



## The Triumph of Impressionism

### I. Beginnings – Childhood, Youth and Education

1842–1864

#### Origins and Birth

Towards the end of the 18th century, one Léon Pascal Monet lived in Paris with his wife, Catherine Chaumerat; he had been born in Avignon in 1766. The family of his father, Claude Monet, is thought to have had its roots in the Dauphiné; Catherine, born in Lyon in 1772, was the widow of Isidore Gaillard.

Shortly after the Monets moved to Paris, their son Claude Adolphe, was born, on 3 February 1800. After a rather eventful childhood during which he was enrolled on the books of the merchant navy at Le Havre as an apprentice ordinary seaman, Adolphe returned to Paris. He was living at 7 Rue d'Enghien on 20 May 1835, when he married Louise-Justine Aubrée. She was the daughter of François-Léonard Aubrée and Marie-Françoise Toffard (or Toffart); born 31 July 1805 in Paris, she was thirty years old when she married, having lost her husband a little more than a year previously. Her late husband, Emmanuel Cleridus Despaux, had been a man of means; many years were to pass before she enjoyed a similar standard of living in her second marriage.

By 1836, when their first son, Léon Pascal was born, the Monet-Aubrécés had moved from the Rue d'Enghien to 39 Rue Caumartin. They moved again to 45 Rue Laffitte, where they occupied a small set of rooms just south of the hill of Montmartre, in the last house before the church of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette. There, on 14 November 1845, Louise-Justine gave birth to a second son, Oscar-Claude; his parents called him Oscar but he was to become famous as Claude Monet.

One striking fact about Monet's origins is that both sides of his family had converged on Paris, where his four grandparents settled around 1800, forty years before he was born; his father and mother were both born in Paris. Claude Monet, therefore, could lay claim to being of genuine Parisian stock, a distinction later generations rarely enjoyed.

#### The Move to Le Havre

Oscar-Claude was baptised on 20 May 1847 at Notre-Dame-de-Lorette. From the parish register we learn that his godfather, Claude-Pascal Monet, had come specially from Nancy, where he was a merchant; he was accompanied by his wife Antoinette-Reine Freson, Oscar-Claude's godmother.

Oscar-Claude's mother was musical, her singing was part of the background of his childhood. His father's occupation remains obscure but was of a business nature. In official documents he is described as a shop keeper, but this was a very common description at the time and conveys little.

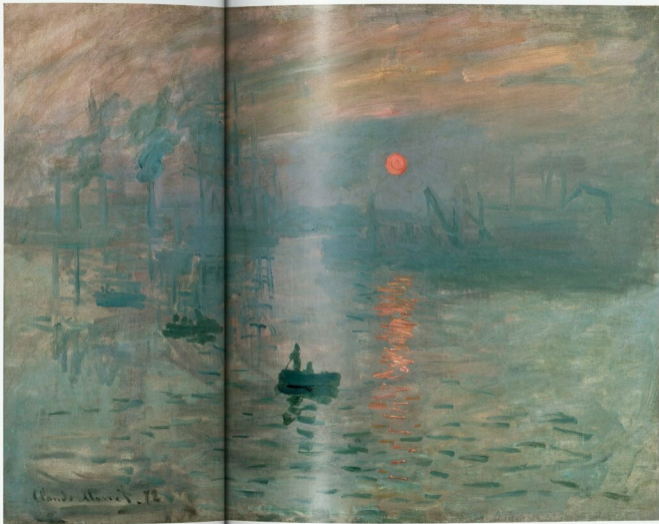
He seems, at all events, not to have prospered. He left Paris for Le Havre at an unknown date, probably around 1845, and the whole family moved with him, including his grandparents, the Monet-Chaumerats. Le Havre was chosen because Marie-Jeanne Gaillard, a half-sister of Adolphe Monet from Catherine Chaumat's first marriage, was living there. She was married to Jacques Lecadre, a "wholesale grocer

PAGE 2  
Self-Portrait with a Beret, 1886  
Autoportrait de Claude Monet  
coiffé d'un beret  
96 × 46 cm  
Private collection

PAGE 4  
The Walk, Woman with a Parasol  
(detail), 1875  
La Promenade, la femme à l'ombrelle  
120 × 81 cm  
Collection of Mr and Mrs Paul Mellon,  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Women in the Garden, 1866  
Femmes au jardin  
216 × 208 cm  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Impression, Sunrise, oil  
Impression, soleil levant  
45 x 63 cm  
Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris



As Monet was still unhappy at Poissy – to the point of thinking of cancelling his lease – and as a planned trip to visit his brother Léon in Rouen had fallen through, Monet made a further trip to Pourville in early June to rent a house where the family could spend the summer. This was the Villa Juliette in Pourville, not far from the bridge over the Scie. This time, Monet returned thrilled with the Normandy coast: “The country is wonderful at the moment and I can’t wait to get back.” He took the time to deliver eight pictures to Durand-Ruel on 9 June, restock his wallet, interrogate Georges Petit, whom he suspected of selling at too low a price, and then, as soon as the children’s exams were over, on 17 June 1882, it was time to leave for a working holiday in Pourville.

#### From Euphoria to Despair

His family’s presence and the certainty that he had the whole summer free for painting imparted a euphoria which, in the early days of this second stay in Pourville, overflowed even into his correspondence with Durand-Ruel. Monet was proud to show Alice his new domain and the subjects that he loved. These included the nets on the beach in which the fishermen brought in the fish at low tide to the joy of the children. The eldest boys were thrilled to make an expedition with Monet in the life-guard’s boat, and Blanche Hoschedé was pleased at the chance to paint outdoors for the first time.

Monet himself set to work with immense energy. He went even farther afield than before. He went to the top of the Falaise d’Amont (ill. p. 227) on the Dieppe side, climbed the Cavée (or Côte) path, and walked the length of the Falaise d’Aval as far as Varengeville church (ill. p. 228). He stopped off en route at the custom’s officer’s cottage in the Petit Ailly gorge, which he painted from every angle (ill. p. 225). He was also attracted by pines and isolated trees standing on the high ground by the sea. The Scie was rather neglected. On the other hand, he often set up his easel at the foot of the cliff, which he reached either directly along the Pourville beach, or via the Petit Ailly path, or the steep way down through the Moutiers gorge. He normally painted the cliffs looking west, though there are a few views to the east. From the Pourville beach he painted both wavescapes and boats out at sea as well as the very typical image of fishermen’s nets (ill. p. 228).

The Pourville-Varengeville paintings exude an impression of creative joy that is rather destroyed by Monet’s correspondence, at least after his first enthusiasm had faded. In the summer of 1882, the weather on the Normandy coast was poor, and Monet awaited bright spells with impatience. July was typical of this bad weather, and the arrival of Durand-Ruel, probably for the national holiday, brought a pleasant diversion, though a visit from a local bailiff caused understandable alarm. There was the second such visit in August. A few days of bright sun in mid-September improved Monet’s morale, but the thought of the bills that would have to be paid before leaving was beginning to depress him. And there was also the children’s new school year to think about. Rain settled in again. Monet was disheartened; the number of studies that he had begun was “crazy,” yet none of them had been finished, or at least, none was satisfactory. He scratched over and even slit several paintings, including a large picture of flowers. On 18 September, Monet’s despair was complete; he spoke of “giving it all up now” and reimbursing Durand-Ruel’s advances with pictures that had remained at Poissy.

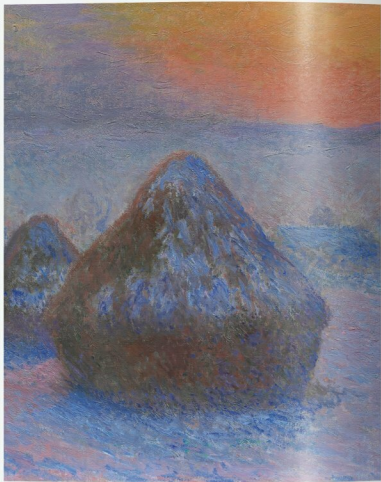
Fortunately, Durand-Ruel was aware of these problems, and immediately put 1,500 francs into the post with a letter of encouragement. The weather was again fine, but Monet was so dismayed that he shut himself up for “a whole week” with his



Claude Monet during the Vithœuil period

Monet’s Garden at Vithœuil, 1881  
*Le Jardin de Monet à Vithœuil*  
 197 x 342 cm  
 National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.





**Grainstacks, White Frost Effect, 1890-1891**  
*Meules, effet de gelée blanche*  
 65 x 91 cm  
 National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

devotes took every occasion to insult the unconverted. And in New York, according to the report of Theodore Robinson, a loyal supporter, there was increasing interest in his work from "people of taste".

Once he had recovered from the trauma of his exhausting Rouen "campaign", Monet began to show his first Cathedrals to visitors; for the time being, he was determined not to part with a single one. Initially held back by his accumulated fatigue, work on them was then further delayed by family events that were to take up a part of the spring and summer. Suzanne's meeting with the painter Theodore Butler produced a very strong reaction in Monet, and his counsels of prudence went beyond even what Alice's bourgeois conventions required.

Indeed, she stood accused of not keeping a weather eye on her children. Monet wrote from Rouen: "I can't think of anything else; the more I think about it, the more worrying and grievous I find it... You have the duty, after what has happened, to refuse your daughter to an American, unless he is known to us through connections or an introduction, but not just met on the road... If she is madly in love, if it is a passion, let her see how inappropriate it is after inquiring; if, as must surely be the case, it is no unconquerable passion, put an end to all hope." It is when he goes on to threaten to throw everything over - "whether or not you follow my advice, I can no longer remain at Giverny" - that we perceive how difficult it was for Monet to resign himself to the fact that his priciest model was soon to be his no more.

**Grainstacks at Sunset, Snow Effect, 1890-1891**  
*Meules, effet de neige, soleil couchant*  
 65 x 100 cm  
 Potter Palmer Collection,  
 The Art Institute of Chicago



Rouen, the façade of the cathedral, 1900

The Portal, Harmony in Rouen, 1902  
*Le Portail en de face, harmonie divine*  
 107 × 79 cm  
 Musée d'Orsay, Paris

circles, the fluctuating position of certain academic artists and the obscurity of others; it occupied the headlines for several years to come.

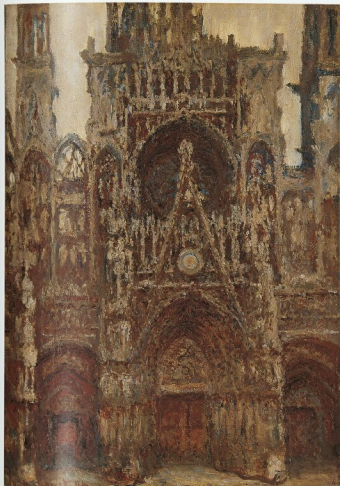
During the early months of 1894, Monet himself was concerned mainly with preparing the exhibition of the Cathedral series; throughout February he was working at this without "managing as well as [he] would have liked". A month later, with the problem of the exhibition still unresolved, he returned to painting in the open air, taking on several motifs at once. After an interruption in mid-April caused by poor weather, "the new leaves" forced him to "start... several spring pictures again", he set about it with a passion.

On first hearing about the forthcoming Duret sale, Monet condemned it as "base speculation". It took place on 19 March at Georges Perie's gallery, and offers us an interesting insight into prices. For the six paintings sold, of which the most recent, a *Wêlweid Steer from Lanacoart* was knocked down for 7,900 francs, the prices varied between 4,650 francs for a *Hut at Sainte-Adresse* and 12,000 francs for *Turkeys* (ill. p. 149), which suggests an appreciable rise. In fact the last two were bought in by Théodore Duret and three others went to Durand-Ruel, so that only one found a previously unknown owner in the shape of Edmond Simon.

Monet had expected the Duret sale to be a complete fiasco, and had eyes only for the favourable impact on his prices. He therefore felt entitled to be very demanding in relation to the Cathedral paintings. Paul Durand-Ruel visited him on Sunday, 29 April, and was alarmed at the scale of Monet's demands; he wanted 15,000 francs for each picture. Durand-Ruel took advantage of the presence of a third party to avoid further discussion of the matter. "If we had been able to have a talk... we would have come to a better understanding, I feel sure", Monet wrote, and immediately after the dealer's departure began a letter-writing propaganda campaign intended to bring Durand-Ruel round. Monet was not excessively scrupulous in his methods, which included a kind of blackmail. Thus he announced that a visit from Valadon was imminent; moreover he was sending out letters to "persons who have expressed the desire to have Cathedral pictures", and they might well select the ones that Durand-Ruel liked best. In a retaliatory gesture, the exhibition for which Durand-Ruel had already reserved the gallery was postponed to the following year. Then, fearing that he had thrown away a means of pressurising Durand-Ruel, he changed his mind and suggested that October or November were possible dates. At the same time, he announced a major concession: the paintings deemed most significant would be provisionally excluded from the negotiations, allowing the others to be sold at higher prices.

Paul Durand-Ruel, unaffected by this last offer, was determined to make matters clear. Monet's paintings were selling badly when they were marked up from the excessively high purchase prices that he was asking. Several collectors had decided to make the most of the added value of their Monets by selling them, and when he could not prevent this, Durand-Ruel was forced to "push [prices] up [himself] or see them fall". "The most enthusiastic buyer... Potter Palmer", had sold several works and was thinking of selling others. In conclusion: "Don't listen to the platonic admirers who never buy, trust to the experience of a true friend like myself, who has always espoused your cause with conviction and impartiality."

One of the most representative of the "platonic admirers" was Gustave Geffroy, who had just published the third series of *La Vie Artistique*, which he dedicated to Claude Monet. This series began with a *Histoire de l'Impressionnisme*, in which the chapter on Monet was by far the longest. In Gustave Geffroy's hands, the work of informing the public was beginning to resemble a publicity campaign.





Houses of Parliament, Sunset, 1902  
*Le Parlement, soleil couchant*  
 81 x 92 cm  
 Private collection

day Claude Monet first looked at a water-lily, the lilies of the Île-de-France have grown more proud and more beautiful."

**"This is not a country where you can finish a picture"**

The last days of 1900 were busy ones, despite an eye accident that forced Monet to interrupt his work for a while. Lucien Guitry promised to come to Giverny with Anatole France. There was a brief, but intense, quarrel with Paul Durand-Ruel over the sale of three canvases to Paul Rosenberg for the sum of 25,000 francs. Monet's relationship with the brothers Gaston and Joseph Bernheim-Jeune continued to develop, and he purchased a Panhard car. By the close of the year, he had recorded an income of 233,000 francs. The difficulties involved in mounting an exhibition of the water-lily series were made clear to Octave Maus, a spokesman for Impressionism in Brussels, in early January. Monet, meanwhile, was preparing for another trip to England. He set off on Wednesday, 23 January, and arrived in London the following evening.



Houses of Parliament,  
 Stormy Sky, 1904  
*Le Parlement, ciel orageux*  
 81 x 92 cm  
 Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille

Durand-Ruel had organised an Impressionist show at the Hanover Gallery, and Monet visited it on 21 January with John Singer Sargent. There the two painters saw pictures by Renoir, Stieglitz, Pissarro and Monet himself. He was disappointed by the exhibition: "Just as I thought, the effect is pathetic. What a terrible way to try and get us known in this country." While he waited for the crates to arrive with the pictures he wanted to rework or finish "in situ", he tried his hand at pastels. This pleasurable exercise produced a mine of information on which he could draw for the paintings. Finally the crates were delivered, and Monet got to work. At first, he painted only from his window at the Savoy, where on 3 February he was working on four different canvases. The next day, he returned to his old haunt at St Thomas' Hospital. Henceforth, he followed the same timetable as he had the previous winter, spending his mornings at the hotel, and his afternoons at the hospital. However, he now limited himself to a single motif in the mornings, which to begin with was Waterloo Bridge. He was soon working simultaneously on ten or more different