

Cover essay

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Berthe Morisot (1841–1895) was a female member of the Impressionist movement, whose most famous painting, *The Cradle* of 1872 is now in the Louvre. The composition for Morisot's painting in part derives from fashion plate imagery in contemporary womens' magazines catering in the Parisian bourgeoisie, but more than this it is a meditation on motherhood and the passage of life. Morisot not only shows a young mother contemplating her newborn who is protected by a veil in a cradle; she draws analogies between mother and child through a series of compositional devices. Thus the mother's gesture of resting her cheek on her left hand and arm is echoed by the

positioning of the infant's right arm, and the transparent veil shielding the child in the bassinet has its counterpart in the curtain which forms a canopy above the young mother. The contemplative solemnity and pose of the mother recalls religious images of the penitent Mary Magdalene, who is frequently shown in a similar posture, meditating on her own mortality while holding a human skull (for instance in Georges de La Tour's famous *Magdalene with a Lamp* of 1636–38, also in the Louvre). Thus Morisot's painting is not only a celebration of motherhood, it is a somber reflection on a woman's life-journey from childhood, to motherhood, to old age.

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