

**Jean Renoir**  
Projections of Paradise

With a New Introduction by Ronald Bergan

Ronald Bergan

[Arcade logo]  
Arcade Publishing • New York

## Praise for *Jean Renoir*

“The ideal Renoir biography — easy, graceful, and unpretentious.”  
—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

“Substantial, well-researched ... Ronald Bergan creates a detailed, affectionate portrait ... vividly realized.”  
— *Observer*

“Bergan has written a book that reads as well at the beach as it will in film class.”  
—*New York Newsday*

“[Bergan] painstakingly chronicles the plots and makings of Renoir’s *oeuvre* ... purely biographical and enjoyable ...”  
—*New York Times Book Review*

# Contents

PART I.	FIRST IMPRESSIONS (1894–1916)	1
1	A Château in Montmartre	3
2	La Belle Époque	10
3	The Little Theatre of Little Jean Renoir	18
4	A Champagne Childhood	27
5	Painting Paradise	35
6	The Rules of War	41
PART II	COMPANIONS IN SILENCE (1917–1929)	51
7	A Fearsome Beam of Light	53
8	The Golden Muse	58
9	Opening Sequence	65
10	Forest Murmurs	70
11	<i>Femme Fatale</i>	77
12	Black and White Follies	85
13	Dédée In Toyland	91
14	Slapstick, Swords and Sand	96
PART III	SOUND BEGINNINGS (1930–1933)	105
15	The Bitch	107
16	Through a Lens Darkly	116
17	<i>Nostalgie de la Boue</i>	122
18	Filming Flaubert	127
PART IV	CITIZEN RENOIR (1934–1940)	137
19	Provençal Passions	139
20	' <i>Vive le Front Populaire!</i> '	145
21	Two Months in the Country	157
22	Moscow on the Seine	164
23	Brothers In Uniform	170

24	<i>'C'est la Révolution!'</i>	180
25	On and Off the Rails	186
26	Everyone Has His Reasons	196
27	A Shabby Little Shocker	207
PART V DRIVEN INTO PARADISE (1941-1949)		
28	Fifteenth Century-Fox	219
29	Occupation Therapy	231
30	Americana	245
31	What the Chambermaid Saw	254
32	The End of the Dream	260
PART VI HOME FROM HOME (1950-1969)		
33	Way Out East	269
34	<i>Commedia Delle Magnani</i>	282
35	The Ballad of the Butte	291
36	Ingrid and Men	299
37	The Eternal Debutant	308
38	Natural Insemination	317
39	The Good Soldier	324
40	Curtain Call	334
PART VII THE ONENESS OF THE WORLD (1970-1979)		
		339
Acknowledgements		
		353
Footnotes		
		354
Filmography		
		360
Jean Renoir: written works		
		366
Index		
		368

## Jean Renoir: Projections of Paradise

### Introduction to the 2015 reprint

There are some artists in all the arts whose reputations fluctuate, tossed on the tides of trends. However, although it is over two decades since my biography of Jean Renoir was first published, his films have continued to be an important and unwavering part of the canon. Orson Welles' remark many years ago that Jean Renoir was 'the greatest of all directors' still provokes few arguments. As a barometer of Renoir's continuing high status, *The Rules of the Game* (1939) is the only film to have been included on every top ten list in the *Sight & Sound's* respected decennial poll since 1952. In fact, in 2012, the magazine voted it the 4<sup>th</sup> greatest film ever made.

*The Rules of the Game* pioneered the use of deep focus cinematography, which inspired Welles' *Citizen Kane*, while *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932) showed how direct sound could be used effectively, and *Toni* (1935) was an important influence on Italian neo-realism. In fact, Renoir's career spans the history of cinema – from the expressionism of the early silent movies to naturalism, committed cinema, film noir, Hollywood studio productions, Technicolor period comedies, and fast television techniques.

At the time, I was very lucky to have been able to meet and interview Renoir's son Alain, and many other people associated with the director. It was also enriching to visit all the places that meant so much to him, particularly the family home in Cagnes sur Mer, where he was brought up and which has changed little since the days when his father, the great Impressionist painter, August Renoir, painted there. I hope that the reader will share my pleasure in (re)visiting Jean Renoir's fulfilling life and work.

Ronald Bergan

*PART I*

*FIRST IMPRESSIONS*  
*(1894-1916)*

## A Château in Montmartre

*'As a result of my many talks with Gabrielle about the Château des Brouillards, where I lived until the age of three, I hardly know which are my recollections and which are hers.'*

Shortly after midnight on 15 September 1894, a midwife held a baby up for the mother to see. 'Heavens, how ugly! Take it away!' she exclaimed; the father, with a certain amount of prescience, said: 'What a mouth; it's a regular oven! He'll be a glutton.'<sup>1</sup> The cartoonist Abel Faivre, who was staying the night at the Château des Brouillards, thought the infant would provide him with a perfect model for his caricatures.

Doctor Bouffe de Saint Blaise said the mother had come through the ordeal splendidly, and he predicted that the child would have an iron constitution. He swallowed a glass of brandy from Essoyes, the home town of the mother, and left. Other witnesses to the birth were Eugène, the first cousin of the newly-born, a sergeant in the Colonial Army, and 15-year-old Gabrielle Renard, the mother's cousin, who had arrived from Essoyes a month earlier to help with the preparations for the birth. She had her own opinions of the baby. 'Well, I think he's beautiful,' she averred.<sup>2</sup> Everyone laughed, including the father.

The mother sat up in bed and asked Madame Mathieu, the family's cook and laundress, to prepare some baked tomatoes

according to a recipe she had been given by their friend Paul Cézanne. 'Just be a little less stingy with the olive oil,' she suggested.<sup>3</sup> Faivre had never tasted the dish before and ate almost all of it, so that Madame Mathieu had to prepare another serving. The father was not hungry. He had been very worried about his wife, who had suffered a miscarriage between her first child and this hippo-mouthed yelling creature. He sat around the table, pale and gaunt. 'To think of putting Aline in that condition just for a few minutes', he said self-accusingly. 'Don't you worry, *maître*, you'll do it again,' the cartoonist said, accurately as it happens, while he put away more tomatoes *à la Cézanne*. Eugène, who was actually born in Russia and might have been a model for one of those idle young men in Chekhov, finished his food, rinsed his mouth out with some wine mixed with water, stretched his legs, leaned back in his chair, and closed his eyes.

A few days later, the father wrote to fellow-painter Berthe Morisot. 'I have a quite absurd piece of news for you . . . namely, the arrival of a second son. He is called Jean. Mother and baby are both in splendid health.'<sup>4</sup>

The Château des Brouillards, where the birth took place, was not a Gothic castle swathed in fog on the Normandy coast as its name might suggest, but was perched on the slope of the Butte in Montmartre, number six in a row of dwellings at 13 rue Girardon. Jean Renoir later described the houses thus: 'A hedge surrounded the property, which was composed of several buildings and a fine garden. Once you entered the wrought-iron gate you found yourself in a lane too narrow for a carriage to pass . . . the inhabitants, enclosed within the high hedge and enjoying a certain privacy behind the fences of their own small gardens, dwelt in a world apart, concealing endless fantasy under a provincial exterior . . . For most Parisians this little paradise of lilacs and roses seemed like the end of the world. Cab drivers refused to drive up the hill, stopping their cabs either at the place de la Fontaine du But [now called place Constantin Pecqueur], where you had to climb the slope to reach the house, or else at the rue des Abbesses, on the other side of the Butte where it crosses the rue Lepic . . . The difficulty of getting to the place was largely compensated for by the low rents, the fresh air, the cows, the lilacs and the roses.'<sup>5</sup>

The Château des Brouillards had two upper floors, plus an attic which had been transformed into an artist's studio. From the attic

window on the west side one could see Mont Valérien, the hills of Meudon, Argenteuil and Saint-Cloud, and the plain of Gennevilliers. The plain of Saint-Denis was visible from the north window, as were the woods at Montmorency. On clear days you could even make out the basilica of Saint-Denis in the distance. 'You felt you were right up in the sky,' wrote Jean. The walls of the rooms had been painted white and the doors Trianon grey, as they had been wherever the artist had lived. Madame Renoir slept upstairs over the dining-room; her husband on the second floor next to the guest room; their elder son Pierre, when he came home from school on weekends; over the drawing room; and Gabrielle above the kitchen.

It is ironic that the artist, who suffered terribly from rheumatism, should have chosen a cold house called the Château des Brouillards. What he needed and desired was the warming sun of the Midi. At the beginning of 1895, during a freezing winter, the baby Jean was taken ill with pneumonia. For an entire week his mother and Gabrielle were on constant vigil, carrying the child about in their arms, because if he were laid flat on the bed he began to suffocate. In desperation, they finally telegraphed Auguste, who was painting down at La Couronne, near Marseilles. Dropping his brushes, he immediately hurried to the station, without even a suitcase, and caught the first train to Paris. 'Thanks to the love of those three devoted people, I was pulled through a crisis which might otherwise have been fatal. Yet once the danger was past, no one made further mention of it. If it had not been for Gabrielle, I should never have known anything about it.'<sup>6</sup> Always in search of warmth, Auguste was off again to the Midi as soon as the baby had recovered.

Auguste had moved into 13 rue Girardon in October 1889 with Aline, whom he was yet to marry, and their five-year-old son Pierre, nearly five years before Jean was born. But the artist had been living on and off in Montmartre since 1873, when he frequented the Nouvelle-Athènes café in the rue Pigalle together with Edouard Manet, Marcellin Desboutin, the painter and writer of verse tragedies; Charles Cros, poet, musician, inventor and wit; the poets Villiers de l'Isle Adam and Jean Richepin; Paul Cézanne, and Auguste's lifelong comrade Georges Rivière, author of *Renoir and His Friends*, and future father-in-law to Cézanne's son. The district possessed everything Renoir *père* adored, and which his second son was to love, from dance halls to circuses, from music halls to the café concert, and its bustling streets were filled with the kind of

people he liked and respected, the workers of Paris. There were also parades of pretty girls, *midinettes*, dancers, acrobats and equestrians.

In the 1870s Montmartre was still a village, an atmosphere it has managed to retain over the years. Auguste settled at 74 rue St Georges, where he rented a studio midway between the Grands Boulevards and the place Pigalle. Then as now it was packed with cafés and places of entertainment, nightclubs and exclusive restaurants frequented by nobs who drove up the hill for a night out and were ready to pay enormous prices for the privilege. 'I will provide low life for millionaires,' says Moulin Rouge impresario Jean Gabin in *French Cancan*, the motion picture Jean chose to celebrate his return to film-making in his native country after 15 years' absence in California; an exuberant, colourful homage to the theatre of *La Belle Époque*. One is constantly made aware in Jean's films of his need to get back to the adult world of his father, and his own romantic memories of childhood, filtered through the not always rose-coloured lens placed there by Gabrielle, his all-enveloping and loving nurse.

Montmartre was where Jean chose to live whenever he returned from America, an area that could not but help form a distinctive part of his character, a certain cynical Montmartroise humour and an attraction towards *la vie de Bohème*. Although the true name of Montmartre is the Mont de Mercure, a very old tradition dating from the eighth century makes it the 'Mont des Martyrs' because, in the year 272, Saint Denis, first Bishop of Paris, and his two prelates were said to have been martyred there. When Saint Denis was beheaded, the legend has it, he picked up his head and walked on towards the hilltop, washing his bloodstained face in the fountain on the way. The hill of Montmartre is also linked with the uprisings of the first Paris Commune in 1871 which resulted from a feeling of betrayal when France capitulated before the Prussian armies.

Artists and writers began to settle in Montmartre in the early nineteenth century because life there was cheap and the hill picturesque. In the cemetery, which Jean visited as a child, are the tombs of Théophile Gautier, Alfred de Vigny, Stendhal, the Goncourt brothers, Greuze and Berlioz, as well as Madame Récamier and Alphonsine Plessis (the model for *La Dame aux camélias*). More importantly, the young Jean was exposed to a stream of living artists visiting his father's household. Among the regular visitors to the Château des Brouillards were Paul Cézanne, whose son was to become a great friend of Jean's, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro,

Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot and her daughter Julie Manet, the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Durand-Ruel, the art dealer who was among the first to champion the Impressionists, and Ambroise Vollard. A creole from the isle of Réunion, Vollard was a thin-bearded bright-eyed man who had opened a small gallery in the rue Lafitte at the beginning of 1884, and was introduced to the Renoir circle by Pissarro, who was also born in the Antilles. He wrote two of the best-known books on the painter, *La Vie et l'oeuvre de Pierre-Auguste Renoir* (1919) and *Renoir* (1920). Vollard's name became so confused in Jean's mind, that he believed that the American silver dollar had been named after him. For years he called it a vollard, expecting to find the art dealer's face on the coins. Later in life, he was still apt to say from time to time, 'The development of space missiles costs billions of vollards.'

When Gabrielle took Jean shopping with her in the neighbourhood, Toulouse Lautrec was often to be seen sitting in the window of a café on the corner of the rue Tholozé and the rue Lepic. The dwarfish artist would call to them to sit down with him and his girlfriends of the moment, sometimes belly dancers at the Moulin Rouge, Montmartre women with exotic names dressed in Algerian costume.

In order to get to the Château des Brouillards today, one can take the métro to place Pigalle and walk up the rather scruffy rue Houdon, in number 18 of which Pierre Renoir was born. Walking further up rue Ravignon, away from the crowds that gather in the cafés down below, a few pleasant houses start to appear on the side of the Butte.

Separated from the cafés and restaurants in a more residential district, there is a street recognisable from one of Max Douy's set designs for *French Cancan*. This is where Nini (Françoise Arnoul), the young laundress with dreams of becoming a dancer at a *caf' conc'*, meets the infatuated Prince Alexandre (Gianni Esposito). On the corner of the rue Girardon is the Bar L'Assommoir, close to where Zola set his novel of the same name, part of the Rougon-Macquart series, two of which, *Nana* and *La Bête humaine*, Jean filmed. There are associations everywhere.

The large numberless house on the corner is the Château des Brouillards. There is no plaque. There are few flowers growing on the hedges, and the garden is unkempt. 'All along our fence there were rose bushes which had reverted to their wild state,' was Jean's description of it. The house with its off-white peeling walls and

shutters occupies the whole block. It has seen better days. In the near distance the white dome of Sacre Coeur is visible.

Up here on the Butte, over a century ago, a small boy played in a garden while his father painted. The house is still there . . . and the memories.

Jean was baptised in 1896 at the Church of Saint Pierre de Montmartre, the third oldest church in Paris after St Germain-des-Prés and St Martin-des-Champs. His godfather was George Durand-Ruel, one of the sons of Paul Durand-Ruel, and his godmother was Jeanne Baudot. She was the 16-year-old daughter of the chief doctor of the Western Railway Company. Two years before, Jeanne had seen Renoir canvases in the house of her parents' friends, the Gallimards, and begged to be introduced to the painter so that he could instruct her. 'What do you want me to teach you?' Auguste asked 'I'm learning every day.'<sup>8</sup> But the young girl and the middle-aged artist got on very well, and she became a good Impressionist painter. Her colourful pictures adorn the walls of the mansion of her nephew, Jean Griot, former editor of *Le Figaro*, at Louveciennes, the town outside Paris where Jean's paternal grandparents lived out their last days.

The sun shone on the day of the baptism. The bright dresses and lace parasols of the women contrasted sharply with the black of the men's jackets and top hats. Faivre was there, so was cousin Eugène, in his Colonial Infantry uniform decorated with medals. He was the son of Auguste's elder brother Victor, a tailor, whom a Russian grand duke had admired so much that he took him back to St Petersburg.

In the garden, Jean's godparents distributed the traditional sugared almonds to the children of the family and the neighbourhood, while the adults drank from a cask of Frontignon wine Auguste had had sent up from the south, and ate *vol-au-vents* and *brioches* chosen at local shops by the host himself.

The baby's elder brother, 11-year-old Pierre, who was of a taciturn nature, unwound after drinking a little of the Essoyes wine and recited some verses from the battle scene in *Le Cid* to the young girls from next door. When Faivre started to tell an off-colour story, Auguste gave him a kick under the table to remind him that young women were present. Although his own language could be spicy (as Jean's later was) and he was free from prudery, Auguste disliked smutty jokes being told in front of the daughters of his friends. After

luncheon everyone strolled under the trees at the Château des Brouillards. The final word on the day came from Joséphine, the fishmonger, who declared it the finest christening she had ever seen in Montmartre.

## *La Belle Époque*

*'I have spent my life trying to determine the extent of the influence of my father upon me.'*

Over a century earlier, another significant baptism had taken place. On 8 January 1773, a foundling was baptised François, but had no surname as his parents were unknown. The newly-born male child had been found the same day abandoned in Limoges, and taken to the General Hospital. It was 23 years later that the surname Renoir first seems to have appeared in the records. On 24 November 1796, François Renoir, shoemaker, of rue du Colombier, Limoges, married Anne, daughter of the local carpenter Joseph Régnier. Curiously, nobody named Renoir lived in Limoges during that time. There was, however, a Renouard, also a shoemaker, in the town. It has been assumed that this man adopted the foundling – a common occurrence when a craftsman wanted an apprentice who would cost only the food he ate.

By a strange coincidence, although there was no Renoir in the town, there was more than one Lenoir, two of whom were well known to the bridegroom and the registrar. One of these was the abbé Lenoir, the priest who baptised François in 1773; the other the magistrate who married him in 1769. It has also been assumed that when François was asked his name at the marriage ceremony he

said, 'Renouard', and that the registrar wrote down the phonetic Renoir – a mistake which François, being illiterate, could not correct. Or could it have been that the 'L' of Lenoir was written in such a way as to suggest an 'R', not impossible with extremely florid handwriting? A clerical error thus gave Jean Renoir's great-grandfather a name that would become famous.

François gladly accepted the name, but he did not accept the mystery of his birth. Like many a foundling he visualised his parents in the most romantic light, and dreamed that he was of noble blood, perhaps the result of a below-stairs liaison between an aristocrat and a maidservant of the household, a frequent occurrence during the days of the *ancien régime*. At the restoration of the monarchy in 1815, François Renoir, believing himself entitled to estates and fortunes and encouraged by his wife and eldest son, travelled to Paris to persuade the commission which dealt with the claims of the dispossessed aristocrats that his father had been guillotined during the Terror. The fact that he was born in 1773, and the Terror was 20 years later, must have conveniently escaped him. François returned to Limoges unheard, but he continued to believe he was of noble birth for the rest of his life. However, none of his descendants, especially his famous artist grandson, cared to be thought of as a blueblood. Auguste Renoir preferred to be considered an artisan and a man of the people, as did Jean, despite some of the latter's aristocratic tastes and a certain (atavistic?) empathy with the philosophy of nobility. One sees this positive attitude to the character of Louis XVI in *La Marseillaise*, deepened by his sympathetic approach to the role as played by his brother Pierre; to the Baron (Louis Jouvet) in *Les Bas-Fonds* (*The Lower Depths*); the aristocrats Captain de Boeldieu (Pierre Fresnay) and Captain von Rauffenstein (Erich von Stroheim) in *La Grande Illusion*, and the Polish Princess Eléna Sorokovska (Ingrid Bergman) in *Eléna et les hommes*. Some members of the Renoir family used to refer to Auguste as 'Monsieur le marquis' as a joke, a title given affectionately to Robert de la Chesnaye (Marcel Dalio) in *La Règle du jeu*.

Of course, one of the great strengths of Jean as a film director was his recognition of the nobility of spirit in a character, irrespective of the character's origins or class – Jean Gabin is called a 'prince' by an old beggarwoman in *French Cancan* – the proletariat were not automatically extolled, the bourgeoisie not automatically condemned. Even within the context of the Popular Front from which emerged *La Marseillaise*, produced by the CGT (*Confédération Gén-*

*érale du Travail*), the trade union organisation attached to the Communist Party, Jean unashamedly presented aristocrats capable of virtue and humanity.

Léonard, the eldest son of François Renoir, was born on 7 July 1799. In due course he was apprenticed to a journeyman tailor, a man who moved from town to town, staying at each one as long as there was work. This nomadic existence lasted until 1828 when the 29-year-old Léonard, a tailor in his own right by that time, visited Saintes, 100 miles west of his birthplace. There he met and married a 21-year-old seamstress, Marguerite Merlet. Jean's grandmother (who modelled for her son Auguste) was a delightfully no-nonsense person who preferred soap and water to cosmetics, wore plain dresses and rejected the highly decorative fashion. She was also plain-speaking, saying what she thought rather than what others wanted to hear.

Soon after the marriage Marguerite and Léonard went back to Limoges, made a home for François and his wife, and helped carry on the family business at 35 boulevard Sainte-Catherine (now 71 boulevard Gambetta) where six children were born, two of them dying young. The four who survived were Henri, born in 1830, Lisa born two years later, Victor who came along four years after Lisa and, finally, on 25 February 1841, nearly five years later than Victor, Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

On 29 May 1845, François died, aged 72, and Léonard and his family decided to move to Paris. 'It's no use asking me about Limoges,' Auguste told his second son in later years. 'I was not more than four when I left it and I've never seen it again.' But Limoges had its effect on him just the same. It was then, as now, famous for hand-decorated porcelain, and Auguste's first job was as an apprentice in the earthenware works in rue Vieille du Temple.

Auguste also sang in the choir at the church of St Eustache in Les Halles, where the composer Charles Gounod was organist and choirmaster. The boy had a very good singing voice, and legend has it that Gounod offered to train him as an opera singer after the 13-year-old got into the chorus at the opera. The world might have lost a great painter to the ephemeral art of the singer, had Auguste, who loved working with his hands, not chosen to continue his career in pottery and art.

He began to paint, and studied at the studio of Gleyre and at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. In October 1863, a 'Renouard' was placed

twenty-eighth out of 80 students in the winter semester examination. However, he soon rebelled against his teachers, who dismissed the realistic art of Courbet and Manet, meanwhile making friends with Alfred Sisley who worshipped Corot. Other friends who used to meet at the Closerie des Lilas in Montparnasse were Frédéric Bazille and Claude Monet. At the instigation of Monet, they would take their sketching-pads into the country. This *plein air* group, which later included Camille Pissarro and Paul Cézanne, often went to the forest of Fontainebleau. The small town of Barbizon in the forest had earlier attracted painters (Théodore Rousseau, Virgilio Diaz, Jean-François Millet, Jules Dupré), who became known as the Barbizon group, though their landscapes were not painted wholly or even mainly on the spot; they usually made a sketch out of doors then finished the canvas at their leisure in the studio or inn where they lodged. Monet condemned this, asserting that a painter must paint what he saw when he saw it, that the key to landscape painting was the depiction of life. It was Auguste's deep belief in the importance of painting in the open air from life that affected his film-director son who, as soon as he was able, moved out of the 'studio', taking his camera and microphones with him.

Auguste often stayed at the inn of Mère Anthony at Marlotte, a little way from Barbizon, because it was cheaper. There he painted *Le Cabaret de la Mère Anthony* in 1866, in which can be seen the painters Sisley and Jules Lecoquer, the innkeeper herself, the bearded Renoir rolling a cigarette, Nana the waitress, and Toto, a white poodle. Or, at least, that is how they are generally identified. A newspaper, prominently displayed on the table, is *L'Évènement*, the paper in which Zola had staunchly defended Manet from attack. Again retracing his father's footsteps, it was at Marlotte that Jean later made his home, and where he shot his first film, *La Fille de l'eau*, in which there are scenes in a café that recall *Le Cabaret de la Mère Anthony*.

Jean's mother began to make her first appearances in Auguste's paintings around 1880. The artist had met Aline Victorine Charigot when he was lunching at the *crémérie* opposite his 35 rue St Georges studio in Paris. She lived with her widowed mother and was 18 years his junior. Like her mother and Auguste's, she was a seamstress. She was born in Essoyes on 23 May 1859 and was the essence of the Renoir girl. She had the 'cat-like face' he loved, round with a small nose, large and slightly almond-shaped eyes, a creamy com-

plexion and a domesticated air. 'He liked women who had a tendency to grow fat, whereas men, he thought, should be lean,' wrote Jean. 'He liked small noses rather than large ones, and he made no secret of his preference for wide mouths, with full, but not thick lips; small teeth, fair complexions, and blonde hair.'<sup>2</sup>

Auguste put Aline into *Le Déjeuner des canotiers* (Luncheon Of The Boating Party) which showed friends on the balcony of the restaurant Fournaise, on an island in the Seine at Chatou, a little further upstream from La Grenouillère, which Renoir had painted in 1869. *Le Déjeuner* portrays a group of friends who have just finished lunch; on the tables are bottles of wine and dishes of fruit. The sun shines brightly on this carefree holiday scene. Jean's mother is the girl in the foreground in a yellow straw hat, arms on the table, hands propping up a little dog to which she is pouting a kiss. We can certainly see a resemblance to her celebrated film-director son. The delightful painting has all the atmosphere that Jean was to recapture in *Une Partie de campagne* (*A Day In the Country*), and on other excursions to *guingettes* such as in *Boudu sauvé des eaux* (*Boudu Saved From Drowning*) and *Les Bas-Fonds*.

It was not long before Auguste was painting Aline in the nude, mainly for a series of Bathers paintings, the first of these being executed in Italy. Aline remembered how, on their trip to Italy when she was 22 and still relatively slim, Auguste added folds of flesh onto her painted image, revealing the tendency he had to enlarge his female figures. This reflected his desire to move beyond his immediate experience of the model towards an ideal of female beauty as a vision of physical amplitude.

When Aline fell pregnant in 1884, the couple started to live together. She was an excellent hostess and cook, and invitations to the Renoirs were sought by painters and writers. It must be remembered that Essoyes is in Burgundy, always considered the gastronomical centre of France. At least, it is historically and geographically in Burgundy, but the vineyards are counted as belonging to Champagne. In later life when Jean visited the family home in Essoyes (officially in the French *département* of Aube), he would argue for hours over a glass of *marc* with his friend Félix Surriot, a small-time vintner, as to whether Essoyes ought to be in Champagne or Burgundy, with the epicurean Jean naturally favouring the latter. Such disputes may not mean much to Anglo-Saxons but they are a matter of – if not life and death – a certain import in a country where the people of a region are considered to be as

distinctive as its wines. The two districts had two different cultures, each boasting exceptional cuisine.

Jean and his younger brother Claude (always referred to as Coco) retained all their lives the barrel-like vocal timbre of the region, as rich and rolling as the soil of Essoyes. This was due not only to the influence of their mother, but to the fact that both were brought up by Gabrielle, who always spoke in the tones of a Burgundian peasant woman, even when she was married to the painter Conrad Slade and living in deepest California. The oldest son, Pierre, who spent less time in the area and more time in Paris than either of his brothers, had a deep, resonant voice, with all traces of regional accent ironed out by the Conservatoire and the stage.

As a Burgundian on his mother's side, Jean loved good food all his life and took pleasure in eating well. He always knew the best restaurants to visit wherever he was in the world. Stories of his appetite and epicureanism are bound to crop up in every conversation in which his friends reminisce about him. Leslie Caron remembered that 'he ate ravenously when he was younger'. During the play (*Orvet* which he wrote for her), he was gargantuan. He ate enormous quantities of food and would drink a litre of wine at dinner.<sup>3</sup> Once, after a casting session for *The River*, while dining with author Rumer Godden at the Café Royal in London, Jean 'let out a bellow that raised the roof' when the wine waiter brought a bottle of chilled Burgundy to the table.<sup>4</sup> Later, in India with Jean and his wife, Godden noted that 'as we drove out to Barrackpore, they spent the time in nostalgic talking about the food they especially loved and missed – particularly *tête de veau* – in all its ghoulish detail.'<sup>5</sup> The only dish Jean could cook himself in his house in Beverly Hills was a *gigot*. In fact, there exists a home movie of him cooking over his electric spit, filmed in the late 60s with a video camera given to him by some Japanese admirers.

Many of the dishes he liked were from simple peasant recipes; he had the idea that the working classes in France knew how best to cook. This belief derived from his memories of the furnace in the kitchen at Essoyes where the food was cooked very, very slowly. Jean lived in a house where his mother was mistress of the kitchen and where the quality of the food was high. Aline had a book full of recipes which she had written down, containing many culinary secrets. The cuisine *chez les Renoirs* was always extraordinary, even on Good Friday when Aline would prepare a *brandade de morue* – cod with a garlic, oil and cream sauce, a dish planned a week in advance.<sup>6</sup>

However, the rather ascetic Auguste was far less interested than his sons in the wonders that came from his wife's kitchen.

It was at their rented four-room apartment at 18 rue Houdon, just off the place Pigalle, that the Renoirs' first child was born on 21 March 1885. A few months later Auguste began work on the theme of Aline feeding the baby and, during the next year, produced two drawings and three oil paintings, all depicting the same pose, with the approximately six-month-old baby Pierre grasping his own foot. They were executed in part at Essoyes, which Renoir first visited that autumn. Octave Mirbeau, author of *The Diary Of A Chambermaid*, commented on *L'Enfant au sein* (The Child at the Breast): 'Admire his Woman with Child, which, in its originality, evokes the charm of the Primitives, the precision of the Japanese and the mastery of Ingres.'<sup>7</sup> Allowing for the extra flesh Auguste gave his models, Aline was no longer the young girl with the good figure in the early paintings. She was 26 but becoming increasingly matronly. Pierre would grow to look more like his father, while Jean was the image of Aline.

After a trip to Algeria, Auguste and Aline were married on 14 April 1890 at the Mairie of the ninth *arrondissement*, and were able to recognise five-year-old Pierre as their legitimate child. (The fact that his mother and father were married some time after Pierre's birth is completely and uncharacteristically ignored by Jean in both his book on his father and in his own memoirs, as well as in most biographies of the painter). After a honeymoon in Sicily, the couple settled at the St Georges studio. Auguste travelled a lot, often to the Midi, and also continually visited Berthe Morisot at Mézy, some miles downriver from what was known as the Renoir part of the Seine, as well as attending her soirées in Paris. She and her circle knew nothing of Aline until Auguste brought her and six-year-old Pierre to visit in the summer of 1891, a year after their marriage. After a subsequent visit from Auguste, Morisot wrote to Mallarmé: 'Renoir has just been with us for a few days, this time without his wife. I could never manage to convey to you my astonishment when I first saw that ungainly woman. I had imagined, I can't say why, that she would be like her husband's paintings. I shall introduce you to her this winter.'<sup>8</sup> Although Morisot instinctively reacted against the wives of the men who attracted her, she and her husband, Eugène Manet, Edouard Manet's brother, would dine with the Renoirs at the Château des

Brouillards later that year, where they would discover the merits of Aline as a hostess.

Gradually, Auguste began to stay *en famille* for longer periods, and with the birth of Jean, and the proximity of Gabrielle, he found two ideal models easily to hand.