



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME TWO

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,
Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley,
Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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painting. “The coolness of the well,” evoked here in the murky browns, grays, and greens behind the figure, is a result of later intervention. Still, the painting retains a certain charm and exemplifies one of Millet’s ideas on a recurring theme. FEW

PROVENANCE Saulnier;⁹ Laurent-Richard, Paris (until 1878, his sale, Drouot, Paris, 23 May 1878, no. 54, as *Paysanne venant de puiser de l’eau*, sold to Brame; [Brame, Paris, from 1878]; possibly Paul Tesse;¹⁰ Ernest Secrétan, Paris (until 1889, his sale, Galerie Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris, 1 July 1889, no. 64, ill., as *Le Retour de la fontaine*, sold to Arnold); Arnold (from 1889); Alfred Corning Clark, New York and Cooperstown (d. 1896); Elizabeth Scriven Clark, his wife, by descent (1896–d. 1909); Robert Sterling Clark, her son, by descent (1909–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1956a, no. 113, pl. 30; Williamstown 1959b, ill.; Williamstown 1993c, no cat.

REFERENCES *Masters in Art* 1900–1909, vol. 1, pt. 8, p. 35; Soullié 1900a, p. 7; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 83, ill.; Reverdy 1973, p. 122; Paris–London 1975–76, p. 136 (French ed., p. 196); Williamstown 1996–97, p. 10, fig. 1; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, p. 118n15.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support appears to be a thin, or thinned, oak panel, whose grain runs vertically. It has been placed within a secondary oak panel tray, whose total depth measures 0.5 cm. The attached panel has a lip that surrounds the surface of the painting on all four edges, extending the dimensions slightly. The 0.5-cm-wide strips of the extension are unpainted. The painting also has a mahogany cradle, which was probably installed with the secondary panel sometime after 1889. A red wax seal on the back is stamped with Paul Tesse’s monogram, “PT.” There are scattered age cracks throughout, especially noticeable in the well wall at the left. The paint is extensively abraded along the top of the wood grain, revealing the ground layer. Solvent erosion has softened many features, including the face of the figure, while the tree foliage is the least affected area. The surface is cloudy in appearance due to thick, cracked varnish layers and extensive retouchings. The painting may have been cleaned and restored in 1935 by Madame Coince. The ultraviolet light fluorescence of the coatings is very dense with major repainting visible below the varnish in many areas. In reflected light, the wood grain is prominent, including some irregular surface areas located over smoother ray flecks of the oak.

The gray ground layer may be artist applied, as it is uneven and appears to extend to the original panel edges at the bottom and sides. No underdrawing or lower paint sketch was detected. The paint layer is a thin to moderately thick layer, with blurred blending of brushwork, which originally had more glazes. The signature in the lower right is blurred and partially hidden under a repair.

1. Wheelwright 1876, pp. 259–60. For a contemporary photograph of a similar well in the corner of a courtyard in Barbizon, see Munich 1996, p. 437, no. D31.
2. Jean-François Millet to Théophile Thoré, 18 Feb. 1862; translation from Sensier 1881, p. 141. The date of this letter is given in Moreau-Nélaton 1921, vol. 2, p. 106. In addition, the original French of the letter differs slightly between the version reproduced in Sensier 1881 (French ed., pp. 209–10) and the one in Moreau-Nélaton 1921, vol. 2, pp. 106–7.
3. Jean-François Millet to Théophile Thoré, 18 Feb. 1862; translation from Sensier 1881, p. 142.
4. See Sensier 1881, p. 124.
5. Wheelwright 1876, p. 271.
6. Formerly IBM Corporation collection. See Paris–London 1975–76, pp. 135–36, no. 83, which mentions several other versions. The IBM painting was subsequently sold at Sotheby’s, New York, 24 May 1995, no. 29.
7. Wheelwright 1876, p. 271.
8. Sensier 1881 (French ed., p. 207). Robert Herbert, in Paris–London 1975–76, p. 136, calls this drawing “preparatory.”
9. Soullié 1900a, p. 7, lists Saulnier as the first owner; this may indicate John Saulnier, who owned several other paintings by Millet.
10. The “PT” monogram on the reverse of this panel suggests that it was owned by Paul Tesse, but the dates of his ownership are unknown. See also cats. 84 and 220.

220 | Young Girl Guarding Her Sheep c. 1860–62

Oil on panel, 38.1 x 27.5 cm
 Lower right: J. F. Millet
 1955.532

Robert Sterling Clark favored the gentler side of Millet’s output. Eschewing depictions of heavy labor such as hoeing or cutting wood, Clark bought small paintings of women and girls engaged in easier tasks associated with the home, carrying water or making or mending clothes for the family. *Young Girl Guarding Her Sheep*, too, is a painting that, if only tangentially, is about textile production, joining the wool in its raw state on the backs of the sheep and its penultimate form as a sock or stocking on the needles. It is also a fine example of the kind of painting Millet began to make in the early 1860s that he hoped would appeal to a broad market. A girl in her early teens, not particularly pretty but not homely either, has been given



the task of guarding the family's sheep. To occupy the long hours, she has brought a brown stocking to knit. Dressed in a rose skirt, blue blouse (which may once have been pink), darker red kerchief, and the hooded cape typical of the area around Barbizon, she trusts the dog to do the actual watching of the flock. A placid, sympathetic view of daily life in Barbizon, this painting suggests the continuity and stability of rural life, far from both the congestion of the city and the brutality of hard physical labor.

This motif of a single shepherdess, knitting or not, was one of Millet's favorites. He began exploring the variants as early as the late 1840s, while living in Paris, and it proved surprisingly versatile, allowing him to picture attitudes of melancholy, lassitude, or, as here, quiet industry. This last theme is the one most often represented. Not only was it one he could have seen, thereby documenting the life of Barbizon, but it also accorded with his interest in the handiwork of women. The subject was given its fullest expression in 1864, when Millet exhibited at the Salon *Shepherdess with Her Flock* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris) (fig. 220.1), a painting that had been commissioned the previous year by Paul Tesse. It was, for Millet, extraordinarily well received.¹ Robert L. Herbert lists several works related to the Salon painting,² among them this small panel at the Clark.

The Clark painting can be seen as a rehearsal for the larger Salon work, which measures 81 by 101 centimeters. Although the painting in Williamstown is not dated, it is very likely the one that was sold from the collection of Comte Edmond Blanc in 1862.³ Preparatory to the small painting was a crayon drawing of the shepherdess with a smaller study of her right, working hand in the upper right.⁴ The drawing and small painting, both vertical compositions, necessarily concentrate on the figure of the shepherdess, whereas the Salon painting, a horizontal format, expands to include an extensive landscape. The Plain of Chailly stretches out behind the shepherdess and her flock, seemingly forever. Almost half the picture is given over to a luminous golden sky, against which are silhouetted the head and shoulders of the knitter. By contrast, the Clark's shepherdess and flock are near a sheltering copse, whose indistinct foliage focuses attention on the girl's head and figure. She dominates the small scene, fully modeled in three dimensions, her cape and skirt falling almost straight down to make her figure virtually columnar. The sheep are barely sketched in, their bodies forming an undifferentiated low wall of fleece behind her.

Earl Shinn, writing as Edward Strahan, characterized this treatment of the figure as embodying "simplicity":

The figures of French art, until the advent of Millet, could show examples of every grace except simplicity. That deep and absorbed concentration in any guiding motive which excludes all self-consciousness, all striking of attitudes, was lacking in them. When this great poet of the brush appeared, with his poignant tales of country life, expressed by personages who evidently did not know they were looked at, it seems to have affected the French like the revelation of an unknown secretion of integrity.⁵

An extension of simplicity can be repose and, further, continuity. Strahan wrote specifically of this painting when it was owned by William H. Vanderbilt:

The complete harmony which the artist has established between his principal figure and the accessories, in his picture of "The Knitting Shepherdess," conduces to a wonderful expression of repose. A naïve posture, caught straight from the fields, shows the girl resting herself by leaning forward on her long shepherd's crook—thus making a kind of tripod on the earth; the flock seems to encircle her with a slow movement, the woods with creeping shadows encircle the flock, the sky encircles all, and the whole composition seems like a dial of which she is the gnomon, marking the long tranquil round of the shepherd's day. Tomorrow will be like it, and the next day, and the next; and, somehow, it is the picture itself which tells us so.⁶

Strahan, writing in the early 1880s, not long after the artist's death in 1875, celebrated the pastoral changelessness, or changeless pastoralism, in certain of Millet's paintings that appealed to private collectors.

While it is more than likely that Millet saw such a shepherdess on his walks after supper with his brother Pierre, he did not sketch her on the spot. As Pierre explained: "All his pictures or drawings were made at the studio. . . . François always went home full of these impressions, and during the evening the memory of what we had seen would suggest to him some com-



Fig. 220.1. Jean-François Millet, *Shepherdess with Her Flock*, c. 1863. Oil on canvas, 81 x 101 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris

position for a picture.”⁷ As the artist stated: “I can say I have never painted (or worked) from nature; *nature does not pose*.”⁸ It was obviously important to Millet that his subjects not move. To that end, he used models. His wife or the family’s maid might be asked to pose.⁹ The static, almost frozen quality of Millet’s figures is thus explained. His paintings and even the drawings on which they are based are carefully considered compositions, each element of which needed to be thought through. Edward Wheelwright reported Millet’s words of advice about drawing: “He constantly insisted upon ‘more deliberation, greater pains; I must be sure I knew what I meant to do before I drew a line or made a mark upon my paper.’”¹⁰ Concerning himself “more about the vital and essential qualities of things than with multiplicity of detail,”¹¹ Millet created iconic figures, rooted to their place, there for all time.

Equally at home in this place are the sheep and their guardian dog. Millet does not individualize these sheep, and Wheelwright, our source for so much first-hand information about Millet and Barbizon, tells us that “the sheep at Barbison [*sic*] and in Millet’s pictures are of no choice and valuable breeds, but very ordinary animals.” The dogs used to guard sheep “were wiry, foxy little fellows, generally black with a

tan spot over each eye, with a sharp nose and pointed ears; not pretty to look at, but indefatigably active and wonderfully intelligent.”¹²

Given the presence on the back of the canvas of Paul Tesse’s monogram impressed in a red wax seal, it now seems clear that the collector, having bought *Young Girl Guarding Her Sheep* at Blanc’s sale in 1862, commissioned Millet to paint the larger *Shepherdess with Her Flock*. In expanding the Clark’s picture to Salon scale, however, Millet substituted grandeur for intimacy, heavenly effulgence for quotidian effect, and a type for an individual. In short, if the larger painting made for Tesse is a more beautiful painting, it is also a less sympathetic one. FEW

PROVENANCE Comte Edmond Blanc (until 1862, his sale, Drouot, Paris, 7 Apr. 1862, no. 33, as *Jeune fille gardant ses moutons*); Paul Tesse; William H. Vanderbilt, New York (by 1879–d. 1885); George Washington Vanderbilt, his son, by descent (1885–d. 1914);¹³ Cornelius Vanderbilt III, his nephew, by descent (1914–d. 1942); Grace Wilson Vanderbilt, his wife, by descent (1942–45, her sale, Parke-Bernet, New York, 18 Apr. 1945, no. 129, ill., as *Shepherdess: Plains of Barbizon*, sold to Knoedler); [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 20 Apr. 1945, as *Shepherdess: Plains of Barbizon*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1945–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1956a, no. 115, pl. 32; Williamstown 1959b, ill.; Omaha–Memphis–Williamstown 1982–83, pp. 126–27, no. 95, ill.; Williamstown 1984a, p. 65, no. 89; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, not in cat. (exhibited in New York only).

REFERENCES Strahan 1879–80, vol. 3, pt. 12, pp. 101, 104, 108, ill.; Vanderbilt 1884, p. 22, no. 38; Vanderbilt 1886, p. 12, no. 32; *Collector* 1890, p. 85; *Masters in Art* 1900–1909, vol. 1, pt. 8, p. 35; Soullié 1900a, p. 18; Metropolitan Museum of Art 1905, p. 204, no. 20; Peacock 1905, p. 168; Cain and Leprieur 1913, ill. opp. p. 76; Burroughs 1916, p. 201; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 81, ill.; Paris–London 1975–76, p. 143 (French ed., p. 204); Kern et al. 1996, pp. 54–55, ill.; Antiques 1997, p. 526, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a very slightly convex oak panel 0.6 cm thick, with the grain running vertically. The reverse has chamfers 1.9 cm wide on the edges, gray paint on the flat central portion, and a colorman’s stamp reading “G & C 9506,” possibly for Giroux et Cie. There is also a red wax seal with Paul Tesse’s interlaced “PT” monogram. In reflected light, branched and connected age cracks are visible in the sky and trees behind the figure’s head. There are also some areas exhibiting the typical rectangular crack pattern found on panels. The lower 3.8 cm has a series of

cracks running horizontally, across the wood grain. Some age cracks are showing signs of opening laterally like traction cracks. There are old frame indentations in the lower edge, indicating pressure on the paint film when it was quite young. De Wild cleaned the painting in 1945, removing a coach or copal varnish, and in 1982, thick yellow coatings were reduced rather than removed in order to protect the sensitive glazes. In ultraviolet light, patches of old varnish fluoresce mainly in the trees and foreground. There are small retouches in the right field below the two trees and in some traction cracks. In reflected light, the wood grain is visible in the upper half where the image is more thinly painted. The gloss is slightly irregular primarily due to the presence of the older varnish residues.

The cream-colored ground appears to be two commercially applied layers. The slightly pebbled texture is visible through the paint of the trees and sky. Using infrared reflectography, strong but cursory black underdrawing lines, possibly ink, can be seen in many parts of the image. Some lines are visible in normal light. There may be a brown sketch below the final paint layers, visible below the grass. The paint handling is sketchy and somewhat dry, with glazes used for details and dark areas. Evidence suggests that the shepherdess's blue bodice was once pink. The landscape was painted around the central figure and the animals, but the staff was painted after the background. The signature may have been executed in brown ink.

1. See Miquel 1975, vol. 3, pp. 596–97, for a sampling of the reviews and responses.
2. Paris–London 1975–76, p. 143.
3. See Provenance. The listing in Soullié 1900a, p. 18, despite the centimeter's difference in height, is the source of this information.
4. Sale, Drouot, Paris, 19 June 1987, no. 47, ill.
5. Strahan 1883–84, vol. 4, p. 51.
6. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 52.
7. Millet 1894, pp. 908, 910–11.
8. Quoted in Eaton 1896, p. 189. Unlike Edward Wheelwright, who lived in Barbizon for nine months in the mid-1850s, Wyatt Eaton spent little time there, in the summer of 1873 and the summer and fall of 1874, that is, at the end of Millet's life.
9. Eaton 1896, p. 190; Wheelwright 1876, p. 258.
10. Wheelwright 1876, p. 268.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
13. George Washington Vanderbilt placed this and a number of other works on long-term loan at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1886. The works were returned to his nephew in 1919.

221 | **The Sower** c. 1865

Conté crayon and pastel on beige paper, mounted on wood-pulp board, 47 x 37.5 cm

Lower right: J. F. Millet

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Hirschl

1982.8

In contrast to harvesting, which requires large numbers of people working quickly to get the ripe grain out of the fields and into the safety of a grainstack or barn, sowing is done by the labor of an almost laughably small number of people. Because of this, even before Millet moved to Barbizon, he recognized that the single figure of a sower could be treated monumentally.¹ On the sower's almost solitary task hinged the welfare of his entire family. In the Salon of 1850–51 Millet exhibited a large oil painting of a sower (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), a dark, heavily worked picture.² The critics were impressed by the power emanating from the man striding downhill, his face in shadow, his hand with the grain picked out by the light of the setting sun.³

Fifteen years later, Millet returned to the subject in a series of pastels. Four are known, two vertical works (the Clark's and one at the Frick Art and Historical Center, Pittsburgh) and two with the landscape to either side expanded to form a horizontal composition (The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, and private collection).⁴ The example currently in a private collection was made for the architect and collector Émile Gavet (1830–1904). In addition to paintings by the Men of 1830 (Corot, Rousseau, Diaz, Dupré, and Barye), Gavet owned French and Italian Renaissance furniture and paintings by the Old Masters. As Alexandra Murphy has explained, beginning in September 1865, Gavet provided Millet with a monthly stipend of one thousand francs on the conditions that Gavet be given almost the entirety of Millet's output and that Millet work in pastel. The artist claimed "his liberty both in the choice of his subjects and in working for others."⁵ It is possible that Millet experimented with the different formats before settling on the one he delivered to Gavet, probably in 1866 or 1867; Murphy plausibly suggests that Gavet's is the final version of the theme.⁶

Another, and more likely, scenario is suggested by a close reading of Étienne Moreau-Nélaton's biography of Millet.⁷ Gavet's monthly stipend was surely a stabilizing influence for the Millet household, but