

An exploration of the early photography of Jacques Henri Lartigue, who captured the exuberance of Belle-Époque France with prodigious talent during his childhood

Lartigue

The Boy and the Belle Époque

Louis Baring

150 illustrations

24.0 x 19.0cm

192pp

ISBN 978 0 500 021309

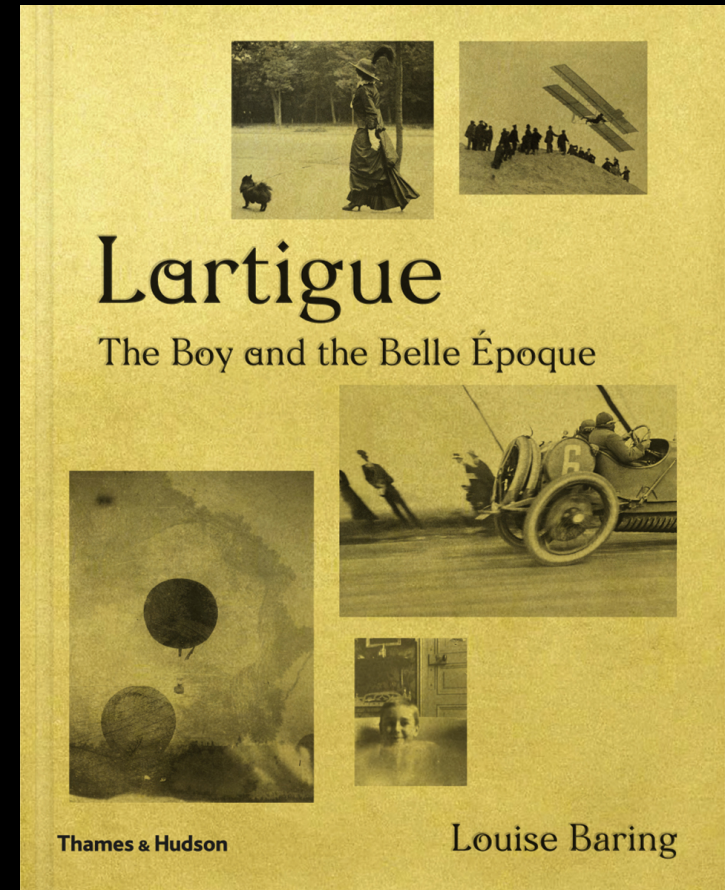
Hardback

£28.00

April 2020

A4

Book



Key Sales Points

- Jaques Henri Lartigue (1894–1986) is one of the 20th century's most celebrated photographers: the confidence and immediacy of his images, some published here for the first time, have universal appeal
- Focuses largely on the output of Lartigue's childhood adolescence
- The author has worked directly with the Lartigue estate
- Combines the intimacy of Lartigue's personal observations and memories, using excerpts from his boyhood diaries, with vivid cultural history to bring alive his early photographs and the world in which they were created

The human eye has, of course, much in common with a camera. Light bounces off the surface of an object into the eye, the pupil dilating or constricting in response to variations in light. The camera, in turn, has an aperture that must be adapted along with shutter speed to ensure perfect exposure. But, as Lartigue soon realized, the image the camera produces lasts far longer than memory. A couple of days later, he discovered his 'eye trap' did not work: he could no longer recall the images he captured. His father—a bearded, God-like figure in his eyes—came to the rescue: 'For many years now, Papa has done photography. Photography is a magical Thing. A thing that has mysterious odours, a little strange and frightening, something one quickly grows to love,' Lartigue recalled in a childlike voice in his memoirs, published in 1975.¹² 'Under the black veil, Papa lifts me up so that I can see the image that he is going to take: a marvellous little picture, with all the colours, dazzling, alive, but upside down. A small image, lovelier and clearer than the little bit of reality one sees. When I'm the one posing for Papa, I can't move at all while he counts: "One, two, three, it's done!" Each time, though, my eyes disobey and seek amusement by wandering.'

His retrospective account goes on to describe the mysteries of photographic development: 'Afterwards, in the darkroom, under a little red light, I watch Papa's hands as he puts the large green plate, now almost white, into the basin. We wait, and suddenly it starts: we see the image appear! Slowly, then much more quickly. The plate darkens, and one can no longer see anything. Papa rocks the basin continuously in order to agitate the liquid: this annoys me and keeps me from seeing very well. Finally, the plate is moved to the basin in the middle, then it is placed in the third basin. Papa says: "It's a success". And we wait in the dark, with nothing to do, unless we begin right away to develop another photograph.'

Recognizing the camera as the perfect tool to express himself, Jacques first persuaded his father to photograph whatever caught his imagination: 'Photograph this, and this, and this,' he ordered. Then, in late 1901 or 1902, Henri Lartigue gave the boy his own camera: a hefty polished wood 13 x 18 cm plate camera made by J. Audouin with no shutter, affixed to a tripod. Lengthy exposure was made by lifting and replacing the lens cap by hand. Henri's often-reproduced photograph of Jacques in the Bois de Boulogne from 1903 shows the nine-year-old clutching a Jumelle hand-held box camera with 9 x 12 cm glass plates, his mother and maternal grandmother in tow

Jacques Lartigue with his mother and his grandmother (Eugénie Haguët), Bois de Boulogne, 1903. Photo: Henri Lartigue.



(above). His impish yet curiously adult face is recognizable even in a documentary made eighty years later, his deft hands demonstrating how to use a folding Gaumont Block-Notes camera his father gave him in 1904.

Lartigue's first photograph (developed by his father), which Marie Lartigue pasted into a lined black notebook she entitled *Photographies Diverses 1894-1903*, shows a posed family portrait at Pont-de-l'Arche in the summer of 1902 (p. 22). Though Henri and Marie Lartigue enjoyed the pleasures of the rich, they showed scant interest in the beau-monde. Jacques grew up amid a swarm of aunts, uncles and cousins, many of whom appear in his photographs, including his maternal grandmother, Eugénie Haguët, a short bundle of a woman who covered the page in alarm when he showed her a photograph of herself. His mother had three brothers, two of whom

tilting a photographic print to steepen the horizon line for dramatic effect in a cycling image, for example, or using a double-exposure technique to create a 'spirit' photograph, like his image of a semi-transparent, ghost-like Zissou draped in a bedsheet as he closes in on a reclining boy, whose arms are outstretched in horror. More important were 'instantanés', stop-action photographs that captured a world of people and objects in motion, spurred by Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey's scientific investigations into the nature of movement in the 1870s and '80s. In an early photograph shot with his Brownie No. 2, Lartigue catches the moment his nanny throws a ball up into the air, and another with his cat Zizi springing up to catch a ball in the garden (below), and family friend Georges Bourard leaping over a cross-leg table perched on the front lawn at Pont-de-l'Arche in 1905 (opposite). The collaboration between father and son was undeniably close.

Dudu and Zizi in the garden at 40 rue Cortambert, 1904 (album page).



Indeed, Lartigue was happy to appropriate the odd Henri Lartigue photograph as his own. Martine d'Astier, former director of the Donation Jacques Henri Lartigue, has identified an image of Zissou leaping up at an angle, his beach ball suspended in mid-air, as one example. The full negative reveals crop lines excising the diminutive Jacques on the left, thus only his father could have taken the photograph.

The young Lartigue's ever-active imagination injected magic into his surroundings, without which he found mundane life in consequential, even suffocating. Rarely without one of his cameras, he documented everything he enjoyed most: 'Every lovely, curious, strange or interesting thing gives me such pleasure that I am mad with joy! Even more so, since I can preserve so much, thanks to photography!'¹⁵ Other children took photographs, particularly with the introduction of the simple, inexpensive, roll-film Kodak Brownie in 1900 that eliminated the task of developing and printing negatives, but none with the same drive or excitement in the creative process.



Georges Bourard, Pont-de-l'Arche, Normandy, 1905.



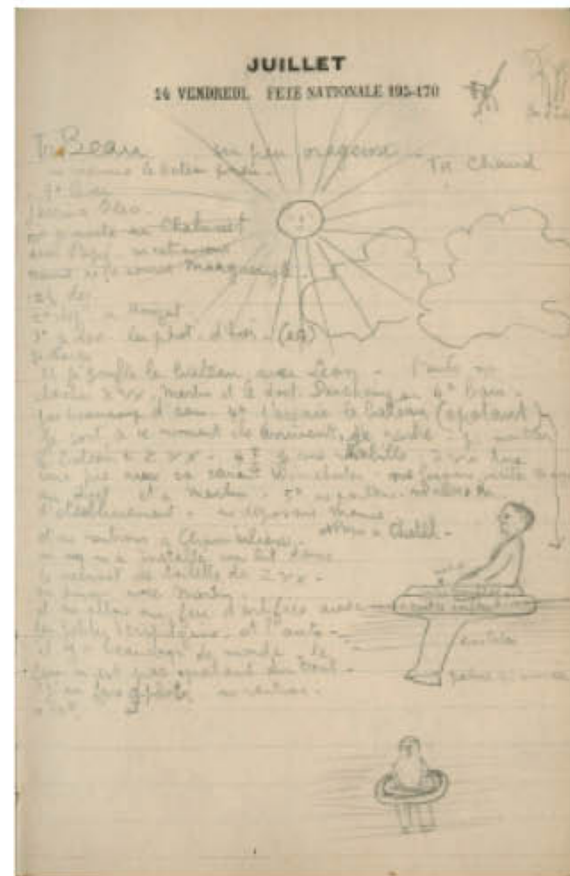
Louis Ferrand (Loulo), Larrigue's cousin Raymond van Weers (Oléo) and Zissou, Rouzat, 1910.



Simone Roussel, Rouzat, 1913.



Zissou in the pool at Rouzat, 1911.



Page from Larrigue's diary, 14 July 1911.



Allée des Acacias, Bois de Boulogne, 1911.

Chapter Five The Beauty of Speed

'Yesterday, an aeroplane flew above me,' wrote Lartigue. 'Right above me! From below, I saw the real live man, sitting on his seat, legs apart... And suddenly something mysterious came into my head... as though I had vertigo upside down! It was as though I'd seen this man go by with eyes other than mine; perhaps his? I watched him go off into the distance, still in the air.... One sometimes experiences unique emotions that one chases after but can never bring back.... I wonder what one should call the "opposite of fear", that "joyful fear" that suddenly entered my head.'¹

An aeroplane craze swept France in 1908. In August of that year, Wilbur Wright took off in his engine-powered flying machine at Le Mans race-course. Though the public demonstration lasted only one minute and forty-five seconds, Wright's ability to perform banking turns and fly a circle silenced sceptics. The euphoric Jacques began photographing model aeroplanes on the floor or on bare ground in the park. As already seen, Zissou also started building his own designs, Jacques documenting each stage, from model to test flight. Even the sports magazine *La Vie au Grand Air* published an article entitled 'How to Construct an Aeroplane', complete with diagrams. In December that year, the Grand Palais held the first Salon de l'Aéronautique (p. 132, above). Louis Blériot then made the first flight across the English Channel in his own plane, the Blériot XI, on 25 July 1909. Flushed with success, the engineer inventor moved his company, Blériot Aéronautique, to Buc, near Versailles, where he set up a private airport and flying school. It was at Buc that Lartigue took his photograph of Zissou at a diagonal, caught in the blast of Italian aviator Stefano Amerigo's propeller (p. 131), capturing a magic the photographer described seventy years later: 'What was marvelous was the air, the wind, the cold, the noise of the propellers – all gave you an extraordinary feeling.'²

Lartigue caught a glimpse of Wilbur Wright at Pau, near the Pyrenees, where the latter continued his flight demonstrations in early 1909: 'Wilbur,

Gabriel Voisin's first
flight, Merlimont,
Pas-de-Calais, 1904.



my famous Wilbur! I recognize him very well.... I approach him, my little Gaumont Block-Notes hidden in my hand.... I take a photo from afar.... I come closer.... Wilbur looks at me, then suddenly turns his back!... Perhaps he's furious, but the photo has been taken. This consoles me a little for the bad weather that prevents us from being able to see him fly.³

An aerodrome at Issy-les-Moulineaux, just outside Paris, meanwhile, became the site of countless flight experiments. Aviation pioneers like Blériot (p. 133, above), Henry Farman (p. 134, above), René Simon (p. 139) and the Brazilian-born Alberto Santos-Dumont (p. 132, below; his obsession with flight extended to suspending his dining-room table and chairs in the air, obliging dinner guests to climb a stepladder to reach their seats) built their own hangars. In one photograph, a solitary young couple out for a stroll with their baby in a pram are interrupted by a Blériot aeroplane hovering nearby, another like a giant bird in the sky above.



Zisou, Buc airfield,
Ile-de-France, 1911.

An exploration of the early photography of Jacques Henri Lartigue, who captured the exuberance of Belle-Époque France with prodigious talent during his childhood

Lartigue

The Boy and the Belle Époque

Louis Baring

150 illustrations

24.0 x 19.0cm

192pp

ISBN 978 0 500 021309

Hardback

£28.00

April 2020

A4

Book

