The historian

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31. Exodus 23.25.

32. For a detailed discussion on this subject, see Nicholas Dent, *Rousseau* (London: Routledge, 2015), 105–12.

33. See Peter Jones, “The Peasantry of France on the Eve of the French Revolution,” *History of European Ideas* 12, no. 3 (1990): 355–60. If it was a bad harvest year, Jones notes, agricultural labourers had no choice but to resort to beggary and vagrancy. For more on the subject refer to another one of Peter Jones’ articles: “The Challenge of Land Reform in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century France,” *Past & Present* 216, no. 1 (2012): 107–42. Greuze, in another series of works, shows the effects of poverty on male youth from the countryside. The drawing *The Departure of the Young Savoyard* (ca. 1769) depicts a boy prematurely forced to leave his home to seek work. Reluctant to say goodbye to the family home, the boy displays a gloomy expression and reticent posture, which communicate to his mother his desire to stay, yet his feet push him forward. Boys from Savoy often left for Paris where they became street entertainers or were cheaply employed as chimney sweepers or pedlars. Significantly, the provider and protector of the family—the father—is absent from these depictions by Greuze of Savoyard boys. I draw this information from Edgar Munhall, “Savoyards in French Eighteenth-Century Art,” *Apollo* 87, no. 72 (1968): 86–94.

emphasizes, moreover, that there were different kinds of peasants: the landed peasantry, as we see represented in this painting; farmers with little land who also had to work as labourers on the estates of their wealthier neighbours; and poverty-stricken agricultural workhands.<sup>34</sup> The family in Greuze's paintings has the time to devote to the boys' moral upbringing, a process of training undertaken in the sheltered countryside. As with Emile's education, the goal of the home schooling as depicted in *Father Reading the Bible to His Children* and *Filial Piety* is to preserve a youth's personal autonomy and independence; this training aims to cultivate his inner will and strength so he can resist the corrupting forces of society and make moral choices. At some point, however, when a youth is mature, he must leave home to seek employment. Greuze captures these moments of transition in two pivotal works, *The Paternal Blessing, or the Departure of Bazile* (ca. 1769), in which the son sets off to become an apprentice, and *The Father's Curse: The Ungrateful Son* (1777), featuring a son who decides to become a soldier.

In the drawing *The Paternal Blessing* (Figure 4), the older boy is about to leave his parents' home and kneels to receive his father's blessing. The main focus of this drawing is the interaction between the father and son as the latter one prepares to depart.<sup>35</sup> For Greuze, the moment when the young man transitions from dependence to independence occurs just before he steps into the street.<sup>36</sup> Greuze provides the verbal support for this image himself: "The scene takes place in a sitting room. The father is seated in an armchair by the window; his son appears in travelling dress; he falls at his father's feet, knee on the ground; the father puts his left hand on his shoulder saying, 'Go forth and prosper. You have your father's blessing.'"<sup>37</sup> As in *Emile*, the older boy has arrived at the stage of his professional development where he must become an apprentice and acquire a trade, as did many young men in Europe at the time. For example, Rousseau explains that

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34. For context, see Jones' article, "The Peasantry of France on the Eve of the French Revolution," cited above.

35. Rafael Fernandez, "Greuze's 'The Paternal Blessing,'" *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 5 (1970): 93–94.

36. Mark Ledbury, "Greuze in Limbo: Being 'Betwixt and Between,'" *Studies in the History of Art* 72 (2007): 178–99.

37. Quoted in Brookner, *Greuze*, 163.



**Figure 4.** *The Paternal Blessing, or the Departure of Basile*, ca. 1769, pen and brown ink, brush and black ink, gray wash and graphite, with traces of scraping, on tan laid paper, laid down on tan wove board. Art Institute of Chicago.

learning carpentry will teach Emile about mutual dependence; he will come to know that men are helpful to one another when they bind their interests together through collaboration. According to the philosopher, “to learn to do manual work” is an “apprenticeship to life” (164).

Rousseau in words and Greuze in pictures acknowledge that becoming an apprentice usually involves separating from parents, assimilating into a new environment, and acquiring new skills. During this maturation process, the necessity for young men to submit to their employer’s authority occurs just as they are attempting to develop a sense of self-empowerment. Consequently, the peer-to-peer bonding of young people is a key feature of their passage into adulthood. While the terms of apprenticeship differed depending on the trade and other factors, the fundamental concept was the same: indentureship for a fixed period. Rousseau recommends carpentry because in the eighteenth century, before the trade was industrialized, carpenters were considered craftsmen. According to Lee Shai Weissbach, carpentry

required knowledge, skills, artistry, intelligence, and judgement: carpenters fell into the category of artisans, who were “no less artists than were painters, writers, or sculptors,” and as such were “concerned not only with the actual process of production in which they engaged, but also with the quality and the value of the products they produced.”<sup>38</sup>

*The Father's Curse: The Ungrateful Son* (Figure 5), in contrast to *The Paternal Blessing*, expresses the anguish of a father who curses his son for joining the army. Members of the family desperately try to hold back the irresponsible young man while an unsavoury companion standing by the door observes the scene with a devilish look on his face. Evidently, this onlooker is the cause of the son's disregard for his father's authority.<sup>39</sup> The geopolitical context of *The Father's Curse: The Ungrateful Son*, which refers to the warfare that was all too frequent during this era, is relevant to an informed analysis of this tableau. France had provoked the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) with its attacks against the British colonies in the Ohio River Valley. In what is recognized as the first global war, France fought assiduously but to no avail against Britain, Prussia, and their allies. Then in 1778, the Anglo–French War commenced, a five-year military conflict between France and Great Britain as well as their respective allies, which was concurrent with the American Revolutionary War. The goal of both parties was to expand colonial domination in North America and India and achieve world supremacy.

Rousseau was persuaded that the French Royal Army's pursuit of world dominance was the biggest mistake a society could make.<sup>40</sup> To serve this priority, a nation had to commit to establishing a sizable army, committing its citizens to fight in foreign lands, enhancing its

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38. Lee Shai Weissbach, “Artisanal Responses to Artistic Decline: The Cabinet-makers of Paris in the Era of Industrialization,” *Journal of Social History* 16, no. 2 (1982): 67.

39. A century earlier, the Dutch philosopher Benedict de Spinoza commented on young men joining the military, specifying that “as boys or youths, who cannot peaceably endure the chidings of their parents, will enlist as soldiers and choose the hardships of war and despotic discipline in preference to the comforts of home and the admonitions of their father: suffering any burden to be put upon them, so long as they may spite their parents.” Quoted from *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, vol. 2: *De Intellectus Emendatione, Ethica, (Select Letters)* (1677), trans. R. H. M. Elwes, 2nd ed. rev. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1887), 239.

40. For details, see Steven M. DeLue, “Rousseau: A Theory of History that Vindicates the Common Man,” *Polity* 7, no. 2 (1974): 180–92.



Figure 5. *The Father's Curse: The Ungrateful Son*, 1777, oil on canvas. Louvre Museum, Paris. (Wikimedia Commons)

defense system, and building a financial reserve to support its aggressions. In his opinion, an army should be nothing more than a citizen militia whose purpose was to defend the nation from invasion.<sup>41</sup> Given the intellectual affinities between Rousseau and Greuze, it is not a surprise that the painter agrees with the philosopher on this point. In his notes for the story of Bazile and Thibault, he describes his pictorial concept for “Worthy Action of Bazile, Aged Eighteen.” The contextual details he provides are valuable to us as viewers: “The English land on the coast and proceed to pillage the town; young Bazile joins the volunteers and fights with such bravery he is regarded as being responsible for the failure of the English raid.”<sup>42</sup>

Young men like the one Greuze depicts in *The Father's Curse: The Ungrateful Son* joined the army out of misguided conceptions regarding the life of the soldier and the purpose of warfare. They

41. *Ibid.*, 191.

42. Quoted in Brookner, *Greuze*, 163.

believed that becoming a soldier was a liberating rite of passage into manhood, which was an erroneous assumption among families with little wealth or influence. Reality and expectation clashed, not only because of the dangers inherent to combat but also because of the poor quality of military life being offered to young men coming from lower social positions. As Christy Pichichero observes, in the spirit of “military enlightenment,” army leaders attempted to initiate reforms that improved the social condition of soldiers from the lower ranks, but these reforms were not very successful.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, David Hopkin highlights that, in an effort to recruit the peasant youth who made up the majority of the army, soldiers were idealized in prints, songs, and folktales as heroes and adventurers, free from the constraints of family and country life. The reality, as most parents knew all too well, was entirely different.<sup>44</sup> Hopkin notes also the common belief that “[s]education, like marauding, was something French troops did best.”<sup>45</sup> The army often turned their soldier sons into immoral men who raped and impregnated women, and then abandoned them.

The young man in *The Father’s Curse: The Ungrateful Son* is the archetypal bad son without a conscience. He lacks self-control, disregards his obligations to his father and family, acts only according to his passions and inclinations, and lets himself be conquered by temptation. The future wellbeing of the family and society depends on the good son, who is a product of the teachings of his virtuous father. In contrast, the bad son, who rebels against his father’s teachings because of his egotism, undermines the social order. Whereas the good son Bazile “returns to the town covered with wounds” from which he will recover, and is “congratulated by the mayor and the principal citizens,”<sup>46</sup> the young man in another tableau, *The Son Punished* (1778)—the companion piece to *The Father’s Curse: The Ungrateful Son*—returns home sorrowful and with a damaged leg that will leave him a cripple for the rest of his life. Tragically, the prodigal son, his moral failings physically

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43. Christy Pichichero, *The Military Enlightenment: War and Culture in the French Empire from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), esp. Chapter 1.

44. David M. Hopkin, *Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture 1766–1870* (Woodbridge, UK: Royal Historical Society/ The Boydell Press, 2003).

45. *Ibid.*, 275.

46. Quoted in Brookner, *Greuze*, 162.

embodied, has arrived too late to be forgiven by his dead father. Still, *The Father's Curse: The Ungrateful Son* contains a note of optimism. Against the dramatic movement of outstretched hands, which gives this painting a compositional force that places the spotlight on the departing son, a boy of about eleven stares at his father with an attitude of concern. The distress of the father and other family members, evoked by facial expressions and bodily movements, arouses the boy's pity and motivates him to imagine his father's anguish. Unlike his older brother, who refuses to acknowledge the pleading looks of his family, the younger son is attentive. His good conscience and compassion are presumably the result of him being more innately receptive than his sibling to his father's moral instruction.<sup>47</sup>

I end my discussion of fathers and sons with *The First Furrow, or a Tiller Turning Over the Plow to His Son, in the Presence of His Family* (Figure 6), exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1801. In this painting, the son looks up at his father with hesitation as the paternal figure reassuringly holds the young man's arm on the wooden handles of the plow about to be harnessed to a team of oxen.<sup>48</sup> This significant step in the son's life, one that marks his readiness for the responsibilities

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47. Seven years after Greuze created *The Father's Curse: The Ungrateful Son*, and five years before the French Revolution, Jacques-Louis David painted *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784) in what appears to be a deliberate reaction to his predecessor's work. In this painting that features a son who defies his father by joining the army, David presents a positive image of military service by means of an allegory that depicts the Roman legend of the Horatii as told by the historian Livy (although this particular scene does not appear in his known writings or any other ancient text). The Horatii brothers, supported by their father, visually pledge loyalty to Rome in a composition that juxtaposes this valiant act of allegiance with the sentimental grieving of the women in the family. In this work, David articulates the belief that male self-sacrifice and patriotic duty to king and country come first. It is also possible that, since the artist would soon actively participate in the French Revolution himself, the painting may contain the hidden meaning that rebellion and sacrifice should not be for the benefit of the monarchy but for the good of the French people. See Tamar Mayer, "Drawing the Corporeal: Balance and Mirror Reversal in Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of Horatii*," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 46 (2017): 229–60.

48. Greuze was probably aware of François-André Vincent's *The Ploughing Lesson*, which was exhibited in 1798. Greuze has altered the composition so that the father rather than a farmhand teaches the boy how to plough. In Vincent's work, the father stands by the oxen with his wife and daughter and observes his son; the class discrepancy within this painting is obvious, as the old farmhand is barefoot and in working attire, while the boy and his parents wear clothing typical of a bourgeois family.





Figure 6. *The First Furrow*, 1801, oil on canvas. Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. (Wikimedia Commons)

of manhood, is celebrated by the family through a musical procession led by a band of pipers. The small boys at the front dancing joyfully to the pleasing sounds of the music are a compositional element that imbues the scene with the festive atmosphere of a country festival. In this painting, Greuze reflects Rousseau's conviction that the country fête, a communal event celebrated with popular melodies, is the best expression of natural feeling.<sup>49</sup> *The First Furrow* is an unusual painting, nonetheless, in that the personhood of the farmer at work was usually of little interest to the elite in this era; instead, farmland was typically envisioned as a place of rural harmony peopled by nondescript labourers happily plowing the fields or bringing in the harvest. In this work, one of his last paintings before his death in 1805, Greuze returns to a narrative of the moral rural family, a theme he has not pursued for over

49. On this theme, see Paul Thomas, "The Revolutionary Festival and Rousseau's Quest for Transparency," *History of Political Thought* 18, no. 4 (1997): 652–76.

twenty years, during which time he has preferred executing appealing portraits, charming genre scenes, and popular mythological subjects. This visual setting, however, is different from the ones developed by Greuze in his other paintings: *The First Furrow* is the only family painting by the artist that sets the scene not in or outside a cottage home but within an open landscape with a view to the far horizon. Portrayed in this visual landscape, the assembly of like-minded people in *The First Furrow* who have come together to proclaim their public joy valorizes the moral aesthetic of the farming family and the beauty of harmonious living.

Contemporary events in France provide an explanation for this atypical depiction of a rural family in its milieu. By 1801, France was a stable republic, benefiting from a new confidence as a nation and stability due to Napoleon having been installed as First Consul.<sup>50</sup> The Great Fear (*La Grande Peur*) that had precipitated the French Revolution—a period of widespread panic and rural uprising by peasants, the bourgeoisie, and other sectors of the agrarian community—was now twelve years in the past. A significant outcome of the revolution was the dissolution of the large land holdings of the Church and nobility. France was now a country of small peasant-owned farms. It is thus no surprise that *The First Furrow* focuses on farmland that is now in the hands of an independent farmer. A visual reminder of this momentous transition, the ghostly chateau of the nobleman who had previously owned the land hovers in the distance.<sup>51</sup> There is more to this painting, however, than these political resonances. Greuze is also returning to Rousseau's ideas about raising male children and to his foundational belief in the moral fortitude and simplicity of rural life. The philosopher died in 1778, but his writings strongly influenced

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50. At this time, Napoleon was very popular due to his promise of a lasting peace and his attention to securing a stable and just government. French people believed that their country was finally being governed by a real statesman who embodied the ideal characteristics of the male citizen envisioned by Rousseau in his writings. Greuze's admiration for Napoleon is confirmed in several portraits he painted of him between 1791 and 1803. The portraits depict the emperor as an adolescent boy resembling the good son in Greuze's family artworks. See James Thompson, "Jean-Baptiste Greuze," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 47, no. 3 (1989–1990): 46.

51. *The First Furrow*, now in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, was purchased by a Russian noble family called Shuvalov. Its meaning was likely misinterpreted by these owners as happy serfs working the land of the feudal lord.

the liberal ideas of the French Revolution and its aftermath. In *Emile*, Rousseau reiterates his conviction that the bedrock of human goodness is a love for the land, which must be nurtured in concert with the love for one's countrymen. Land is in fact central to Emile's vision of his adult self: "As I should be a man of the people, with the populace, I should be a countryman in the fields; and if I spoke of farming, the peasant should not laugh at my expense. I would not go and build a town in the country nor erect the Tuileries at the door of my lodgings. On some pleasant shady hill-side I would have a little cottage..." (317). Rousseau's message is clear: only by living in the country and tilling the land can the adult male remain a man of conscience and be a compassionate citizen. In short, Greuze's *The First Furrow* reproduces Rousseau's ardent belief that rural life cultivates righteous sentiments and prepares the young man for his future role as a citizen of a just republic.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have explored how Greuze's images of male youth coalesce with the gendered ethics promoted by Rousseau in his pedagogical treatise *Emile*. The tutor in this influential text teaches Emile to be a morally autonomous young man whose behaviours, judgments, and beliefs are ethical. Through paintings that contemplate family life, religious sentiment, filial piety, obedience/disobedience, illness, and death, Greuze similarly addresses the conscience and compassion that a boy had to develop under the guidance of his father to become a man of virtue. In so doing, the artist responds to some of the key historic issues and social beliefs affecting male youth during this era: the challenges facing apprenticed boys who must leave home; an idealization of country living and farming as the best occupation for the adult male; and the overwhelming concern, felt during this heightened period of warfare and unrest preceding the French Revolution, that young men go astray when they become soldiers.