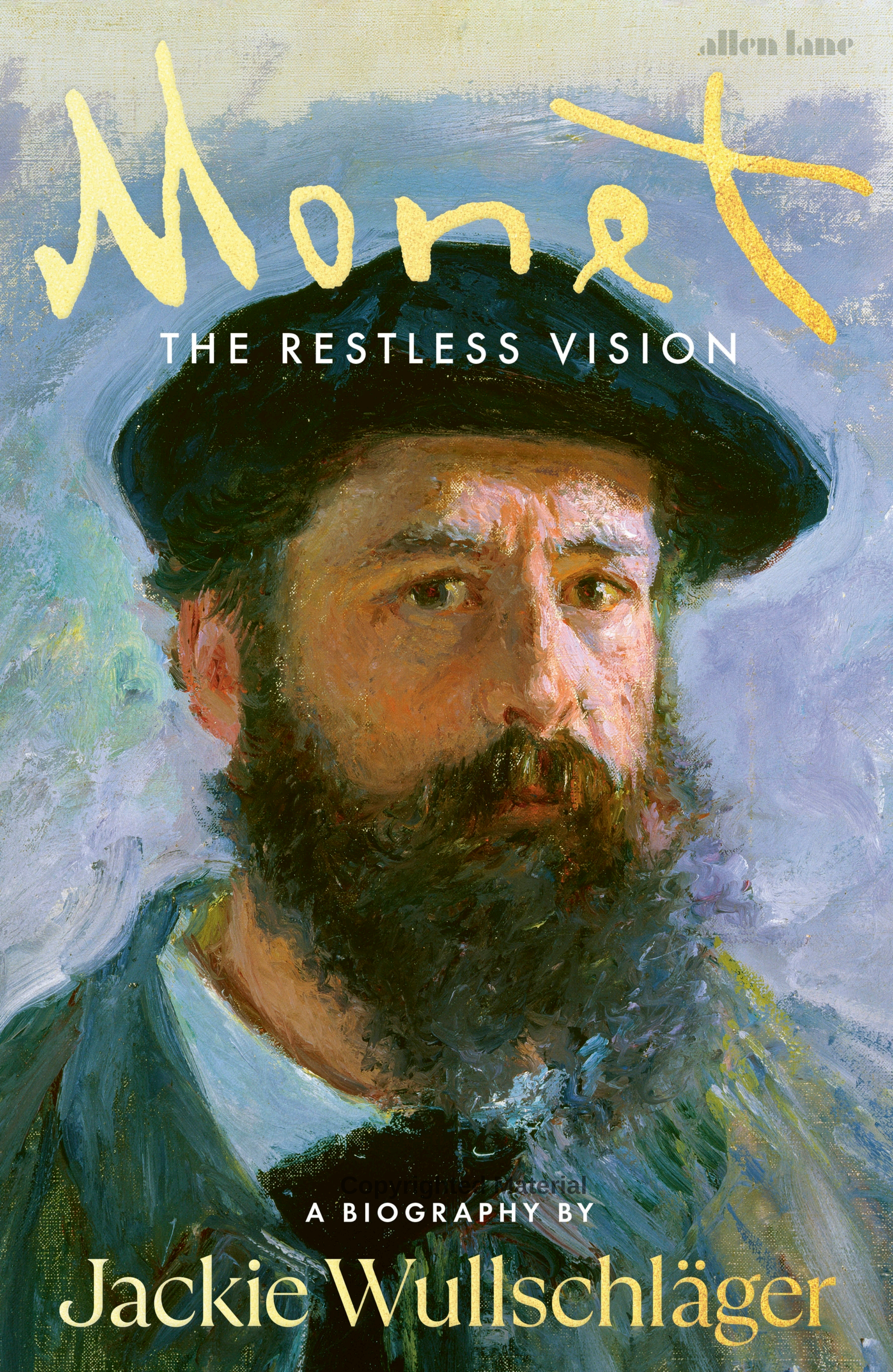
allen lane



Monet

THE RESTLESS VISION

A BIOGRAPHY BY

Jackie Wullschläger

Monet

JACKIE WULLSCHLÄGER

Monet

The Restless Vision

ALLEN LANE
an imprint of
PENGUIN BOOKS

ALLEN LANE

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Allen Lane is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

Penguin
Random House
UK

First published in Great Britain by Allen Lane 2023
001

Copyright © Jackie Wullschläger, 2023

The moral right of the author has been asserted

Set in 10.5/14pt Sabon LT Std
Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–241–18830–9

www.greenpenguin.co.uk

MIX
Paper | Supporting
responsible forestry
FSC® C018179
FSC
www.fsc.org

Penguin Random House is committed to a
sustainable future for our business, our readers
and our planet. This book is made from Forest
Stewardship Council® certified paper.

For William

Contents

Introduction and Acknowledgements ix
Prologue: 'The Throb of One Happy Moment' xv

PART ONE

Voyaging Out

1 The City and the Sea, 1840–57 3
2 Trembling Laughter, 1857–9 22
3 Oscar in Paris and Algiers, 1859–62 38
4 Bazille, 1862–5 63
5 Camille, 1865–7 87
6 'Painter on the Run', 1867–9 111
7 La Grenouillère, 1869–70 126
8 The Bridge to Argenteuil, 1871–3 140
9 'This School of the Future', 1873–6 155
10 *À Montgeron, chez Monsieur Hoschedé*, 1876–8 170
11 Pastoral, 1878–9 193
12 Alice, 1879–81 212

PART TWO

Eyes Turned Inward

13 The Path to Giverny, 1882–3 235
14 Home and Abroad, 1884–6 251
15 Betrayal and Loyalty, 1886 269
16 *Les Demoiselles de Giverny*, 1887–91 283
17 'Now You Have Happiness', 1891–2 307

18 Revolution in the Cathedral, 1892–7 324
19 Retreat to the Garden, 1897–9 336
20 Unreal City, 1899–1903 350
21 The Moment of Roses, 1904–8 365
22 Death in Venice, 1908–14 380
23 Blue Angel, 1914–20 399
24 ‘Midnight in Full Sunshine’, 1920–26 421
Epilogue: ‘The Magic Mirror’ 441

Notes 447
Select Bibliography 487
List of Illustrations 493
Index 505

Introduction and Acknowledgements

Like many people who love Monet's paintings, I hardly remember a time when they were not part of my visual imagination. But I recall very clearly the moment I started thinking about the relationship between his life and work: it was in Paris in 2016, at the Fondation Louis Vuitton's exhibition *Icons of Modern Art: The Shchukin Collection*. Loaned from Moscow, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* [Plate 3], the large oil sketch of 1865 for a yet larger, never completed picture of eleven picnickers in a forest, stopped me in my tracks. Its context at the exhibition was unusual: Sergei Shchukin collected predominantly Matisse and Picasso. In their company, *Déjeuner*, spectacular and odd, held its own as aggressively modern. In 21st century Paris it looked as alive as if it had been painted yesterday: the dramatic action of light beating through trees, the strange artificial tableau of figures around the chicken and wine picnic. All the women were modelled by Monet's 18-year-old girlfriend, holding five different poses, her expression a curious mix of warmth and neutrality. I wondered who she was, this teenager offering an outstretched arm to welcome the viewer into the scene, pulling us into the feast of Monet's painting. In appreciation, Monet carved a heart with an arrow into the bark of the oak tree in the foreground – his signature as a lover.

Monet the lover was to me an unfamiliar figure, refreshingly unlike the white-bearded sage serene by his pond, gazing out from the famous late photographs. *Déjeuner* made me want to know more about his character, life, the people in it, how they determined his art, and about the social currents informing his thinking – the triumph of French secular culture in an era marked by wars, political unrest, concern about man's relationship with nature, and changing roles for women.

Although he has been exceptionally well served by art historians, I could find little about Monet's interior life. Daniel Wildenstein's catalogue raisonné includes a documentary account, which I read initially in the one-volume English version. Then I discovered the magnificent five-volume French edition of the catalogue raisonné, published by the Wildenstein Institute between 1974 and 1991, which includes, collected at the end of each volume, some three thousand letters by Monet. Very few have ever been translated into English. I set out to write a full personal biography based on this rich untapped source. My approach stems from the belief that painters transform the raw material of experience into art; that, as the artist Sean Scully once said to me, 'painting will always reflect your nature without mercy', and that understanding something of this creative process enhances our enjoyment of looking at pictures.

Wildenstein's work is foundational for all Monet studies, and I am immeasurably indebted to him and to the generations of outstanding scholars, above all Meyer Schapiro, John Rewald and Charles Stuckey, who have defined the history of Impressionism. I have also benefited from studying material which has surfaced since the catalogue raisonné was completed, in the Cornebois collection of letters to Monet sold by Artcurial auctions in 2006, and in unpublished documents in private French archives. I am deeply appreciative of all those who granted me access, beginning with the leading Monet scholar Marianne Matthieu, head curator until 2022 of the Musée Marmottan Monet. She guided me through the archives there and inspired me throughout by her erudition and acuity. I am exceptionally grateful for her unstinting generosity and energy in sharing her knowledge and wisdom. I would also like to thank Aurélie Gavoille and Manon Paineau at the museum, and director Érik Desmazières. At the Fondation Custodia, the late Ger Luijten warmly hosted me, and I thank Mariska de Jonge and Marie-Claire Nathan for helping find material, and art historian Jean-Paul Bouillon for answering questions about Manet's letters held there. Flavie Durand-Ruel and Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel made my visit to the Archives Durand-Ruel, headquarters of Monet's dealer, pleasurable and profitable. Hugues Gall, president of the Fondation Claude Monet, was the perfect guide to Monet's house, garden and more in Giverny.

As Monet left no direct descendants, surviving family documents are in the hands of his step-children's heirs. The late Claire Joyes, widow of Jean-Marie Toulgouat, Monet's step-great-grandson, welcomed me to her home on rue Colombier in Giverny, invited me to examine letters and photographs, and gave me the benefit of her vivid grasp of Monet family identity. My friends Francis and Christine Kyle kindly introduced me to Claire. I am also grateful to art historian Philippe Piguet, another Monet step-great-grandson, for showing me further material, for his help with photographs and for his illuminating observations.

I am much indebted to the staff of the British Library, especially for tracking down obscure French volumes, and to the expertise of curators of recent exhibitions. Over many years I have appreciated stimulating conversations with Ann Dumas; her *Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse* at the Royal Academy was the exhibition which stayed most in my memory while writing. Anne Baldessari kindly gave me a tour of *Icons of Modern Art* at the Fondation Vuitton, and Roya Nasser hosted my return there to see *Monet – Mitchell*. I learnt more about *Women in the Garden* from its restoration at the Musée d'Orsay in 2022 under the guidance of director Sylvie Patry. Her show on Berthe Morisot in 2019, and that at Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2023, curated by Lois Oliver, cast light on one of Monet's important friendships. Cécile Debray widened my thinking with *The Water Lilies: American Abstract Painting and the Last Monet* at the Musée de l'Orangerie, and I enjoyed Richard Thomson's *Monet and Architecture* at the National Gallery. My understanding of Monet's admiration and support of Cézanne was strengthened by the Cézanne exhibition, which arrived in autumn 2022 at Tate Modern from Chicago, curated by a team led by Gloria Groom and Natalia Sidlina, and by the landmark study appearing at the same time, *If These Apples Should Fall* by T. J. Clark, from whose books I have been gratefully learning since the 1980s.

At Penguin, my huge thanks to Stuart Proffitt, peerless editor, for commissioning the book, allaying my anxieties, and vastly improving the manuscript by his fine judgement and knowledge. Everyone at Penguin made the book far better. Alice Skinner was an astute editor of the second draft and I greatly appreciate her lively engagement with the text and her help smoothing the book's production. I was extremely fortunate to work with Claire Peligry, eagle-eyed, sensitive copy-editor supreme, whose command of French history and language helped at every turn, and Cecilia Mackay, queen of picture researchers, who brought her flair and expertise to bear on the text too; each meeting with her sparked fresh thoughts. My warmest thanks for their time, patience and good humour extends also to Anna Wilson, who supervised the copy-editing, Matt Young for his imaginative cover design, publicity manager Matthew Hutchinson, Fonie Mitsopoulou, stepping in to help at the last minute, and Francisca Monteiro. I am grateful to my editor in New York, Shelley Wanger, for additional careful editing, fruitful questions and for her enthusiasm. Remaining mistakes are of course my fault.

I thank my agent Carol Heaton for her commitment to the project; as ever she was a rock, giving me confidence, encouragement and easing many paths. At the *Financial Times*, Jan Dalley was crucial: for her advice as a writer and her intellectual discernment, for allowing me to balance my efforts between journalism and biography, for her kindness as a friend. I would also like to thank Raphael Abraham and Josh Spero at the *Financial Times*. As a critic covering contemporary art on a daily newspaper, I have also benefited from conversations about painting and about Monet with Frank Auerbach, David Hockney, Bridget Riley, the late Howard Hodgkin and the late Leon Kossoff and from the understanding and help of Erica Bolton, Kate Burvill and Dennis Chang.

While I was working on *Monet*, five of my oldest friends were also engrossed in writing long books: Elizabeth McKellar in Oxford, Deborah Steiner and Alastair Macaulay in New York, Peter Higgins in Cardiff, and Michael Kerrigan in Edinburgh were the best of fellow travellers, sharing ideas and troubles, unfailingly supportive and sympathetic. In London, with me every step of the way were Aline de Bièvre, Louise Gale and Andy Stern, friends who have come to feel like family.

My children Naomi, Zoë and Raphael contributed more to the book than they could imagine, by their interest, fresh perspectives, willingness to challenge my opinions, affectionate moral support, practical help, and by the happiness they and their partners Michael, Thomas and Evelina always bring.

This book is dedicated to my beloved husband William Cannell. For nearly four decades, he has shaped my endeavours, encouraging me by his expansive vision and integrity to think more broadly and deeply than I would have otherwise dared. I rely on his comments on every page, and our looking at and talking about painting together is a consistent joy. I no longer know the boundary between his and my thoughts, but I do know that without his love and conviction I wouldn't write at all. To express my love and thanks, I fall back as before on Dante: *l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*.

Prologue: 'The Throb of One Happy Moment'

During the overcast summer of 1879, in the riverside village of Vétheuil halfway between Paris and Rouen, a restless painter paced his garden, waiting for an hour's sunshine. When the cloud lifted, he slipped through his gate bordering the Seine, made rapid sketches of the water and the reflections of its grassy islets, and returned home fast to be at his sick wife's bedside. Camille 'had been, and still was, very dear to me', Monet said,[1] but he was falling in love with someone else. Alice, hot-tempered, highly strung and married to one of Monet's collectors, was close by. Bankruptcy had lost this once gilded couple their paintings, their Paris apartment and their country chateau, and they were sharing the Monets' cramped terraced house. While devotedly nursing Camille, Alice became fascinated by Monet.

Camille died on 5 September and Alice described her last day. 'The poor woman suffered horribly, it was a long and terrible agony, and she remained conscious until the last minute. It was heartbreaking to see her say her sad goodbyes to her children.'[2] Alice did not allow herself to relate what happened next. Monet seized a canvas and sketched his dead wife. 'I found my eyes fixed on the tragic countenance, mechanically trying to seek the sequence, the degradation of the colours that death had just imposed on the motionless face. Shades of blue, yellow, grey, and I don't know what . . . My automatic instinct was first to tremble at the shock of the colour.'[3]

But *Camille Monet on her Deathbed* [Plate 25] is about far more than the play of colours: the quick, coarse bluish-violet-white marks veiling the pallid face unfold Monet's blizzard of grief. A torrent of slashing horizontal strokes rushes along the lower part of the canvas, as if submerging and carrying away the body. It is a portrait of Camille disappearing.

Monet had made his reputation painting Camille. She features in fifty pictures, strolling in gardens, relaxing on a river embankment, windswept on the beach – images for ever connecting Impressionism with everyday happiness. But after her death, he hardly depicted a figure again. In a winter that came early in 1879, he went back to the Seine and, a hot-water bottle in each pocket to warm his hands, stood on its now frozen surface, painting frost, ice floes, snow-covered fields lit by a pale sun: nature transformed, on a gigantic scale, into a shroud of mourning. Monet was thirty-nine, almost halfway through his life, and at its turning point.

In Vétheuil he developed a fresh way of working – to trap the same scene at different seasons, hours, to paint time passing. 'Monet is only an eye, but what an eye,' was Cézanne's famous, deprecating praise.[4] It has distorted interpretation of Monet ever since. Cézanne admired his friend's unerring, nuanced vision, rapture at the visible, directness in translating that delight into pictorial fact, but he defanged him into emotional neutrality and implied an intellectual void. Giving primacy to what was seen, to the shimmering surfaces of his canvases, the remark underplays the roles in Monet's painting of feeling, thought and memory.

This book attempts to tell Monet's life as he felt it: his joys and sorrows, loves and disappointments, what he read, his connections to cultural currents, and how all this, and especially his closest relationships, inspired his choices of what and how to paint.

Three times, Monet's art changed decisively when the woman sharing his life changed. To excavate the unrecognized contributions and the voices of Camille Doncieux, Alice Raingo and Blanche Hoschedé, the special atmosphere with which each surrounded him, the extent to which they curated the milieu of his paintings, is not to diminish the force of Monet's originality, but to rethink how he worked, and how his paintings work on us, to enlarge 'only an eye' to admit heart, soul and mind.

Monet himself talked little of these things. 'Monet the Taciturn' is the title of Thadée Natanson's affectionate memoir. Natanson's Monet was a 'raptor' with a devouring gaze who sat silent, as in a trance, in his wide-brimmed straw hat, watching his water lilies. If he opened his mouth, it was to puff on a Caporal cigarette, from which 'scrolls of smoke climbed and renewed themselves around him'.[5] Vanishing into his garden, into his paintings, Monet, one of the most popular artists of all time, became what Degas aspired to be: illustrious and unknown.

Discretion and reserve were elements of his character. A decade after becoming Alice's lover, Monet was still writing to her as 'chère Madame' and using the formal 'vous' pronoun. His adored younger son could not bring himself to address his father by the familiar 'tu'. And Monet never painted a nude, the only great artist from the Renaissance to the early twentieth century not to do so.

Yet his paintings are the opposite of restrained. They embrace sensual experience, and are built on what Meyer Schapiro called 'the fury of the brush'.[6] His letters reveal his voracious appetite, for art and life: 'I work in the rain, in the wind. I gorge myself on it'; 'I have a terrible thirst to be near you'.[7] He is always hungry, always greedy, 'j'ai grand faim'; 'I will spoil myself like the big mouth I am'.[8] Painting both answered an emotional need – 'it was a joy for me to see this furious sea, it was like a nervousness' – and drove introspection – 'I plunge back into examining my canvases, that is to say, continuing my tortures. Oh, if Flaubert had been a painter, what would he have written?'[9]

Impressionism, with its breezy brilliance at fixing the artist's sensation, inevitably led towards interiority: to painting suggesting mutability, memory; to brushstrokes eloquent for their own sake rather than strictly representational; eventually to forms of abstraction. Monet made the full journey in a single lifetime – the sole Impressionist to push the movement's implications through to the end. He began rendering broad, busy scenes and people, steamships in port, crowds on the boulevards – the sociable existence shared with Camille in the 1860s–70s. He refined his observations in compositions emptied of people: the unsettled seascapes of the nomadic 1880s, then the series paintings launched in the security of Giverny in 1890 with *Haystacks* [Plates 34 and 35], which slow down time to catch 'the luminous atmosphere that brings dazzle to our ordinary lives', as his friend Georges Clemenceau said.[10] Finally, in the seclusion of his garden, Monet in the twentieth century turned the relationship between painting and nature inside-out: he constructed his own landscape to provide motifs against which he could record his minute-by-minute perceptions, and in his *Water Lilies* series [Plates 46 and 49], he painted the surface of his little pond to reflect the infinity of the sky.

Painting is always an expression of personality; with Monet it went further. Only a man of tremendous self-belief could hold his nerve while transforming his private, fleeting impressions, which to audiences at the time looked like mere sketchy improvisations, into defining, iconic images – dawn breaking in Le Havre in *Impression, Sunrise* [Plate 16]; his wife and son wandering through a meadow hazy in summer heat in *The Poppy Field* [Plate 17].

In youth, struggling against near-destitution, mockery and misunderstanding, Monet built Impressionism on his confidence in the authority of a painter's direct perception. His independence, and his intense reactions, were fundamental to the project he set himself: his painting would be, he decided aged twenty-eight, 'the expression of what I myself will have experienced, I alone'.[11] At fifty, inaugurating the series painting, daring to pin down the same subject as one elusive impression after another – light falling thirty times on Rouen cathedral, poplars quivering by a stream from dawn to dusk – he reiterated the same impulse: 'I am more than ever wild with the need to put down what I experience.'[12]

As the frontier of his painting moved inward, Monet insisted that his method remained unchanged: obsessive attention to nature, stalking transient effects. But in 1927 the duc de Trévise described his pictures as abstractions: 'skeins of kindred shades that no other eye could have unravelled, bizarre assortments of immaterial threads'.[13] Few artists have lived and been productive for so long, and only Matisse has equalled Monet in producing late work which radically departed from his early manner, and yet was consistent with and developed inevitably from its first aims.

The distance from young to old Monet is shown by the gulf between his literary champions. In the 1860s Zola praised Monet through the prism of his own vigorous realism: 'Oh, yes, here is someone with a temperament, here is a *man* among all these eunuchs . . . I congratulate him . . . for having an exact and candid eye, for belonging to the great school of naturalists.' Zola was especially drawn to the figure paintings, for Monet 'loves our women, their umbrellas, their gloves, their lace, even their false hair and their face powder – everything that makes them the daughters of our civilization'.[14] But as Monet's path diverged from Zola's, the novelist betrayed the friendship. His scathing novel *L'Œuvre* (1886) stars an impassioned painter who, bereaved, cannot stop himself seizing a canvas and depicting a corpse.

Thirty years later, in the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust alludes to Monet's water lilies. On a walk, the narrator watches the river Vivonne 'choked with water-plants', ugly and disordered, 'suggesting certain victims of neurasthenia . . . and . . . those wretches whose peculiar torments, repeated indefinitely throughout eternity, aroused the curiosity of Dante'. Then comes a property whose owner 'made a hobby of aquatic gardening, so that the little ponds into which the Vivonne was here diverted were aflower with water-lilies'. In the depths, the narrator now sees 'a clear, crude blue verging on violet, suggesting a floor of Japanese cloisonné. Here and there on the surface, blushing like a strawberry, floated a water-lily flower with a scarlet centre and white edges.'[15] The gardener/artist has spun beauty and meaning from the chaos of nature and the mind. For Proust, Monet's lilies symbolized the transformation of life into art.

The painter Elstir in *À la recherche du temps perdu* is partly based on Monet. In one of his seascapes, Proust writes, the artist 'had felt so intensely the enchantment that he had succeeded in transcribing, in fixing for all time upon his canvas, the imperceptible ebb of the tide, the throb of one happy moment'.[16] It is a description of the new painting which Monet inaugurated – painting which is expansive, fluid, and never stales because it is fed by the flux of so rich an inner life.

PART ONE

Voyaging Out

1

The City and the Sea, 1840–57

Monet's life began in Paris in 1840, but the imprint of memory came with the river and the sea. The Monet family moved to Le Havre when he was four years old. The railway to Rouen had just opened; the first line out of the capital to the provinces, it was extended in 1847 to the coast. The train leaves the Gare Saint-Lazare, close to Monet's birthplace on rue Laffitte, and soon crosses the Seine at Asnières, then a tiny village named for breeding donkeys. The route winds back and forth over the looping, slow-flowing river and its fertile valleys before reaching the chalky Pays de Caux plateau and descending to the huge port of Le Havre, on the right bank of the broad estuary. Along this journey were most of Monet's subjects: 'I have painted the Seine all my life, at every hour, at every season. I have never tired of it: for me the Seine is always new.'[1]

At one end of the itinerary, Monet depicted the Channel coast in some 300 seascapes. At the other, the Gare Saint-Lazare inspired a dozen smoke-filled pictures [Plates 21 and 22] celebrating the dynamic industrial era into which he was born. 'Our artists have to find poetry in train stations as their fathers found it in the forests,' wrote his contemporary Émile Zola, born seven months before him.[2] For Monet, the station facilitated an existence divided for the whole of his life between the capital and Normandy, between aggressive commerce and opportunity in the modern metropolis, and retreat and freedom to roam and paint by the water.

Only a single eyewitness report of Monet, other than his own, survives from before the age of seventeen, and it places him happy in Le Havre on the high plateau above the ocean. His friend Fernand Bidaux recalled this scene, 'where we two adolescents, drunk *en plein air*, lost

Le Havre, 1860s

in the mass of rocks, injured by the brambles and asperities which we braved so brazenly, clambered up the cliffs at La Hève, surprising those tumultuous heaps, seeking a motif that you liked . . . Do you remember my sketches, so flat and dull next to your divinely excavated drawings?'[3] The recollection came when Bidaux, who had not seen Monet for forty years, walked into a Paris exhibition of his Channel seascapes in 1898 and was inspired to write to remind him of 'beautiful days for ever gone'.

Monet talked rarely about his childhood. 'Apart from my date of birth, I hardly see what information I can give you except that from my most tender infancy I already had a passion for drawing,' he told the journalist François Thiébault-Sisson irritably, ahead of his first major biographical interview, in 1900.[4] He relented to add a single expansive description, which accords with Bidaux's – he was always outside 'when the sunshine was inviting, the sea smooth and when it was such a joy to run about on the cliffs, in the free air, or paddle around in the water'.[5]

He was an unruly child, the competitive second son of a second son, born to a father whose livelihood as a ship supplier depended on movement and travel – servicing people and vessels arriving and departing Le Havre's quays. Before that, Adolphe Monet had tried a career as a sailor, crossing the Atlantic. At least since the French Revolution, when the Monets begin to be clearly documented, the family survived by being on the move, and moving on fast when disaster struck. Unsentimental, they did not keep mementoes or dwell on the past; no photograph or portrait of Monet as a child is known. 'If he had good memories of his family, he never talked of them. So I think we can say that he hardly had any,' his stepson suggested. 'I never heard him make any reference to a tender childhood memory concerning his parents.'[6] From the same reticence, Monet's friend and first biographer Gustave Geffroy concluded that 'he had a happy childhood', and closed the subject in a sentence.[7]

Monet introduced himself to Thiébault-Sisson of *Le Temps* in six words: 'I am a Parisian from Paris.'[8] He was proud of his roots in the capital, which went back two generations; his Monet grandparents settled there in the 1790s, joining the swell of migrants from the provinces who made up 70 per cent of the city's population at the time. The artist's father was born there, in the parish of Saint-Eustache, close to the food market at Les Halles, on 3 February 1800. A few months before, in November 1799, Napoleon had staged the coup that overthrew the revolutionary government, established himself as First Consul and set France on the path to empire.

Adolphe was his mother Catherine Chaumerat's third and last child, and the only one born legitimate. Catherine, the illiterate daughter of a postman, was used to being pregnant in turbulent times. She came from Lyon, France's second city and Europe's silk capital. Her parents were Gaspard Chaumerat, a Lyon hat-maker's son, and his third wife, Jeanne Marie Mera, a native of Quincié-en-Beaujolais, a village in the nearby wine-making region. Catherine was sixteen when she began a romance with an Italian tailor, Isidore Gaillard, or Gaiardi, born in Rome. It was the summer of 1789, the season of plunder and riots known as 'La Grande Peur' (The Great Fear) – Lyon's equivalent of the disturbances in Paris which culminated in the storming of the Bastille. In Lyon tension between silk weavers and silk merchants was long established, and unrest continued to flare. In February 1790 there was the pillage of the Lyon Arsenal, and in June 1791 a mob attacked the castle of a retired colonial officer, who was lynched and dismembered by a butcher, his heart served up in a nearby *auberge*.

In a city in turmoil, Catherine gave birth to her daughter Marie-Jeanne Gaillard on 13 March 1790, and married Isidore on 7 November. She was quickly widowed and, still a teenager, as quickly found a new partner: in 1792 she had another illegitimate baby, Claude Pascal Léonard Monet. Now Lyon was firmly in the throes of revolution. In the uprising known as the *septembrisades lyonnaises*, officers and priests in the fortress of Pierre Scize were decapitated, their heads paraded round the city and then displayed by torchlight to terrified audiences at the Théâtre des Célestins. The silk industry, the chief source of employment, stagnated. Workers struggled; counter-revolutionary sentiment rose and was snuffed out by republican forces, who bombarded and laid siege to the city. Lyon surrendered in 1793.

Tough and young, Catherine got herself and her two babies through the siege, and survived the 'liberation' of 1793–4, a year of denunciations and mass trials. Two thousand Lyon citizens were killed, some guillotined on the Place Bellecour, others shot by firing squad, the notorious *mitraillades*, on the Brotteaux plain across the Rhône. It was among the worst atrocities of the revolution and, after the fall of Robespierre, answered with reprisals – the 'white' terror, including massacres of Jacobin prisoners and those suspected of sympathizing with them. Women too were shot on the street; mutilated bodies flung into the river were a common sight. Lyon was in a state of more or less civil war until 1798. The population plummeted.

Catherine at least gained security by marriage, in 1795, to her son's father, Léon Pascal Monet, known as Pascal, also widowed. Cited in official documents as an 'agent de commerce', he had come north to Lyon from Avignon, a papal enclave when he was born there on 17 December 1761, the son of another Claude Pascal Monet and grandson of a Pascal. His first marriage, in Avignon in 1779, was to a lawyer's daughter, which implies he came from a higher social class than Catherine. He did not stay long in Lyon: on the eve of the new century Pascal and his wife, son and stepdaughter made the intimidating journey, four days and nights by stagecoach, to Paris. Adolphe was the child who completed the family in their new home. He, and subsequently his sons, would win the unquestioned, lifelong devotion of his half-sister Jeanne. She was nearly ten when her baby brother was baptized Claude Adolphe on 9 February 1800 at the grand Gothic

Saint-Eustache church – where Cardinal Richelieu and Molière had been christened – in the first arrondissement. The building, desecrated and looted during the revolution, remained damaged and had not yet been formally returned to the Church, but Saint-Eustache was on its way to stability and peace and so were the Monets.

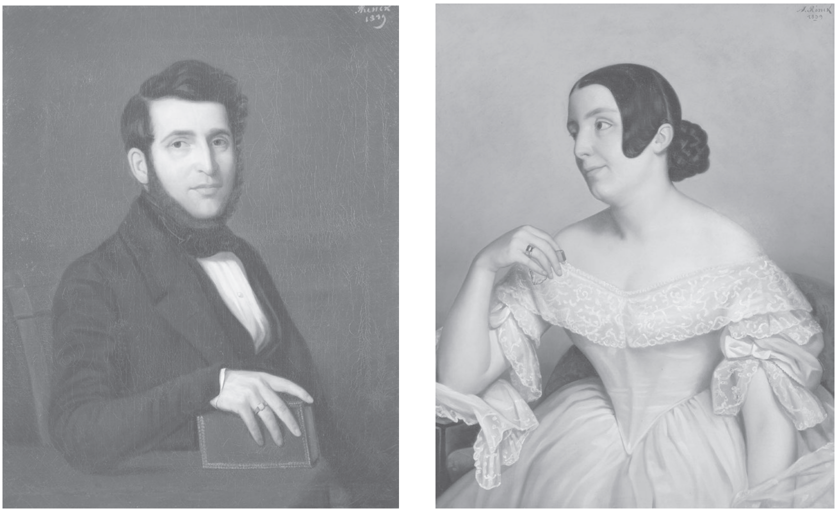
Resourcefulness, adaptability, robust health and a resolutely urban outlook were the legacy of these grandparents, with whom Monet grew up. Having endured and escaped fanaticism, Pascal and Catherine brought up children indifferent to politics, and in the entrepreneurial spirit of the times. The sons followed the rise of industry and international commerce, which made the north the beating heart of modernizing nineteenth-century France, while slow southern towns such as Avignon lagged behind. The older boy married at eighteen and moved to Nancy; he described himself as a 'négociant', a term covering every sort of trade. At the same age, in 1818, the apprentice seaman Adolphe Monet boarded the merchant ship *Constantia*, bound for San Domingo, at Le Havre. He returned from the Caribbean a year later as a passenger, disembarked at La Rochelle and never went to sea again. Another 'négociant', and also referred to on official documents by the equally vague 'propriétaire', he developed business interests between Paris and Le Havre. He was helped by an industrious, generous brother-in-law: in 1823 Jeanne Gaillard, at thirty-three, made a brilliant match to Jacques Lecadre, whose grocery and ships' supply stores and warehouses were prominent in the thriving port city.

Nothing about this thoughtful, refined and dignified woman suggested the turmoil of her first years, although Adolphe later insisted that 'my sister must not be disturbed in her inner tranquillity'[9] – the disturber being her rowdy nephew. Jeanne was an amateur painter and her husband built her a studio. The couple's summer villa, Le Coteau, route des Phares, at the resort of Sainte-Adresse, was a haven where Jeanne cared for her mother and step-father, shielded from continuing political upheavals. When Pascal Monet died at the villa in his ninetieth year, he had lived through three revolutions, in 1789, 1830 and 1848, and, since leaving Lyon, five regimes in as many decades: the First Republic; Napoleon's rule during the Consulate (1799–1804) and as emperor (1804–15); the restored Bourbon constitutional monarchy (1815–30); the so-called July Monarchy of the Orléanist rival king Louis-Philippe (1830–48); and the Second Republic led by Napoleon's nephew Louis-Napoleon (1848–51).

In the early 1830s, Louis-Philippe, known as the Citizen King, dressed like a banker and carrying an umbrella, brought hopes of growth and prosperity, and Paris was calm when Adolphe Monet married Louise-Justine Aubrée there on 20 May 1835. She was born in the capital on 31 July 1805, one of the last dates to be recorded according to the revolutionary calendar – 11 Pluviose, year XIII – and her family and circumstances suggest spirit and independence. François Aubrée, her father, a civil servant in Louis-Philippe's finance ministry, was separated from her mother, Marie-Françoise Toffard – rare at a time when divorce was not possible in France. As a young woman Louise, unusually, did not live with either of her parents in the period before she married the wealthy Emmanuel Despaux in 1831. She was widowed in 1834, and within a year became Madame Monet. The couple's son Léon Pascal, the artist's only brother, was born in 1836.

The first Monet images appear in 1839, suggesting a degree of bourgeois comfort. Adolphe and Louise were sufficiently well off to commission wedding portraits, each showing off a prominent ring, though they waited until a few years after their marriage, and were not affluent enough to ask an established society artist: they chose a foreign adventurer. Adolphe Rinck, an academic painter trained in Berlin, was in Paris en route to America and a flourishing career in antebellum Louisiana. Rinck depicted Monet's father as handsome, with regular features and thick chestnut hair, and somewhat bland, eager to appear correct; a man who would insist that 'there is only one route to success: to progress resolutely on the path of work and order' and set no store by the imaginative life, believing of his son that 'only his actions, his behaviour, are favourable or unfavourable'.[10] Louise – oval face, big eyes, luscious chignon and a slick of dark hair playfully framing her cheek – is more of a performer, coquettishly dangling a jewel, décolleté in fashionable off-the-shoulder ivory silk, lace-trimmed bodice tapering to a point, ribboned short sleeves in little puffs. Her expression is vivacious, mischievous, composed, but there is also something elusive, or distant, in her gaze.

The Monets moved between various rented flats before settling in an apartment on the fifth floor of a newly built block at 45 rue Laffitte in



Adolphe and Louise Monet, the artist's parents, portrayed by Adolphe Rinck in 1839

the ninth arrondissement. Here Adolphe and Louise's second son was born on 14 November 1840, and outlandishly named Oscar Claude, an outlier from Monet family tradition. And unlike his staid brother, this younger son was born at a fancy address to go with his fancy name: rue Laffitte in the 1840s was on its way to becoming *la rue des tableaux*, the street of pictures. In 1842 Adolphe Beugniet arrived at number 10, setting up a restoration business and then a gallery selling the work of artists such as Camille Corot, Eugène Delacroix, the orientalist Eugène Fromentin and the Barbizon landscapist Charles-François Daubigny, later Monet's supporter. Further galleries, stationers and specialists in drawings joined Beugniet; in 1844 *Les rues de Paris* described rue Laffitte as a place of 'trade, arts and pleasure'.[11] By the early 1850s it was commonly referred to as 'la rue des tableaux', the magazine *L'Artiste* even proclaiming it, by 1854, a street museum.

Monet's friend Georges Clemenceau called rue Laffitte an omen, but family agency helped coincidence. The Monets' choice of a smart street on the Right Bank declared cultural ambition, an instinct to be close to the action, characteristics inherited by their second son. Although social classes were jumbled within streets and also within buildings in nineteenth-century Paris – ample apartments on the lower floors, smaller ones such as the Monets' higher up – the location in this animated *quartier* was significant. A neo-classical ensemble of stone town houses, some with shop fronts, most divided into apartments, plus some elaborate *hôtels particuliers* opening on to inner courtyards, rue Laffitte had just been extended to run from Boulevard des Italiens, the most prestigious of the café-lined *grands boulevards*, to the new church of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette.

Here, in a gold-frescoed chapel, at a font adorned with a bronze St John, Oscar Monet was baptized on 20 May 1841; his uncle and aunt from Nancy were godparents. A year before, the composer Georges Bizet, born a few streets away to another ambitious father, a wigmaker turned singing teacher, had been christened at the same font. Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, today dwarfed by the massive Sacré-Coeur on the hill of Montmartre behind it, was considered at its completion in 1836 to be controversially lavish, almost unspiritual; the carved tympanum and Corinthian columns inspired by Roman basilicas certainly aggrandized the worldly rue Laffitte. The Bourse was within comfortable walking distance, and it was in order to be near it, and to woo the new money on the Right Bank, that the dealers came here, deserting their former haunts around the official Académie des Beaux-Arts and the aristocratic Faubourg Saint-Germain on the Left Bank. More notorious residents in the area were the 'lorettes', the demi-mondaine prostitutes maintained by several lovers, who took their nickname from the church. Thus *L'Artiste*, noting the seductive gallery windows, called rue Laffitte 'the valley of temptation'.

Lifestyle and aspiration were on display and for sale. Rue Laffitte was a fashion destination – Madame Guichard's hats, dresses at Madame Palmyre's, couturier to royalty – and a cultural gathering place. It was home to Balzac's friend the romantic poet Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, to the polemical journalist Émile de Girardin, publisher of the pioneering mass-market newspaper *La Presse*, and to the opera singer Rosine Stoltz, a sensation as Léonor in Donizetti's *La Favorite*, which premièred a fortnight after Monet's birth. At number 2, the other end of the street from the Monets, Lord Hertford was amassing the paintings which would become the Wallace Collection in London. At number 19, banker James Rothschild had reconstructed his neo-Renaissance *hôtel particulier*, which Heinrich Heine called a financier's Versailles. At number 27 lived the banker Jacques Laffitte, who gave his name to the street. Previously it had been rue d'Artois, after the comte d'Artois, with a brief period from 1792 as rue Cerruti, commemorating a Revolutionary journalist.

The renaming in Laffitte's honour, in recognition of his manoeuvres in ensuring the throne for Louis-Philippe, signified the rise of the financial class. Under the July Monarchy, commented Stendhal, 'the bankers are at the heart of the State. The bourgeoisie has taken the place of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and the bankers are the nobility of the bourgeoisie.'[12] Physically, Paris at Monet's birth was still the city of Balzac – picturesque and filthy, with its twisting alleys, cramped pavements, poor lighting and stench of sewage – but new social and financial structures were ushering in great change. In 1837 Jacques Laffitte founded Paris's first business bank, the Caisse Générale du Commerce et de l'Industrie. Thanks to speculative investment, industry and technology boomed, and railways were built. '*Éclairez-vous, enrichissez-vous*, improve the moral and material condition of our France, *voilà* the true innovations,' Louis-Philippe's foreign minister François Guizot told the French people in 1843.[13] It was only a street, but rue Laffitte in the 1840s represented the alliance of middle-class money and culture evolving from the upheavals of the last half-century, which in turn laid the ground for the intellectual and artistic innovations of the next generation. No less than the Lyon postman's illiterate daughter who made a life in Paris, and her children who went on to acquire solid wealth and cultural capital, Monet's life was shaped by these forces.

They were at work in his favour when they swept the young family up to Le Havre in 1845. Standing between the mouth of the Seine and soaring cliffs, France's biggest northern port was noisily responding to expansion in transatlantic transport and trade. The cranes of its shipbuilding yards were gigantic, its basins were built deeper and deeper to accommodate the new vessels, its quaysides bursting with exotica, yelping monkeys and jabbering parrots alongside coconuts and chinoiserie. Le Havre was, according to Jules Janin in the mid-century, 'the warehouse of the whole world'.[14] It boasted 'des rues toutes parisiennes'; the activity, movement, passions of a great city. Completely modern, it [was] a town of zeal, work, active industry, storms which grumble and pass, boats which arrive and depart again', where everyone was in a hurry, everyone needed 'to produce, exchange, sell, buy, create, fill and empty this port'.[15] Wholesaler Jacques Lecadre, trading cotton, rope, wool, indigo, resin, oils, candles, spices and wine from 17 quai d'Orléans and rue Fontenelle, had more business than he could manage. His nephew and partner Arthur Lecadre died unexpectedly in 1843, making an opening for his brother-in-law, Adolphe Monet.

The Lecadre-Monet business flourished in a city which absorbed every regime change in its rush to profit, and benefited from each one. The February 1848 uprising in Paris which deposed Louis-Philippe stirred riots in industrial cities, including neighbouring Rouen, and also Lyon, but in Le Havre it provoked only sporadic chanting of 'La Marseillaise'. The *Courrier du Havre* hoped that trouble in Paris 'would not take on the character of an insurrection, still less that of a revolution'.[16] Le Havre's expansion, begun during the July Monarchy, gathered pace under the Second Republic from 1848, and flourished still more following Napoleon III's coup in 1851, which established the Second Empire. The new boulevard Impérial linked station and port; the rail speculators Émile and Isaac Pereire branched out to launch the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique; the quai d'Orléans abandoned a name with royalist allusions to become, briefly but aptly, the quai du Commerce. As the merchant Frédéric de Coninck said, 'Le Havre would be nothing without its commerce, and no serious commerce is possible without confidence in the stability of government and the maintenance of peace.'[17]

The tourist Stendhal described a place where adventurers from across the world sought to 'smack' a fortune; it operated to the rhythms of the Bourse as well as to the tides. The marine insurers lining the port had names like 'Les Deux Mondes' and 'L'Espérance'; vistas were global and optimistic: vessels arrived from Constantinople, Odessa and New Orleans and there were regular sailings to Southampton, Liverpool, Hamburg, Rotterdam and New York. Sixteen-year-old Manet passed through in 1848 to sail on the *Le Havre-et-Guadeloupe* for Rio de Janeiro. Pissarro, disembarking after a voyage from his native Danish Antilles in the 1840s, first set foot on French soil at Le Havre. 'C'est peu esthétique,' he would tell his son Rodolphe, 'but you get used to it and end up discovering great character there.'[18] That hard-edged, teeming character and modernizing impetus were part of Monet's childhood, and the directness and rough handling of his painting have something of Le Havre's upstart brashness. 'The water is acrid, and the horizon extends with harshness,' wrote Zola of Monet's early depictions of the port. 'We're facing the ocean; before us is a ship smeared with tar; we hear the muffled, gasping cry of the steamer filling the air with its sickening fumes.'[19]

Profits made from these ships enabled Le Havre's merchants to live away from the smoke, in the airy upper town, the *ville haute*. Adolphe Monet settled his family in a large house in Ingouville, at 30 rue d'Eprémesnil. In his *Excursions in Normandy* of 1841, the German traveller Jacob Venedey singled out the heights of Ingouville: 'the wealthier merchants of the wealthy commercial town have here built a number of palaces, where they enjoy themselves in summer after the toils of the day. Many English live in those which the owners are willing to let, that they may thus make money even of their villas.'[20] Others, including the Monets, took in paying holiday guests to supplement their income. Among the summer lodgers at rue d'Eprémesnil were a family of aristocratic foreign office civil servants, the Beguin-Billecocqs, who began visiting in 1853; two sons, Ernest and Théodore, became friends with the Monet boys. An older cousin, Count Théophile Beguin-Billecocq, kept a diary of his holiday, and thanks to him is preserved this sole vignette of Monet domesticity: 'I found this short holiday very pleasant. During the day there were walks and sea-bathing, in the evening improvised concerts and balls; everything conspired to make the house cheerful, and the hosts were ready to enjoy life to the full.' Madame Monet sang, he added, and had 'an exceptional voice'.[21] Monet did not inherit his mother's talent, but he did enjoy singing and in his seventies he could still sing the baritone part of a Mozart duet from memory, on pitch.

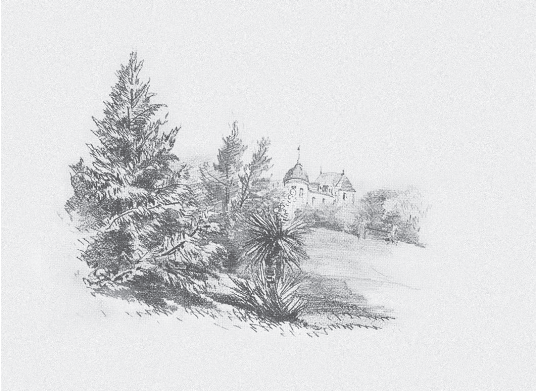
The Billecocqs would have found themselves in the heart of genteel Le Havre society. Through the connections of Jeanne Lecadre, the Monets' friends included the Delaroches, relatives of a former mayor and owners of the most imposing estate in Ingouville, and the engineer Alfred Bodson de Noirfontaine, designer of the harbour's new fortifications, and his wife Pauline, a local author who in her Paris days had hosted a salon. Monet's famous youthful picture *Terrace at Sainte-Adresse* [Plate 2] was painted on a visit to the Noirfontaine beach house, looking out on a regatta. Lecadre cousins are depicted there too.

The Lecadres were eminent locally, and a street commemorates another of Jeanne's nephews, Dr Adolphe Lecadre. He served the poor, led the local *société savante*, and pioneered research into cholera and demographics, comparing the decrepit lower town with the salubrious residential heights, where he was bringing up three dainty daughters. The Monet boys acquired a gang of quasi-cousins: the doctor's girls and Arthur's two orphaned sons, whom the childless Jacques and Jeanne had adopted. Suave Eugène Lecadre, aged thirteen in 1845, was a natural businessman, and was being trained to run the enterprise. His older brother would become another doctor. Léon Monet, nine, was destined for science; as a chemist, his knowledge of how synthetic dyes widened the possibilities for oil paint would be a point of connection with his brother. For now the little Oscar, youngest of the quartet, chose as his role 'essentially that of a vagabond', he later remembered.[22] It distinguished him from the others, and particularly from steady Léon. While Léon studied, Oscar roamed the town and the seashore. In middle age Monet was still mocking his sedate, less agile older brother as he struggled on a cliff walk, and Monet had to help him down the cliff, holding his hand 'like a lady's'.

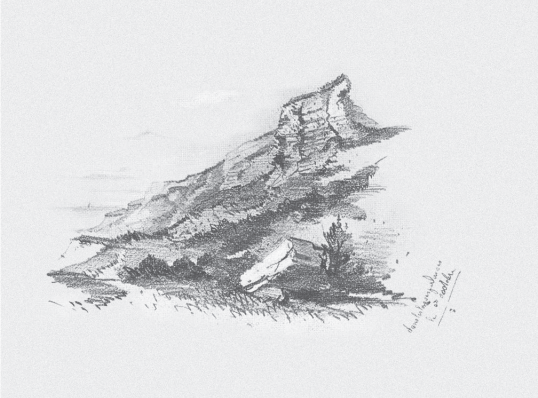
Oscar was a short, dark-haired, spirited boy who found school 'a prison, I could never make up my mind to stay there, not even for four hours a day'.[23] This was the Collège du Havre, where, after a private primary school, Monet was enrolled on 1 April 1851, remaining there until 1857–8. A liberal, secular establishment of some 200 pupils, the school did not use corporal punishment and seems to have been indulgent towards Monet, who brightened lessons – two hours in the morning, two in the afternoon – 'with distractions. I made wreaths on the margins of my books; I decorated the blue paper of my copy-books with ultra-fantastical ornaments . . . deforming . . . as much as I could, the face or the profile of my masters.'[24] François Ochard, the patient middle-aged drawing teacher, left no opinion of his disruptive pupil, who did not choose to attend Ochard's additional classes offered at the municipal drawing school. Monet played down his schooling, which however equipped him as an adult to keep his own business accounts, bargain with dealers, build his own library replete with the classics – from Homer and Tacitus to Voltaire and Molière – and become a lifelong devoted reader and friend of poets and novelists.

His memory was that he was ‘naturally undisciplined’ and ‘the worst pupil’ in his class, ‘since all [he] did was sketch’, but he was well liked.[25] ‘Your success . . . can’t have altered the qualities of the generous nature that I knew,’ wrote Fernand Bidaux wistfully.[26] Abbé Anthiaume, collating evidence for a history of the school in 1905, recorded that Monet was remembered for ‘an excellent nature, very sympathetic to fellow students’. He had ‘a remarkable disposition for drawing, enjoyed sketching in pencil or making ink portraits, which he offered very cordially to his friends in the school. We know of some of his efforts, which his childhood friends are carefully preserving.’[27]

The first extant mark of Monet’s hand dates from the age of fifteen: a pair of sketchbooks from summer 1856, their pages meticulously annotated. They trace his wanderings near his home and, as remembered by Bidaux, around the Cap de la Hève, close to the Lecadre villa Le Coteau. Monet gives a glimpse of Ingouville’s bourgeois houses, set in parks with paths framed by yuccas and umbrella pines, suggesting already the appeal of gardens, of nature tamed, enclosed and decorative, as a counterpart to the attraction of the open sea. A drawing which lays claim to be Monet’s first seascape is dated 11 July 1856: the water calm on the wide bay of Sainte-Adresse, a distant schooner making for the port. Another focuses on three boats stranded on the



Monet, *Villa in a Park in Ingouville*, drawing from the 1857 sketchbook

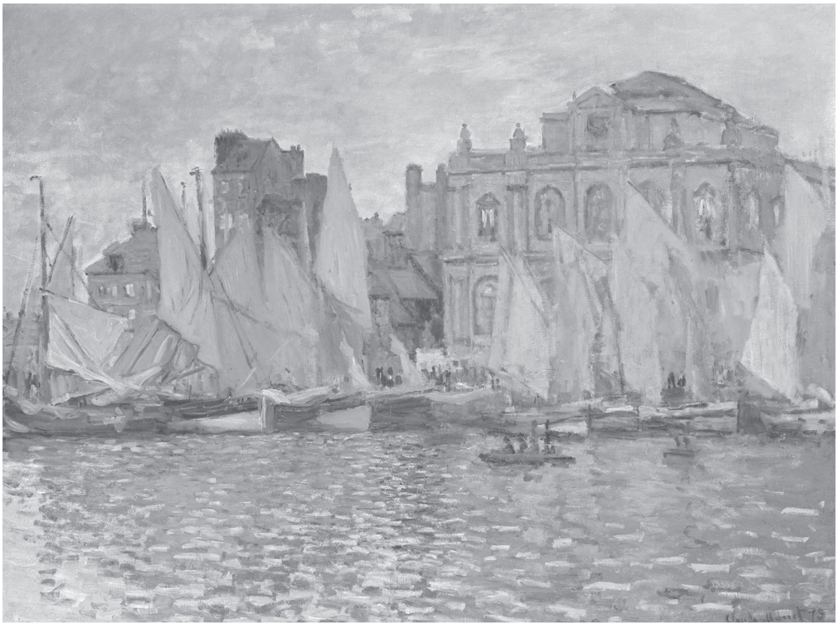


Monet, *Cliffs at Sainte-Adresse*, drawing, 1 October 1857

Le Havre shore, their sails drying in the wind. There are pages and pages of detailed studies of the 'divers bateaux', which held Monet's interest so much more intently than his classes.

The Collège du Havre stood on rue de la Mailleraye, which ran down to the outer port – an attraction for all the boys and the professional destination of most of them, Monet to an extent included. It offered a thrilling spectacle at a particular historical moment, when the age of sail and wood was giving way to that of steam and metal. Monet the artist kept a child's sense of wonder at the turmoil and energy. In *The Grand Quay at Le Havre* [Plate 1], the basin is vibrant and unpredictable, packed with majestic three-masters and puffing steamships. On the embankment glittering hay bales are unloaded and, reduced to small flecks, a maritime cast – travellers, sailors, dockers, crane operators, customs officials, port agents were always on the quays – rushes around between the bureaux of the shipping lines. *The Port of Le Havre* and *Fishing Boats Leaving the Harbour* [Plate 15] depict the curve of the harbour, its front line of tall narrow houses grey in the smog, the action all in the swarm of graceful schooners and hard-working rowing boats.

In these vigorous, affectionate paintings, from the 1870s, the brushwork is improvisational, fast and loose, but the compositions are monumental and architectonic. Monet takes command of the town developed by the mercantile elite to which his family belonged, but always gives primacy to the water. *The Museum at Le Havre* features



Monet, *The Museum at Le Havre*, 1873

the impressive municipal building, which was erected on the quayside the year the Monets arrived: Monet painted it as if from a boat on rippling water, with oversize sails obscuring the façade of arched windows – the sea triumphant. He would write of his ‘passion for the sea’, once joking that he wanted to be buried in a buoy.[28]

Monet’s three intimate writer friends each documented the impact of the sea on his art. Watching the ‘stirrings of the tumultuous ocean’, wrote Clemenceau, his eye grew familiar with ‘the luminous gymnastics of the mad atmosphere which hurls all its nuances and all its tones to the reckless waves and winds. From childhood, Monet loved the huge horizons of the sea.’[29] Gustave Geffroy believed that ‘there stayed with him, from this handsome commercial city, the ineffaceable impression created by the roads opening on to the sea.’[30] And Octave Mirbeau thought the port inflected Monet’s very brushstrokes:

> automatically the movement of the boats on the sea, of the sea against the jetties, the rhythm of the swell, the entry of ships into the harbour, the fluctuation of the pent-up masts which relates to the loose curves of

> the ropes, the fleeting sails which dance and fly, the spirals of smoke, all the silhouettes of the teeming quaysides, teach him better than a professor the elegance, the suppleness, the infinite variety of shapes.[31]

Monet painted more than a thousand works where water is the main motif, and returned to Le Havre all his life. Jacques-Émile Blanche's description of Monet in a November storm in the 1920s, 'old but still very handsome, getting out of a powerful car, enveloped in a sumptuous fur' to sit on a dyke 'in a bitter west wind which ruffled his long white beard, mingling it with the foam of the waves', closes the circle of Channel coast sightings begun with Bidaux's recollection from the 1850s.[32]

Manet, attempting simultaneously to confine and acknowledge his rival, called Monet 'the Raphael of water', but the reach of Le Havre went beyond his subject matter. Impressionism is a northern art, forged from the experience of movement and change in a place where everything is in motion – weather and light, tides and gusts whipping the water, the shifting reflections of sails, buildings, clouds, the sombrely nuanced grey-blue-brown tonalities of sea and sky. Monet the northerner ignored French classical tradition, the heritage of Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin, who both lived extensively in Italy. Among nineteenth-century artists, it was Paul Cézanne the southerner, painting in the constant luminosity of Aix-en-Provence, its fountains and avenues of plane trees preserved since the *ancien régime*, who pursued the aim of 'making of impressionism something solid, like the art of the museum'.[33]

Monet's exceptionally intense experience of seeing was innate, but the transparency of water and the blur of fog in Le Havre played their part in training his eye: the mist above the port hid then revealed objects and elements, so that the act of looking was itself a quest. Stendhal, at the window of Le Havre's Hôtel de l'Amirauté in 1837, described an atmosphere dense with black-brownish smoke from the steamers, mingled with jets of white steam whistling from the industrial buildings. Monet, from a window of the same hotel in 1873, reconsidered the view he had seen every morning as a schoolboy, and painted winter dawn over the smoky port: the harbour at first hardly perceptible in its shroud of mist and steam, then forms – docks, cranes, chimneys – heaving into view. The grey sea and sky are tinted rose by the rising sun, whose reflection, applied in a thick orange-red paste, wet on wet, is cursory and dashing. A diagonal of three sculled boats punctuates the water surface; their dark silhouettes are almost filmic, as if Monet shows the same slowly progressing boat at different moments. This painting, *Impression, Sunrise* [Plate 16], gave Impressionism its name, made Le Havre an icon of modern art and memorialized Monet's connection to the port city.

What we know of his first decade there, aged four to fourteen, suggests a child outward bound, curious, stimulated by his surroundings, and secure within a nurturing extended family of characterful women. Oscar and Léon grew up under the gaze of a lively, sociable mother, of sensitive Aunt Jeanne, attentive to everyone's needs, and of Catherine Chaumerat, the sturdy grandmother from Lyon, who lived on at Le Coteau into her eighties. Until this point, Monet's happy childhood, fortunate in its uneventful ordinariness, as mentioned by Geffroy, rings true.

Then catastrophe struck. Catherine's death at Sainte-Adresse in September 1855 marked a turning point for the Monets, the end of a

Adolphe and Louise Monet, *c.*1855

long period of comfort and upward mobility. In 1856 it became obvious that Louise's health was failing. The only known photograph of Monet's parents dates from around this time. His mother, seated, demure and neat, looks resigned – far from the lively hostess described by Théophile Beguin-Billecocq and painted by Rinck. Adolphe stands protectively, anxiously, behind his wife, with a bewildered, almost vacant look. Another Billecocq visitor is the witness to this period: the diplomat Hippolyte, father of Ernest and Théodore, recalled Adolphe's concern for his wife, and 'the care with which he surrounded her during that cruel illness'.[34]

Adolphe and the Monets' maid, Célestine Vatine, became Louise's nurse. Jacques' nephew, Adolphe-Aimé Lecadre, was her doctor. Monet kept out of the way. His sketchbooks trace his wandering by the water almost every day in summer 1856. On 17 July he drew eleven different boats, their riggings and sails precisely detailed, on a single sheet, plus studies of trees in Ingouville on two further pages. The next morning he was back on the beach, then he went east to Harfleur, where the little river Lézarde meets the Seine; here Monet drew his first bridge, and its reflection in the water – a motif that would hold a lifelong attraction. He slipped into the Delaroche property to sketch the gardens, and into the orchards of a neighbouring farm to draw apple trees. In a second summer sketchbook, begun on 13 August, on the pebbled slopes of Bléville, he noted 'the storm of 21 August' with a tempest-tossed canoe, and trees whipped by the wind. Every page shows the fifteen-year-old's power of concentrated observation, his easy touch, what Bidaux called his 'divine' drawing.

Towards the end of the summer Monet found two little boys to pose, one sitting cross-legged with a doll, the other, named – Édouard Perdrieux – standing solemnly in knee-length trousers, oversized jacket and a cap, hands in his pockets, a tiny figure in the middle of the page. Monet's sympathy for children is well documented, but in 1856 he was not much more than a child himself, and perhaps felt lonely or lost. He concluded the sketchbook on 10–12 September with a pair of melancholy spectacles: a tumbledown cart marooned in long grass, and a gnarled broken tree trunk inscribed 'aux phares' – the twin Sainte-Adresse lighthouses which guided the way into Le Havre, and gave their name to the route des Phares, where Le Coteau stood. Then he returned to school and to autumn and winter evenings in a darkening house.

Louise Monet died at home at one o'clock in the morning on Wednesday 28 January 1857. At 11 o'clock, Jacques Lecadre registered the death at the town hall. He himself had only a year to live, and without his protection Adolphe's professional position was vulnerable. For now, Jacques offered a last gesture of help to his brother-in-law: an escape from the house on the heights, too large to manage without Louise, to an apartment on the harbour at the Lecadre business headquarters, at 13 rue Fontenelle. The widower relocated with his sons to the quayside, and Monet lost Ingouville as well as his mother.

Her death could not take away the advantages of passing his youth in Le Havre. The city imbued Monet with a love of movement, a delight in the materiality and texture of things – Impressionism's secular pleasures and extroversion. But a childhood awareness of loss, burning deep into Monet's psyche, may also have had a bearing on paintings which so determinedly celebrate the fleeting moment, and therefore say too that each will inevitably pass.

'Painters in the past attempted to separate the eternal from the transitory. They distinguished elements, bodies, substances in an effort to be specific about volumes and planes,' wrote the critic Roger Marx in the early twentieth century. 'M. Claude Monet belongs to a quite different age, one in which dizzying speed is the rule' and in his painting 'the question is no longer a matter of fixing what is there but of seizing what is going by'.[35]

Son of energetic Le Havre, Monet, even in the shock of grief, was ready to seize the moment, in art and in life.

2

Trembling Laughter, 1857–9

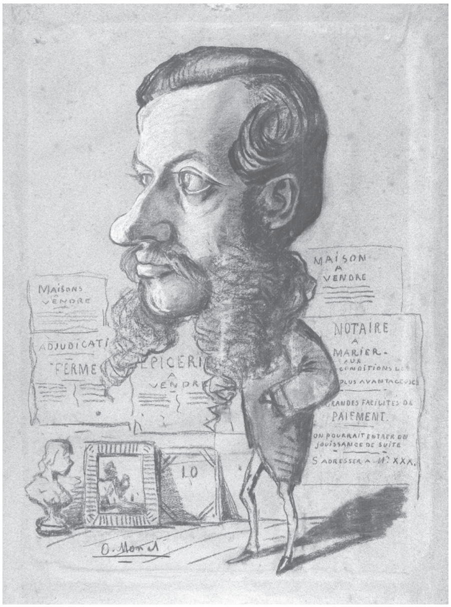
A fortnight after Louise's death, Monet climbed the hill overlooking Graville, where a Romanesque abbey stands behind yew trees, and sharp gusts blow off the Channel. He began a fresh sketchbook with the drawing of a crooked covered gate entrance to a farm, the little roof damaged but still supported on uneven brick pillars, the portal swung back and a bare tree sprouting in the opening. It is an image of man-made shelter amid nature such as would appeal to Monet all his life – cabins on the cliffs, haystacks in the fields. Already in this 1857 sketchbook are depictions of the distinctive *caloges*, the covered boats resting onshore through the winter, which would recur in his 1880s paintings of nearby Étretat.

On 22 February, Monet was out again, 'sur le bord de la mer', as he recorded beneath his sketches, drawing a tousle-haired, dark-eyed, full-lipped youth. It was not a self-portrait, although the expression, sombre, pained, withdrawn, is that of a grieving adolescent. Another tumbledown lonely building, a thatched grange several kilometres inland, was his subject a week later.

Then suddenly a new sort of drawing appears in this sketchbook: monstrous caricatures with huge heads, pronounced, hideous noses and small bodies. By the summer, when he gave the loyal visitor Ernest Billecocq a batch of funny, savage cartoon-portraits, Monet had refined the drawing and added colour highlights. He was on the quays, satirizing the arrivals and departures. A fashionable young man squints through a monocle, a traveller in tartan sports an oversized moustache, a staring boy in a too-tight jacket is entitled 'progéniture anglaise'. Among these characters, a benign, larger personage, long-haired, bandy-legged, bright with a big red bow tie and a pointed hat, is an artist, carrying his case of paints.

These figures represent the launch, within months of his mother's death, of the caricaturist signing himself 'O. Monet'. He quickly made progress and as quickly became known across the town. Monet recalled circling the rue de Paris in the centre of Le Havre so that he could repeatedly walk past the stationer and framer Gravier, at number 104, where his caricatures of the town's notables were on show in the window, in an arrangement renewed every Sunday. 'My caricatures arrogantly displayed themselves five or six in a row, framed in gold and glazed, like highly artistic works, and when I saw the loungers crowd before them in admiration and heard them pointing them out, say "That is so and so", I nearly choked with vanity and self-satisfaction.'[1]

Some of these have survived. Each is carefully worked, executed with fluent economy of line and tender-cruel attention to facial detail and to insect-like shadows thrown by the tiny legs. Monet learnt his grotesque style by copying examples from the popular 'portraits-charges' (caricatures) by illustrators such as Étienne Carjat, in the newspaper *Le Gaulois*, and Nadar, in his satirical 'Panthéon' and in *Le Journal amusant*. His own subjects came from the Lecadre-Monet


MAISON
A
VENDRE
Maisons
à
VENDRE
NOTAIRE
A
MARIER.
AUX
CONDITIONS LES
PLUS AVANTAGEUSES
GRANDES FACILITES DE
PAIEMENT.
ON POURRAIT ENTRER EN
JOUISSANCE DE SUITE
S'ADRESSER A Mr XXX.
ADJUDICATI
FERME
EPICERI
A
VENDRE
LO
O. Monet

Monet, *Léon Manchon*, *c.*1858

business circle, such as the 'courtier de commerce' Adolphe-Victor Coësme with his flamboyant curly coiffure. Lawyer Paul Bodereau, sharp-eyed behind his pince-nez, thin and menacing, is depicted in pugnacious cross-examination, while his colleague Léon Manchon, outsize side-whiskers trailing halfway down the page, is set against posters mockingly advertising his trade – 'Notaire à marier, aux conditions plus avantageuses'. Manchon was treasurer of the Société des Amis des Arts du Havre, and Dr Lecadre also sat on the board. A big-nosed disaffected character is the elderly picture framer and gilder 'grand-père Lebas'; a wily-looking man fingering a snuff box is an auctioneer; and Monet inscribed a portrait of a lugubrious middle-aged grocer 'à mon ami Dermit'. These macho distortions flattered big egos. Monet's harsh contours matched his subjects' thrusting personalities.

How much the aggressive productions of the precocious teenager owed to the rage and loneliness of the bereaved child is hard to say. In his analysis of caricature in *De l'essence du rire*, written in 1855–7, Baudelaire declared that 'le sage ne rit qu'en tremblant'– the wise man does not laugh without trembling.[2] Baudelaire situated caricature as an urban, edgy form, revealing and representing alienation. The ambitious Monet seized it to situate himself socially and professionally, but it was for him also an expressive outlet; drawing was a refuge from the gloomy household.

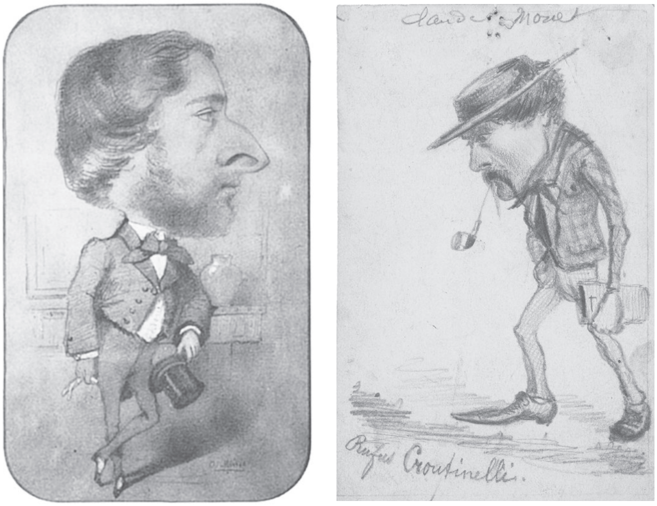
The only written record of the Monet family in the months after Louise's death comes from the Billecocq visitors. 'I'm not at all surprised at the demoralized state in which you have found the worthy Monsieur Monet,' Hippolyte told his son Ernest. 'I knew too well the affection he had for his regretted wife . . . For the poor husband, it's a broken existence, a void that nothing can fill.'[3] But Adolphe did soon fill it, in secrecy and shame: with the maid Célestine Vatine, who would give birth to his daughter Marie in January 1860. Adolphe did not reveal the child's existence to his sons. Confronted some years later with the news that Monet's lover was pregnant, Adolphe closed his ears. He expected, he said, that 'these things' remained unspoken, 'restent dans le silence'.[4]

Monet too kept things *dans le silence*. For forty years, no one recalled him talking about his mother, and never in his voluminous correspondence is she mentioned. When eventually he did refer to her, under pressure from interviewers after 1900, he was wilfully misleading. Once he predated her death, claiming that she died when he was only twelve but 'had already urged him to draw'.[5] On another occasion he extended her life to his student days in Paris when 'my mother in secret sent me small sums of money'.[6] That fantasy carried some emotional truth about his behaviour at the time, for in his letters until the mid-1860s, describing current events and interactions with his father, Monet repeatedly referred not to 'mon père' but to 'mes parents'. Although this can mean 'my relatives', Monet's use of the phrase, long after his mother's death, allowed him at least not to admit her absence from his life. If the deliberate vagueness was a defence, he may have uttered no happy recollection of his mother not because he had none, but because he found strength by refusing to look back and accept that she was gone.

Monet's stepson said that his aunt was 'the only person from this time of whom he talked with affection'.[7] Adolphe, sneaking off to visit his 21-year-old mistress in the bustling rue des Pincettes, a few minutes' walk from rue Fontenelle, was distant from his sons. Léon was absorbed in his studies. The brothers were never close and, according to family memory, a lifelong antagonism existed between them. But there is an implication of common experience in a gift made much later. One week after Léon himself was widowed, Monet gave him an 1856 landscape drawing signed 'à mon frère, souvenir de notre jeunesse', dated 20 September 1895 – a condolence gesture which recalled their shared difficult year, 1856–7. Léon, in the family tradition, remarried quickly, and in his sixties became father to a daughter, whom he named Louise, after his mother.

'Certainly life has its sad moments, but if you let yourself continue like this, you are lost' was Monet's advice, many decades on, to an inconsolably bereaved woman whom he loved.[8] It was given from his own experience of resilience and recovery. As an adult, he was explicit about attempts to sublimate unhappiness in painting: 'I have to be able to work to conquer my grief.'[9] At sixteen, he was already doing so. On the one hand, he was out with his sketchbook on the cliffs, heralding the habits of a lifetime – Geffroy asserted that Monet was predominantly 'a man of solitude' for whom 'nature has been the most splendid refuge'.[10] On the other, he threw himself into the busy sociability of making caricatures, and an enterprising marketing of them.

With his *portraits-charges*, Monet steps out of the childhood mists of Le Havre, and begins to forge an identity. He received commissions, he boasted, and 'according to the appearance of my clients, I charged ten or twenty francs . . . the scheme worked beautifully. In a month my patrons had doubled in number. I was now able to charge twenty francs in all cases.'[11] These caricatures link the provincial adolescent to metropolitan modernity, to a genre inherently rebellious – even if his bourgeois subjects treasured the results enough to pay for and keep them. Their aggression is also defensive, for distortion deflects the threat of another's subjectivity. They were an assertion of power at a time of vulnerability. In them, little Oscar got the better of 25-year-old Eugène, his smooth, complacent, hook-nosed cousin, top hat to hand, who was rising in the Lecadre business. And Monet was ruthless with a rival young aspiring artist, Henri Cassinelli. Renamed 'Rufus Croutinelli' (a *croûte* is a sketch), he was depicted with his shoulders hunched, downcast and hindered by too-large shoes, staggering unevenly along the street, as if Monet hoped he would trip up.



Monet, *Eugène Lecadre*, *c.*1858 and *Rufus Croutinelli*, 1858–9

Why are we amused at 'the spectacle of a man who falls . . . who stumbles at the edge of the pavement', Baudelaire asked in *De l'essence du rire*. 'One finds at root, in the thinking of he who laughs, a certain unconscious pride: me, I don't fall; me, I walk straight.'[12] The caricaturist Oscar Monet at seventeen was walking straight – towards Parisian modernity. He was also expressing something indomitable in his relationships with others: that he would accept them only on his own terms. He would carry elements of his *portraits-charges* into the painting of Claude Monet, in his hard emphatic touch, and in his stark, anonymizing way of engaging with the human figure. From the eleven picnickers in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* in 1865 to the pictures of girls in boats of 1887–90, whoever he depicted was playing a part in a composition, not a psychologically considered or independent person.

This is one reason that Monet became primarily a landscape artist. Another was the painter Eugène Boudin. Monet met this tall, slow-moving, good-natured sailor's son, sixteen years his senior, in the framer's shop when he was crowing over his display of caricatures. Boudin's pictures were also on show, and did not sell. Self-taught and self-doubting, Boudin, with his inquisitive eyes, domed forehead and fan-shaped beard, was a familiar but mostly scorned figure in Le Havre. Born in Honfleur and apprenticed at twelve to a printer, he had met the Barbizon realists Charles-François Daubigny and Jean-Francois Millet when he worked in a stationery shop, and following their example he began to paint informal, non-academic seascapes and landscapes *en plein air*.

In 1854 he was thirty, lived in an attic and told his diary: 'I'm only too aware of my unimportance . . . I have not a penny in the world, I have absolutely nothing.' Two years later, things had slightly improved when he noted: 'people are beginning to visit me and I'm no longer treated like a miserable failure.' In December 1856 he set down his quest for the new year: 'To bathe in the depths of the sky, to express the gentleness of clouds, to balance these masses far, far away, from the grey mist, to set the blue of the sky alight, I can feel all this within me, poised and awaiting expression.'[13] He was trying to make it happen when he encountered the audacious young caricaturist who thought himself 'an important personage in the town',[14] enjoyed drawing as an instinctive pleasure, but 'had never seen a canvas being covered' in paint.[15]

'I remember our meeting as if it were yesterday,' Monet recounted to Boudin's biographer Georges Jean-Aubry. Monet had until then shared Le Havre's prejudice against Boudin. His 'expansive and generous personality was already apparent', he recalled, but

> I had seen his work on several occasions, and I must admit I thought it was frightful. 'These little things are yours, are they, young man?' he asked. 'It's a pity you don't aim higher, for you obviously have talent. Why don't you paint?' I confess the thought of painting in Boudin's idiom didn't exactly thrill me. But, when he insisted, I agreed to go painting in the open air with him. I bought a paintbox, and we set off to Rouelles, without much enthusiasm on my part. I watched him rather apprehensively, and then more attentively, and then suddenly it was as if a veil had been torn from my eyes. I had understood, I had grasped what painting could be. Boudin's absorption in his work, and his independence, were enough to decide the entire future and development of my painting. If I have become a painter, I owe it to Eugène Boudin.[16]

The fateful meeting took place in 1857, and Monet was soon following Boudin. 'Together we went on long walks during which I never stopped painting from nature. That's how I understood it and got to love it

Eugène Boudin

passionately.'[17] His attraction to Boudin was instinctive: a teacher with untiring kindness guided him to a stage beyond drawing. It helped that Boudin was temperamentally his opposite – mild, moderate, modest. Monet would probably have resisted a more forceful personality. As it was, he learnt *plein air* painting from a teacher in the vanguard, and at a propitious moment. *Plein air* painters had been significantly helped by John Rand's invention, in 1841, of the collapsible paint tube, light and portable, and the Impressionists would further exploit its bright new synthetic colours, made possible as chemistry advanced.

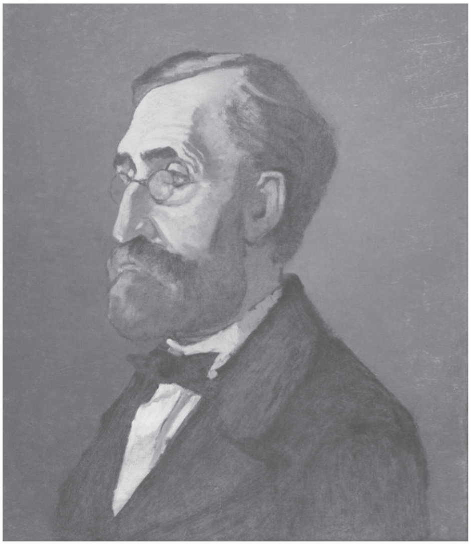
'How long is it since we set out to try ourselves out on the landscapes of the Rouelles valley[?]' Boudin asked decades later, recalling 'our years as beginners'.[18] The recollection is of a parallel endeavour rather than mentor and pupil. Rouelles, in the valley of the river Lézarde, was a fifteen-kilometre hike from Le Havre through forests and villages. *View of Rouelles* is Monet's first known painting, and his first to be exhibited, at Le Havre's Société des Amis des Arts show in August–September 1858. Monet had positioned his easel next to Boudin, who depicted the same scene in *Norman Landscape*, but to different effect. Boudin's rural idyll balances river, trees, farmhouse, the roofs of a hamlet and cattle grazing in a pasture. The drifting clouds imbue the scene with life, but at ground level everything is static. Monet cut most anecdotal detail – no houses, no animals, only a lone fisherman – and simplified the scene to emphasize a row of poplars reflected in the river, which opens up in the foreground into a pool of light.

Boudin's is a work of careful naturalism, Monet's a schematic, composed picture. Executed in a higher colour key, more imbued with the effects of light and air than Boudin's, and harmonious in the equilibrium between water, sky and the fisherman's blue shirt, his little landscape anticipates a lifetime's concern with weighing fidelity to observed nature against the demands of pictorial construction. He surveyed the scene, and concentrated on what gave structure and luminosity: the poplars and the pool of water. Both became favourite motifs when he was rethinking what landscape could be in Giverny in the 1890s and 1900s. Aged seventeen and out with Boudin, 'my eyes, finally, were opened' to nature, he said, then, 'I analysed it in its forms with a pencil, I studied it in its colorations.'[19] With him for the whole of his life was Boudin's conviction that 'anything painted directly from nature and on the spot has always a force, power and vivacity of touch that one cannot find in the studio . . . Three brush strokes painted from nature are worth more than two days' work at the easel.'[20]

In 1858 this was eccentric, and Boudin's was the opposite of a successful career. He was so poor that he burnt his furniture to keep warm, but he was slowly gaining respect from somewhat like-minded, more famous peers. Corot, acclaimed painter of Arcadian, silvery landscapes, begun in the open air but finished in the studio, called Boudin 'the king of skies'. Gustave Courbet, the pioneer of realism, saw a Boudin picture in 1859 and demanded an introduction. Boudin kept his head, noting, 'He really is a vigorous man. His approach is broad . . . at the same time I find it very coarse, and his attention to detail, very summary and rather styleless. I feel that there is a truer and surer way to paint.'[21]

Boudin's loose connections with the celebrated realists of the age alerted Monet to a cultural scene beyond Le Havre. By the time he was eighteen, Monet was giving promotional advice to his teacher, declaring, 'There is a total lack of marine painters, and it's up to you to set off on the road which will lead you far.'[22] Monet would follow that advice himself, overtaking Boudin, who never sought prominence and whose career unfolded gradually. Once he had taken what he needed, Monet did not always repay Boudin's kindness. 'I have many causes to reproach myself as far as you're concerned, and I very often do,' he wrote in 1889, 'but don't let this make you less certain of the friendship I feel for you, nor of my gratitude for the advice you gave me, advice which made me what I am.'[23]

The teenage Monet was bold enough to ask Boudin for the gift of a sketch. In turn, asking sadly years later for a 'keepsake', Boudin wrote, 'If I have one regret on seeing myself growing old, it's that among my souvenirs . . . I have not the tiniest little bit of a painting by you . . . I once had a very beautiful one . . . without a circumstance of which I don't have to remind you, it would still be on my wall.'[24] The implication is that Monet took advantage of Boudin's good nature. The gap widened quickly. Boudin in his forties was still warning himself, 'I must work to eliminate a certain timidity . . . which is a long-cherished provincial habit.'[25] Monet was a provincial in a hurry not to be one.



Monet's portrait of his father, Adolphe Monet, 1865

Six months after meeting Boudin, he had made his decision: 'I announced to my father that I wished to become a painter and that I was going to settle down in Paris to learn.'[26]

Adolphe Monet had more pressing concerns. After Jacques Lecadre died, in 1858, Hippolyte Billecocq noted, 'M. Lecadre's death should have the effect, it seems to me, of dissolving the business which he directed: what will happen to M. Monet père? Will he continue to preside alone, or will he have to find another position? The prospect of a legacy coming to his sons would be sweet, but it in no way ensures his livelihood now.'[27] The worldly Billecocq had observed Adolphe Monet through the 1850s, and his lack of confidence was justified. Adolphe did not stay long at the company, retiring in 1860. His widowed sister, for whom Jacques had ensured a comfortable private income, welcomed him at Le Coteau and helped support him. His own funds were channelled, secretly, to Célestine Vatine after the birth of Marie. Monet's depiction of his father in 1865 suggests Adolphe did not age happily, nor win his son's sympathy. The profile portrait shows a heavy-lidded, morose figure with turned-down mouth and half his face shaded – a descendant of the harsh caricature mode.

It is hard not to see Boudin in 1858 fulfilling a nurturing paternal role for Monet that was absent at home. It may have been to this period, and to summers at Sainte-Adresse, that Monet referred, in a rare throwaway remark, 'I learnt gardening in my youth, when I was unhappy.'[28] His room was on the second floor at Le Coteau, and from it he depicted the wooded valley with the towers of the churches Saint-Denis at Sainte-Adresse and Saint-Vincent at Le Havre, fog rising from the estuary, sky and water tinted pink: *View of Sainte-Adresse from Aunt Lecadre's House*, a picture belonging to his brother Léon. A corner of the white house with green-grey shutters, and Monet's window, peer out from his painting *Garden in Flower*. Eugène, who married his Lecadre cousin Marguerite, a Havrais doctor's middle daughter, inherited Le Coteau in 1871 and demolished it in favour of a turreted Anglo-Norman pile. But for Monet the dappled park, abundant and multi-hued with its tall rose bushes darting up from bright flower beds, its curving gravel paths and the sheltering screen of hedges and trees, was the prototype for all future gardens, first in paint, then in fact when he created his own. In the mid-1860s he made a group of scintillating garden paintings led by *Woman in the Garden* [Plate 6], where Marguerite Lecadre with her parasol strolls past flowers in a sunlit glare. Eugène and Marguerite acquired this major painting,* then swapped it with a Havrais collector for a pair of Chinese vases.

In adolescence Monet basked in Lecadre largesse. As Adolphe's means were reduced, Jeanne's fortune and the estate at Le Coteau kept the Monets in bourgeois style. *Peaches in a Jar*, the clove-studded bottled fruit reflected on a glassy surface, depicts the pride of Jeanne's greenhouse – she would send her nephews gifts of peaches – and distil the indulgence and taste of childhood. Without a husband to care for, this fragile, determined woman, nearly seventy, concentrated her affection on her nephew. She got little thanks. She allowed Monet to use her studio, and made him a present of a landscape painting. Monet claimed she had failed to recognize it as by Daubigny, the Barbizon *plein air* painter; he identified it and sold it. That she did not understand what she was giving him seems unlikely, as the Barbizon artists

---

* It is now at the Hermitage in St Petersburg, and was the catalogue cover image for the Monet retrospective at the Grand Palais in Paris in 2010.

Jeanne Lecadre

were well known by the 1850s, and Jeanne had connections with realist painters through a friendship with the painter Armand Gautier, a disciple of Courbet and frequent visitor to Le Havre. She and Gautier, a fervent republican and a generous man, kept up a regular correspondence. Jeanne was well informed, cultured and smart. Monet seems to acknowledge her qualities in a caricature of an elderly woman whose features, affable intelligent expression, wide-mouthed yet reserved smile and old-fashioned Norman pleated headdress all resemble Jeanne Lecadre in a photograph. This was one of the few caricatures Monet neither sold nor gave away.

Of Adolphe, Monet spoke only with derision. His father 'opposed him vigorously'[29] from the outset, he said, and never gave him a franc. The paintings depicting him disprove this – Adolphe, after all, posed for them – and so do Le Havre's archives. On 6 August 1858, Adolphe Monet applied to the municipality for a grant for his son to study art in Paris; the city ran a competition to help promising candidates embarking on their careers. The attempt was unsuccessful, and Adolphe applied again on 21 March 1859. Between these dates, Monet, out of school, drifted. In the summer he was steadied by Boudin. In the winter he hung out downtown, making 'drawings from the theatre, on separate sheets, *portraits-charges* of all the artists in the troupe and several musicians from the orchestra'.[30]

These were displayed in 1859 at the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville in the shop of a photographer called Lacourt, and were still remembered in Abbé Anthiaume's gathering of recollections *Le Collège du Havre* in 1905. We can trace a connection, arising in the 1850s–60s, between the virtuoso speed of caricature and the flash of photography. The caricaturists Carjat and Nadar both became celebrated photographers.* Monet said that he also made portraits, for 5 francs a head, of sea captains coming off the boats. He was thus in direct competition with the Macaire-Warnod brothers, who set up their photo booth on the Le Havre quay in 1851, and in 1858 netted as a customer, among numerous other travellers, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She was a fervent admirer of photographs: 'I would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest Artist's work ever produced,' she wrote.[31] Already, in 1851, the *Revue du Havre* reckoned the brothers' photographs had 'a truthfulness which would be the despair of the most skilful pencil'.[32] In Le Havre, the contest between the media heightened when the Macaire-Warnods appeared in the 'drawings' section of Le Havre's Société des Amis des Arts exhibition in 1858, with 'portraits et marines instantanés, non retouchés'.

Louis Daguerre had announced the invention of the daguerreotype in 1839. Quite soon it became clear, to thoughtful artists, that photography would make painting's documentary function obsolete, and technical virtuosity at rendering reality became ever less important – expressive content, inventive composition and colour more so. Monet, and his friends born at the time – Cézanne and Sisley in 1839, Renoir and Berthe Morisot in 1841 – belonged to the first generation of painters challenged at the outset of their careers by photography's *instantanéité* and objective eye. Monet competed with the first, and developed painting which declared its own subjectivity – a response to the second.

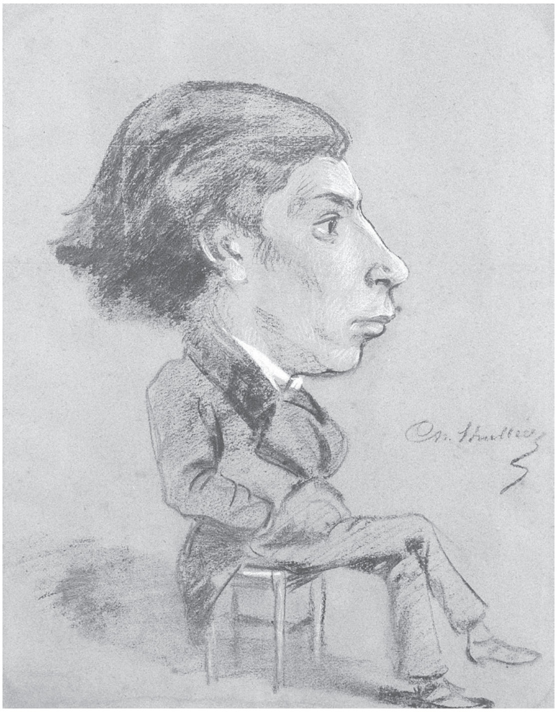
His display at Lacourt's drew attention from the committee considering grant applications. There were six candidates in spring 1859, reduced to five when Cassinelli, aka Croutinelli, was disqualified because he was not French. The case of 'Monnet (Oscar)' intrigued the municipal board: 'we all know . . . his remarkable natural disposition for caricature' but 'is there not in this precocious success, in the direction so far towards this facility of drawing, a danger, one that will keep the young artist away from more serious studies?'[33] The sketchy virtuosity of his *portraits-charges* was too easy. Monet's paintings would meet similar criticism for the next quarter century.

---

* Monet would come to know both: Carjat was the first to photograph him, in 1865; Nadar lent his premises for the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874, and later made famous images of the elderly Monet.

At rue Fontenelle, Monet's future was also unclear, but he was on a loose leash. While Léon was taken on by the Swiss firm Geigy and began a successful career as a chemist, and Eugène thrived in the family company, developing a profitable specialism in wool, Oscar drew, painted, studied illustrations in Parisian journals and dreamt of going to Paris. Later Monet claimed his father was biding his time, allowing him freedom only to 'catch' him at twenty, when the lottery for conscription took place. Under the Second Empire, military service was a seven-year stint, avoidable only by paying a substitute; thus an 'unlucky number' gave wealthy parents bargaining power over recalcitrant sons. When Monet was eighteen, this was a far-off prospect, but, like many uneasy teenagers, he began to resent the milieu on which he depended. Le Havre, he told Boudin, was philistine, 'a cotton town', 'this dirty city'.[34] Gautier concurred that 'the city is so commercial and the museum so neglected that exhibitions are rare.'[35] Monet, at least in retrospect, unfairly tarred his family with the same brush: 'I was born in a circle entirely given over to commerce, where all professed a contemptuous disdain for the arts.'[36]

Unfolding his biography to Thiébault-Sisson, Monet skirted the two years in Le Havre following his mother's death by pretending that he had simply not been there. He did not want to dwell on them. His version was that, against the will of his parents, he lived in Paris for four years, from the ages of sixteen to twenty, funded by an unlikely 2,000 francs earned from his caricatures. He told Geffroy too that he went to Paris in 1857. This is an invention: he is documented as living in Le Havre until 1859. In his legend of independence, Monet also cast his mother, dead before he set eyes on Boudin, as the opponent of the man he believed his saviour. Louise Monet disapproved of Boudin, he claimed, and 'thought me lost in the company of a man of such bad repute'.[37]



Charles Lhuillier's caricature of Monet aged eighteen

Louise shifts in her son's memories between adversary and secret ally, probably reflecting the ambivalence with which the adolescent Monet thought about her. But his living family was supportive. In spring 1859 Monet told Boudin that he had persuaded his father 'to let me stay a month or two' in Paris 'to work firmly at drawing'. He was to search out a teacher and an art school. Following this initial foray, he was expected back for summer 1859 in Sainte-Adresse to paint 'good studies in the country', then in the autumn he would return to the capital 'to settle definitively. That is accepted by my family.'[38] It was also funded by them.

The earliest known depiction of Monet comes at this time, appropriately a caricature, by Charles Lhuillier, who had trained with Ochard in Le Havre, and was Boudin's contemporary. He delineated a teenager with a dramatic quiff, dressed up in a too-large suit, a little foppish with his sharp lapels and bright neck-tie, the pose