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**CLAUDE MONET'S NORMANDY COAST PAINTINGS:
A LINK TO THE PAST AND A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE.**

By

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ABSTRACT

CLAUDE MONET'S NORMANDY COAST PAINTINGS: A LINK TO THE PAST AND A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE.

By

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Fantasies, dreams and memories became a prominent part of Claude Monet's art during the late 1880s and 1890s. In his Normandy Coast paintings, Monet moved from optical reality to a painting style of his own creation. Although he was known for his Impressionist technique, Monet gradually found this style unsatisfying and became depressed. This depression was caused by his inability to capture all aspects of how the light changed on an object. As he matured as an artist and as an individual, he began to realize that he wanted to harness the places, events and people of his life through art. He achieved this goal through the influence of Symbolist writers. Soon, he was able to accumulate past and present experiences and combine them into a few paintings, building a résumé of his personal and artistic challenges. Monet's departure from optical reality into a world of introspection and dream is significant because it contributed to future modernist techniques.

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1999

DEDICATION

Thanks to:

my husband James, for his support through these many years of education.

**Also, to my parents, siblings, and grandmother
who have always believed in me.**

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INTRODUCTION

“I’m still struggling as I can with the admirable landscape motif, which I’ve had to do in every weather in order to make just one which would be of no weather, of no season.”¹

Claude Monet has been classified by art historians as working within the Impressionist style longer than any other Impressionist artist.² However, the previous quotation from 1891 contradicts public opinion that Monet only sought to express the *enveloppe* or atmospheric effects at various times and under different weather conditions. The actual term “Impressionism” came from an art critic who ridiculed Monet’s *Impression Sunrise* of 1873 (Figure 1). The “Impressionist” name was linked to Monet and other painters who had similar beliefs about art. The Impressionist style was known for its accuracy in recording the physical world, and giving an authentic representation of color and light as seen by the eye. Monet’s work from the 1870s and 1880s is within the Impressionist style. Yet, by 1891, as the quotation indicates, weather and seasonal changes were not important to him at that time in his life. Why did he stray from painting an accurate representation of weather and seasonal changes which obsessed him during the 1880s? This thesis will explore the reasons why the 1880s Normandy Coast paintings are so different from the 1890s paintings of the same subject. In the 1880s, Monet’s artistic philosophy changed through personal and outside influences, but these thoughts were not actualized in his paintings until the 1890s. This maturation in artistic philosophy transformed Monet’s painting style. The three most obvious changes occurred through perspective, color and abstraction. These changes were important because Monet was able to break free from conventional views of perspective and color, and thereby, to achieve his ultimate goal of manipulating time and nature.

¹ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 220.
Letter from Monet to a Painter, November 1891.

² Peter and Linda Murray, *Dictionary of Art and Artists* (New York: Penguin, 1991) 280.

Through reading various books by Monet scholars such as Paul Hayes Tucker and Robert Herbert, it became clear that the 1890s Normandy Coast paintings were mentioned on a limited basis. The difference between the 1880s and 1890s Normandy Coast paintings needed further evaluation since scholars had not dealt with this topic extensively. These paintings do not conform to the Impressionist framework and seem to come from other forms of thought and influence. Artists such as Monet, mature in their goals and evolve in different directions. Artists can have many different styles or philosophies about art throughout their life. These categories of style or philosophies can be more damaging than helpful in our understanding of an artist. Monet did not ask to be an Impressionist artist, and in the 1880s, he tried to separate himself from that label by not participating in their exhibitions. Through reading Camille Mauclair's *Monet* from 1924, Virginia Spate's *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* from 1992, and various readings by Octave Mirbeau from the late nineteenth century, it seems there were deeper issues developing for Monet, which ultimately surfaced during the 1890s.

Monet's need for security and permanence opened the door to the 1890s Normandy Coast paintings. He found permanence in nature which was where he placed his "faith." Mauclair discussed Monet's great love of nature in his book *Monet*, and suggested that Monet was a pantheist. Why would Monet devote so much of his life obsessing about nature? To understand this question more fully, one must know that Monet did not believe in God. A belief in God often provides a sense of security and control over one's life that never inspired Monet. Generally, human beings place their faith in various types of dogma where they often have a sense of why they exist, and what happens to them after death. Even atheists have a sense of security that they have found their own truth. As many individuals search to understand God, Monet tried obsessively to understand nature. What he found had little to do with the mechanics of how nature operates. Instead, he found a spiritual connection with nature that provided him with a sense of permanence which he bestowed upon his paintings. Monet illustrated permanence through the use of symbolic colors which he learned from Symbolist writers, poets and critics. An art critic, Octave

Mirbeau, was a close friend of Monet. Mirbeau often referred to Monet as a Symbolist rather than an Impressionist artist.

In *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet*, Virginia Spate discussed Monet as a manipulative and controlling person in his pursuit of security. She also discussed how Monet's paintings merged time and space into a cumulative experience. His need for security became part of his art as he became obsessed with trying to control nature. This was most apparent in his paintings from the 1880s. Monet would become very depressed when he could not capture all aspects of how the light changed on an object. As he matured as an artist and person, he began to realize that he was truly after much more. His goal was to harness the places, events and people of his life through art. He would accumulate past and present experiences and combine them into a few paintings, building a résumé of his personal and artistic challenges.

During the 1880s, Monet increased his painting campaigns to the Normandy Coast. The paintings of the 1880s show a growth in stormy beach scenes with a sense of three-dimensional space and depth. The elements of earth, water and sky are painted naturally, as one might see them in real life. Color also appears natural. Dozens of canvases were used in one setting in order to capture the duration of light on an object. Therefore, it wasn't just particular times of the day such as morning, afternoon and evening, but every instant the light changed which accounts for the numerous canvases painted. During this decade, Monet's correspondence showed dissatisfaction with his paintings due to his obsession with capturing exact moments of time.³ Monet captured the essence of time, but not to the degree he sought. Though he seems to be obsessed with capturing these exact moments, there were other subconscious goals that he was trying to reach but he lacked the tools until he later found Symbolist thought.

The 1890s Normandy Coast paintings are more closely related to Monet's ultimate goal of "producing an illusion of an endless whole, of a wave with no horizon and no

³ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 99.

shore.”⁴ At this point, Monet’s Impressionistic style as defined in art books, severely diminishes. The 1890s paintings are calm, flat, two-dimensional surfaces that often appear abstract. His use of color creates hallucinatory effects of pastels while confusing one’s sense of truth about color in nature. The grass becomes a smoky pink and colors blend together unnaturally. He paints fewer canvases in the 1890s due to the evolution of his artistic philosophy. Since Monet was frustrated with trying to capture the duration of time, he began to focus on a cumulative experience that would incorporate his entire artistic career on the Normandy Coast in just a few paintings. These paintings represent the passage of time through a kind of résumé of his artistic and personal journey on the Normandy Coast. To control nature and time, Monet was forced to change his style and philosophy toward art. Since the Impressionist philosophy no longer met his goals of controlling nature, Monet’s scope broadened through his investigation of influential and popular Symbolist writers and critics during the 1880s.

Other artists such as Edgar Degas and Paul Gauguin also responded strongly to Symbolist concepts which dealt with two main ideas. The first was based on the unimportance of objects in a poem or painting, and the second dealt with ambiguous rather than precisely stated meaning. Monet attended their meetings and began friendships with some of the movement’s most influential critics and writers. Symbolist influences guided Monet, helped him mature as an artist, and lead him eventually to his goal of finding ultimate truth and unity in nature. This occurred in the last decade of his life when he helped to design the museum in which his *Decorations* or Water Lilies series was placed after his death. The Musée l’Orangerie was Monet’s last chance at achieving his goal of controlling an environment. It seems as though the museum was co-designed by Monet in order to eternalize himself through art, and to include others in a pantheistic philosophy of unity.

⁴ Denis Rouart. *Monet, Water-Lilies or the Mirror of Time* (New York: leon ameil, publisher, 1974) 61.

The first chapter of this thesis will explore the Normandy Coast paintings from the 1880s, while taking a closer look at his family and financial situation during that decade. Since Monet was influenced by Symbolism during the 1880s, the second chapter will explore Symbolist theories and their influence on Monet. The third chapter will look at Monet's new philosophy as revealed in the Normandy Coast paintings from the 1890s and will contrast the 1880s and 1890s Normandy Coast paintings in an attempt to explain why these differences occurred. The fourth chapter will deal with Monet's attempts at reaching his ultimate goal through the creation of the Water Lilies series located at the Musée l'Orangerie. In the end, Monet was more than just an Impressionist painter, he exhibited Symbolist philosophies which brought to fruition his desire to manipulate nature. The 1890s Normandy Coast series combined what he learned from the 1880s, therefore serving as a major stepping stone that enabled him to manifest his true motivations for forming a union with nature.

CHAPTER ONE THE 1880s NORMANDY COAST PAINTINGS

“To paint the sea really well, you need to look at it every hour of every day in the same place so that you can understand its ways in that particular spot.”⁵ The 1880s Normandy Coast paintings reflect Monet’s obsession with the passage of time. His correspondence shows him increasingly obsessed with capturing subtle shifts of light on an object or landscape. He would often bring a dozen canvases to one painting location in order to harness various weather effects in rapid succession.⁶ Throughout the decade, he revisited the Normandy Coast and preferred painting in the small villages of Fécamp, Pourville, Etretat, Dieppe and Varengeville. Monet’s love for the sea brought him back to Le Havre where memories abound, making the paintings extremely personal due to the vast memories of his earlier life on the coast. Here, art and life intermingle, and the changes in his personal and artistic life are transferred to his paintings during this decade. This chapter first discusses Monet’s personal life through the examination of his friendships and family, explores Monet’s artistic philosophy during this decade, and traces his intense need to control aspects of his family life, other individuals, the environment, and time.

Monet’s family life during the 1880s was filled with turmoil due to various incidents concerning his family, friendships and art. In 1879, Monet’s first wife, Camille Doncieux-Monet, died of cancer soon after their second son was born. *Camille on her Death Bed* illustrates a transparent sheet covering her body (Figure 2). Monet interestingly painted Camille with long sweeping brushstrokes in an oval composition. This painting style creates the illusion of being buried in an oval shaped watery grave. Camille’s body floats in unity with the oval womb surrounding her. From 1878 to 1881, the Monets lived with the Hoschedé family in Vétheuil in order to save money on rent. The house was large enough for both families and included Alice and Ernest Hoschedé, their six children, plus the two children of Camille and Claude Monet. After Camille’s death and

⁵ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 122. Letter to Alice Hoschedé from Claude Monet on October 30, 1886.

⁶ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 99.

the estrangement of Ernest Hoschedé from his family in 1879, Monet began a romantic relationship with Alice Hoschedé while still living at Vétheuil. Alice, a devout Catholic, would not marry Monet until her husband's death. Therefore, she lived in constant anxiety over whether to continue the relationship with Monet, or leave him and return to Ernest. Monet desperately wanted to continue the affair with Alice in order to maintain family unity. Alice cared for Monet's two sons, along with her own six children, which helped him out enormously. Monet loved Alice and enjoyed having such a large family which made him feel secure. Yet, insecurities existed within the relationship. Monet often had to struggle with Alice in order to keep her from leaving.⁷ Alice struggled with feelings of guilt because she was still married to Ernest, and according to the Catholic Church, living a life of sin. This battle went on through the 1880s and greatly affected his art. In 1883, Monet moved Alice and the children to a house in Giverny which was renovated to create a large, enclosed garden where he shared a private life with his new family.⁸

As Monet and Alice Hoschedé dealt with problems from their romantic situation, other factors aggravated their tense relationship. Illness struck Alice's two daughters, Suzanne and Germaine Hoschedé. Germaine would recover while Suzanne grew weaker each year. When she became bedridden, Alice began to take care of Suzanne's two children which was an additional strain on the family. Yet, Monet was accustomed to death. His own mother died in 1857 when Monet was seventeen, and he had lost many close friends and associates such as his good friend Edward Manet (d. 1883).⁹

Though Monet appreciated much of his colleagues' work, he began to move away from exhibiting with the Impressionists. This period has been characterized in terms of the 'crisis of Impressionism' which occurred when the Impressionists began to question their commitment to modern-life subjects, open-air painting and group exhibitions.¹⁰ Monet

⁷ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 110. Letter to Alice Hoschedé from Monet on March 3, 1884.

⁸ Joel Isaacson. *Observation and Reflection* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 1978) 37.

⁹ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 17.

¹⁰ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 134.

began to distance himself from the Impressionist exhibitions in order to establish a name for himself, independent from the group. He participated in his last Impressionist exhibit in 1882. This was partly due to his new ideas on how to market his art, and to his dislike of being associated with the Impressionist movement because of his shift in artistic influence and philosophy. In 1881, the gallery owner Paul Durand-Ruel reentered Monet's life. It was a time of economic depression in France. Durand-Ruel loaned Monet money constantly so that he could continue to support his painting campaigns and upper-middle class life-style. Monet made the equivalent salary of a French physician during the times when he claimed to be in poverty.¹¹ As Monet's sales increased through the Paul Durand-Ruel Gallery, Monet began to play one dealer against the other to ensure profit.¹² Though Monet sold much of his art through Durand-Ruel's gallery, he never sold his art exclusively through one source, which indicates that he was a clever businessperson. In this way, Monet was able to gain a substantial amount of financial security. Yet, Monet does not reach a period when he felt completely secure economically until the 1890s. His correspondence with Durand-Ruel illustrates insecurities about his financial situation. He continued to borrow money from the dealer.¹³

This decade illustrates a period of flux in Monet's life due to the death of his first wife Camille, his affair with Alice Hoschedé, the move to Giverny, the illness of Alice's two daughters, the new independence away from the Impressionist group, and finally the constant borrowing from his dealers. These turbulent times in his life are reflected through his 1880s Normandy Coast paintings. From 1881-1886, Monet painted in Fécamp, Pourville, Varengeville, Petites Dalles and Etretat where he earned the reputation as a painter of marines.¹⁴ Monet grew increasingly concerned with light, color and the difficulty in capturing nature. He began to familiarize himself with the landscape, painting it in all weather conditions and conveying his own personal feelings in the presence of

¹¹ Eldon Van Liere. *HA 840 Nineteenth Century European Art*, Michigan State University, class notes, Spring 1997.

¹² John House. *Monet: Nature into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 11.

¹³ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 33. Letters to Paul Durand-Ruel from Monet on March 26, 1881 and June 5, 1883.

¹⁴ Robert Herbert. *Monet on the Normandy Coast* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 37.

nature. Monet embarked on a new journey in the 1880s that eventually lead to the extraordinary paintings of the 1890s, affecting his art for the remainder of his life. Monet primarily painted in his studio during the 1880s, a fact that he never like to admit, “My studio! But I have never had a studio and I do not understand shutting oneself up in a room.”¹⁵ Since he was in his studio, he could not directly observe nature. Therefore, his memory was left with the difficult task of recalling details from paintings in *plein air*. Therefore, memory was often used to finish paintings that were started in nature. Though he began to paint more from the studio, he still suffered the discouraging task of trying to capture passing atmospheric effects from *plein air*, using as many as twenty canvases a day.¹⁶ This decade shows the impossibility of what he was trying desperately to accomplish. Correspondence indicates that Monet “raged at his inability to express it (the sea) better,” and was growing extremely dissatisfied with his art and tired of fighting a losing battle with nature.¹⁷ Monet’s 1880s Normandy Coast paintings show an increase in turbulent weather conditions, which is not surprising since Monet’s artistic and personal life was in an upheaval.

The ocean brought out a strong emotional response in Monet’s work. He grew up by the ocean and felt a deep affinity toward its power and believed that it rejuvenated him in times of hardship. Monet found certain locations which he painted more frequently than others. For example, *The Coast Guard’s Cottage* was one such location that he favored above all others in this region (Figure 3).¹⁸ The stone cabin was built in the beginning of the century for observing coastal traffic and was subsequently used by fishermen for storage and temporary refuge.¹⁹ This painting illustrates an example of the strong textural quality of the 1880s compositions. The green colors are rich and the foliage circles around the cottage like a web. The red flowers are clearly marked within the grass while the boats

¹⁵ Steven Levine. *Monet, Narcissus, and Self Reflection* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 23.

¹⁶ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 154.

¹⁷ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 113. Letter to Alice Hoschedé from Monet on October 20, 1885.

¹⁸ Robert Herbert. *Monet on the Normandy Coast* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 46.

¹⁹ Robert Herbert. *Monet on the Normandy Coast* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 46.

cruise slowly upon the ocean. The horizon acts like a demarcation line between earth and sky, rather than a smooth transition of these two elements. Above the horizon, separating water from air, is a cloudy sky that leads the eye back to the ocean and quickly to the safety of the dark green cliff. It seems as though the small cabin acts as a surrogate for Monet who has battled the ravages of time and life, much like the cabin itself. Monet painted this cabin at many different angles and times of the day. The painting of the cabin illustrates active surroundings through the movement of grass, clouds and water. The activity divorces each element from one another in clear components of earth, water and sky. There is a lack of unity within these three elements due to their finely pronounced sections within the painting. There appears to be some intermingling of color through the use of green in the ocean, but for the majority of the painting, each element exists on a separate plane. The painting serves as a window to nature where Monet's observations are clearly defined.

Harsh weather conditions and the clearly defined textural qualities were common in Monet's paintings during the 1880s. One example, *Fishing Boats and the Porte d'Aval*, depicts a division within the composition caused by the material quality of objects, and the separation of elements through line (Figure 4). The boats sit on the sand while the wind blows the puffy, white waves which, in turn, pound hard against the beach. The rock formation in the background shows the needle plunging into the sea, but the viewer can still see the sky through the needle's opening. The rock formation has a strong textural quality and one envisions a rough, stone texture. The needle serves as the cliff's only weak point. Once again, a demarcation line for the horizon appears which leads the eye to the well-defined sky. The wood boats are red and green and illustrate the fine slope of each boat, and the shacks on the beach are clearly defined. The ocean's waves are threatening and one gets an insecure feeling about the safety of the boats so close to the beckoning sea.

Another example of Monet's use of harsh weather conditions includes the painting *Pourville, Flood Tide* (Figure 5). Once again, Monet paints his beloved cabin from a bird's eye view. Monet seems to be experimenting with a geometric composition and a

nominal area of sky. The green A-framed cliff points to the sky as the wind blows the grass toward the cabin which withstands the pressure. The ocean shows white caps, indicating a windy day at sea. To show a sense of unity, Monet adds green to the blue ocean so that the eye moves from the green cliff to the ocean. The colors are not in complete isolation, they both oppose and interlace, making them interact and sustain each other. The painting shows movement while retaining a sense of permanence, an exact moment in time. Monet used this solitary, but strong cabin as a surrogate for his own personal life. Monet's life as an artist, father, and lover were not united and insecurities remained concerning the permanence of his personal life with Alice. Monet could identify with the cabin's vulnerability in nature, as Monet was vulnerable in his own life. Art historian Paul Hayes Tucker concurred with this point of view stating, "Whether blown by the wind or bathed in brilliant light, the house also takes on the attributes of a landscape painter alone with his motifs, enduring the elements in order to be one with them."²⁰ Tucker indicates that Monet saw the cabin as a surrogate for himself, but also implies an even deeper meaning. To be one with an element hints strongly of pantheistic ideas about nature.

Tucker's observations are in line with my own thoughts on the cabin during the 1880s due to the fact that Monet had a very strong attachment to this area. He grew up along the shoreline and felt at home on the coast. He eventually acquired a key to the cabin, much to his delight, and painted many paintings with the cabin as the focal point. Monet used objects in two ways, either to show how the atmosphere played against the object, or how he saw something of himself within the object.

In the case of the cabin, it appears that Monet saw it as an old entity that lived by the sea, facing many challenges and withstanding the ravages of time. Monet seemed to understand the problems the small cabin faced. Like the cabin, Monet withstood many hardships, but still remained. The prominence he gave the cabin in the 1880s vanishes in the 1890s. The reasons why will be evaluated more extensively in Chapter Three.

²⁰ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 108.

Monet continues to mature as an artist and develops new ideas that are expanded upon in the 1890s. One idea explored includes the descent into the composition. An example of this procedure is shown in three paintings, *Etretat, Rough Seas*; *Cliff at the Porte d'Aval*; and *The Manneporte, Etretat* (Figures 6, 7, 8). All three paintings are similar. They share the same scene of the needle (the area of the rock which plunges into the sea) with harsh weather conditions. Yet, *Etretat, Rough Seas* includes the beach, shacks, boats and two men, while the other two do not incorporate these elements. In *Cliff at the Porte d'Aval*, Monet begins to venture deeper into the composition by using just three elements earth, water and sky. Once again, he unites the composition by using the color blue mixed throughout each element. This leads the eye in a circular motion around the composition. The elements appear in close connection with each other by leaving out evidence of human intervention. Monet seems to understand that each element contains an extension of itself, and that they are all connected. Water exists in the limestone, clouds, land and, of course the ocean. It connects all elements.

The Manneporte, Etretat continues to give a closer view of the ocean, sky and limestone formation. The painting goes beyond changes in weather conditions. Here, Monet focuses on the needle as an instrument of time. The needle erodes slowly, as water tears at the limestone and forces the rock into the ocean where it breaks down. This is a continuous cycle that changes the appearance of the needle over time. It has existed for thousands of years and appears permanent, though in reality, it is constantly changing. Monet's paintings of the needle illustrates duality through its changing and permanent qualities. Monet's objective in the 1880s was to contain objects that constantly change. Monet paintings serve as a documentation of what the needle looked like in 1883. He stops the erosion process by containing the needle within the painting. Though Monet's focus was primarily on atmospheric effects, he also worked with changes in the natural world, such as the needle. Learning to look closely at nature was important to Monet who felt that people in general did not focus on these unseen forces that act across time. He said that, "People must first of all learn to look at nature, and only then may they see and understand

what we are trying to do.”²¹ Monet seems to use symbolic forms, such as the limestone, to express his personal feelings about life and nature.

These personal feelings give a sense of aloneness and sublimity. Art historian Steven Levine defines the sublime as “simply the heightened consciousness of beholding oneself beholding the world.”²² Since Monet was from the Normandy Coast, he considered himself a native of the area, not a tourist. The 1880s paintings show the power and beauty of nature, and one feels a sense of awe in its presence. His seascapes were different from his contemporaries, such as Eugène Boudin’s *Beach at Trouville*, because they did not focus on tourists, but on the power of nature (Figure 9). Monet did not include tourists in his 1880s Normandy Coast paintings, nor did he include the hotels and restaurants where these tourists spent most of their time. Monet did paint locations where tourists ventured, but also chose areas that were considered too dangerous or risky for them. The fact that Monet ventured to the coast in winter time indicates his desire to distance himself from the vacationing crowds and to draw on the original spirit of the area.²³ All of the paintings shown have differences and similarities in weather conditions and perspective, but all share the same conceptual importance based on reality. Monet shows viewers what the trained eye can see in nature. Therefore, the landscapes are believable. However, this technique changed in the 1890s. To understand why these changes took place, it is essential that one understands Monet’s personality traits which tended to be quite controlling.

Issues of control and security played a large part in Monet’s personal and artistic life. His dominant personality added to his obsessive need to manipulate family life and the environment. The first issue of control for Monet dealt with finding security in a relationship and family life which legally had none. In the 1880s, Alice, still married to her husband, continued to feel guilty about her relationship with Monet. Monet retained

²¹ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 109. Letter to a Journalist from Monet on March 21, 1883.

²² Steven Levine. *Monet, Narcissus, and Self Reflection*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Essay in 1985, p. 392.

²³ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 118.

control through his financial support and by reminding Alice that he loved her and all the children. Household issues were another way in which Monet asserted his dominance over family life. When Monet began working at Giverny, the whole household revolved around his timetable and was organized to fit in with the rhythm of his work.²⁴ Monet was also a strict father figure to his step children. For example, his step daughter Marthe was proposed to by a financially secure man whom she loved, but Monet refused to allow the marriage because he did not find the man suitable. He kept a close eye on his family, and even built homes and apartments for them on his property so that they could continue to live together as a family.²⁵ This need to keep family members close may be a result of Monet's early loss of his mother and the estrangement of his father. Monet created an ideal family life at Giverny. He embodied the ideal wholeness of the family, which follows the same pattern in his search for unity within art and nature.

Giverny was a world of Monet's own making. The location was perfect because it was on the Seine River, in close proximity to Paris and the Normandy Coast. The house was big enough to support his large family, and the property large enough to support his growing garden. Trees and flowers were constructed to surround his home so that the world outside could not penetrate the environment inside. He used to claim that painting and gardening were his only interests in life.²⁶ His obsession with the garden caused various arguments with the head gardener, Felix Breuil, and local townspeople. Felix Breuil worked for Monet for thirty years and tried to meet his demands. Monet was concerned about the relationships of color, density and texture within his garden. Breuil was not the only gardener that had to put up with Monet's difficult and controlling personality. There were five gardeners under Breuil that mainly tended to the weeds and water lilies. According to art historian Claire Joyes, "No detail escaped Monet; he would correct a vista, recompose a clump of flowers, alter a pattern, and insist on the removal of fading blooms. He planned his flower beds according to the principles that governed his

²⁴ Claire Joyes. *Monet at Giverny* (London: Mathews Miller Dunbar, 1975) 20.

²⁵ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 175.

²⁶ John House. *Monet: Nature into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 12.

palette, with light colors predominating and monochrome masses in juxtaposition.”²⁷

Monet never used earth colors in his art, and he followed the same guidelines in his garden, instructing the gardeners to use vibrant colors. The gardeners were also instructed to lay colors side by side and never to mix them together. This strategy was implemented in his art as well.²⁸

To make his dreams a reality, Monet manipulated his garden to suit the image in his mind, which he then translated to painting. Here are a few examples demonstrating how Monet used the environment to suit his personal and artistic vision. In 1893 he applied for permission to fashion a pond from a stream in order to cultivate aquatic plants so that he could later paint them. Permission was refused because local people thought that he might contaminate the drinking water. Monet was enraged! Since he was away from home, he ordered Alice to throw away the lilies and cancel the construction of the pond. Monet’s friend Octave Mirbeau was a personal friend to the local *préfet*. Mirbeau wrote a letter to the *préfet* pleading Monet’s case. Luckily, Mirbeau changed his friend’s mind.²⁹ Another conflict that occurred with the local people dealt with building a railroad by his land. Monet was worried that the train would cause a smoky residue on his property. He fought the locals by writing letters and attending meetings, but they did not comply with his demands. Monet was forced to pay the village a lump sum of money to keep the railroad away from his property for a certain amount of time. A final example of how Monet manipulated nature takes us to the Creuse Valley. Here, he paid a man to strip a tree of its new leaves in order to continue painting a winter motif previously unfinished.³⁰ This idea of controlling nature serves Monet’s long-term goals which eventually manifest themselves through his garden.

²⁷ Claire Joyes. *Monet at Giverny* (London: Mathews Miller Dunbar, 1975) 37.

²⁸ Claire Joyes. *Monet at Giverny* (London: Mathews Miller Dunbar, 1975) 26.

²⁹ Vivian Russell. *Monet's Garden* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1995) 36.

³⁰ John House. *Monet: Nature into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 145.

Monet learned partly about gardening and various philosophies about nature from the Japanese. Japanese beliefs were based on various religions, such as Zen, which strongly connected to nature. Japanese artists painted beautiful landscapes that were stylistically very different from western painting techniques. Yet, their painting style, along with the decorative arts, became extremely popular in parts of Europe during the nineteenth century. Through their art, the Japanese expressed a deep engagement with nature which had led most French observers to feel that the Japanese operated at a higher level of awareness.³¹ This appealed to Monet's love of nature. He bought Japanese gardening books, decorative arts and paintings from French dealers. Monet also bought plants from Japan, and even installed a Japanese foot bridge over his water lily pond and hired a Japanese gardener.³² In Japanese culture, garden arrangements promote a personal spiritual journey for all who enter. This concept greatly appealed to Monet's own belief in manipulating nature, and he integrated their gardening and artistic techniques into his life and art. Monet never mentioned believing in Japanese religious philosophies. Yet, he once stated, "I have no other desire than to merge myself more intimately with nature."³³ This idea sounds very non-western, and has a strong association to pantheistic notions of being one with nature. Certain Western religions separate themselves from this world because they believe that there is another world (Heaven) that is much more important than earth. However, Monet did not believe in God; he placed faith in his love for nature. Monet's need for security led him to manipulate the environment to suit his own personal and artistic needs.

The final issue of control for Monet dealt with the succession and non-succession of time. This issue of time meant different things to him as he matured as a person and artist. When Monet visited the Normandy Coast in the 1880s, he was obsessed with controlling exact moments of time. He wanted the moment to last forever, and since it was his experience with nature, it bonded him more intimately to his art. Yet, his obsession

³¹ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 184.

³² Paul Hayes Tucker. *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 176.

³³ Roger Marx, "Les Nymphéas de Claude Monet," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 41 1909, 524-29.

with following the *enveloppe* did not meet his needs, and as a result, caused him an enormous amount of anxiety. Monet once stated that he would need hundreds of canvases just to paint Etretat in one day.³⁴ He had expressed the impossibility of what he was trying to accomplish, but realized that there were other ways to express his artistic and personal message in a more complete way. These new ideas came from a group of art critics and poets known as the Symbolists.

³⁴ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 113. Letter to Alice Hoschedé from Monet on October 20, 1885.

CHAPTER TWO TOWARD SYMBOLISM

“Man does not live in a world of hard facts, or according to his immediate needs and desires. He lives rather in the midst of imaginary emotions, in hopes and fears, in illusions and disillusion, in his fantasies and dreams.”³⁵

Fantasies, dreams and memories became an important part of Monet's art in the late 1880s and 1890s Normandy Coast paintings. I believe these ideas stemmed from the Symbolist movement which gained momentum during the *fin de siècle*. To understand Monet's change in philosophy, it is crucial that the major contenders of the Symbolist movement are discussed in some detail. This chapter will first discuss anxieties felt by individuals due to the coming of the new millennium, which is referred to as the *fin de siècle* in France, followed by a discussion of Symbolist dogma and participating poets, critics, and artists, including Stéphane Mallarmé, Octave Mirbeau, Edgar Degas and Paul Gauguin. During the assessment of Stéphane Mallarmé, Monet's paintings will be shown to demonstrate Mallarmé's influence on Monet.

The term '*fin de siècle*' originated in a play from 1888 by two obscure Parisian writers, but the name was soon applied to a fear associated with the close of the nineteenth century.³⁶ This fear was felt by literate bourgeoisie who believed that the end of the century would bring decay, decline and disaster. France had seen its share of wars and revolutionary changes which fueled thoughts of ultimate disaster. According to Shearer West's book, *Fin De Siècle*, late nineteenth Europe was invaded by *fin de siècle* art and literature which self-consciously promoted themes of death and self-awareness due to anxiety about the coming century. Religion did not disappear as a source of hope and anxiety, but the 1890s was characterized by greater self-examination and more explicit

³⁵ Ernst Cassirer. "Symbolic Interactionism" *Nature and Types of Sociological Theory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981) 335.

³⁶ Shearer West. *Fin De Siècle*. (New York: Overlook Press, 1994) 1.

psychological perspective which was encouraged through literature and the visual arts.³⁷ Important qualities which distinguished the *fin de siècle* were the awareness of time and future, the idea that events were moving towards a final conclusion, and the belief that nothing happens without a purpose.³⁸ Art and literature began to reflect these concepts in the Symbolist movement.

Romanticism had been the accepted form of art and literature in the early part of the nineteenth century. French Symbolism differed from Romanticism and its exaltation of imagination and the worship of organic nature which stemmed from the writing of the American author, Edgar Allan Poe. The Symbolist aim was to create a new language whose primary function was not to convey meaning, but to alter the receiver's experience of the medium through the transformation of reality itself.³⁹ They believed that rhythm and harmony would help them achieve these goals of transcendence.⁴⁰ The anxiety from the *fin de siècle* transformed itself into a need to reconcile oneself with the world. This was accomplished by looking at what laid beyond one's immediate perceptions to search for the metaphysical that went beyond the material world.⁴¹ Symbolists' backs were not turned away from reality as it may seem. Instead, they sought ultimate truth and knowledge through self-evaluation and the pursuit of unknown realities through their art. Perhaps the most well-known Symbolist innovator was the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who changed the long history of French poetry's uniformity and conformity. Romanticism had preserved an optimism about its ability to apprehend an ultimate truth and to communicate it to others. The Symbolists felt unable to express what they considered unexpressible truths.⁴²

³⁷ Shearer West. *Fin De Siècle*. (New York: Overlook Press, 1994) 15.

³⁸ Shearer West. *Fin De Siècle*. (New York: Overlook Press, 1994) 1.

³⁹ Dee Reynolds. *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 198.

⁴⁰ Dee Reynolds. *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 198.

⁴¹ James Kearns. *Symbolist Landscapes* (London: W.S. Maney and Sons Limited, 1989) 36.

⁴² Laurence Porter. *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 11.

Mallarmé's poetry was deliberately complex and difficult to understand, and the meaning was vague. Mallarmé believed that objects were not solid forms and should be removed all together. His poetry displays a limited vocabulary of recurring metaphors as the main materials for poetry.⁴³ According to Laurence Porter's book, *The Crisis of French Symbolism*, Romantics assailed the absurdity and errors of existing institutions, seeking to reform them or replace them with others. The Symbolists saw all institutions as relative to time, place and circumstance, and therefore as delusional.⁴⁴ In his book, *The World as Will and Representation*, Arthur Schopenhauer sums up a current of thought widespread in the nineteenth century. "Time, space and causality are that arrangement of our intellect by virtue of which the one being of each kind which alone really is, manifests itself to us as a multiplicity of similar beings, constantly appearing and disappearing in endless succession."⁴⁵ Seeking transcendence from the world of images, Mallarmé abandoned romantic traditions and used writing as a vehicle for transcendence. According to Mallarmé, art had become too focused on materialism, rather than tapping into a spiritual and invisible world. He called for less precise information in order to express ambiguity and mystery which the Symbolists found attractive. Artists should suggest ideas and not state them directly. Mallarmé promoted imagination above observation in order to create an art form that was very personal and individualistic. His poetry is a guide to the world of fantasy that reveals complex truths about an individual, as one shall see from Monet's art.

Albert Wolff, Symbolist writer and critic for the French magazine *Le Figaro* wrote about Monet's paintings on the Normandy Coast stating, "The Sea at Etretat does not, however, belong to the naturalist genre. It is a fairy tale lake. It is then a fantasy sea with fantastic coloration, but very distinguished, with fantasy rocks."⁴⁶ Symbolist interpretations of Impressionism were the dominant trend in art criticism, and with this new

⁴³ Laurence Porter. *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 1.

⁴⁴ Laurence Porter. *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 8.

⁴⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*, 3 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1966) 224.

⁴⁶ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 173.

Albert Wolff, "Exposition Internationale," *Le Figaro* (1886).

trend, Monet's popularity grew between 1889 and 1891.⁴⁷ The above quote was directed toward one of Claude Monet's paintings on the Normandy Coast. It may seem odd to discuss Monet's art using terms such as "fantastic" to describe his painting techniques, especially since Monet has been known for trying to capture a real impression of light on an object or landscape. Yet, Monet became influenced by Stéphane Mallarmé and other Symbolist writers, critics, artists and sympathizers. In 1885, Monet began to frequent Berthe Morisot's monthly dinner parties where her close friend Mallarmé came on a regular basis.⁴⁸ Monet and Mallarmé's friendship grew, and in 1887, Mallarmé asked Monet to draw an illustration for one of his poems, which provides evidence of their mutual admiration and respect. Monet read Mallarmé's poetry and books and exclaimed, "I must tell you with what pleasure and delight I read your book. I was quite unaware of Poe's poetry; it's wonderful, true poetry, the stuff of dreams."⁴⁹ Mallarmé also wrote complimentary letters about Monet stating to Octave Mirbeau, "the man is definitely a genius."⁵⁰ The correspondence between Monet and Mallarmé leaves little doubt that they shared an admiration for each other. Mallarmé even asked Monet to send him a painting to be illustrated next to one of his poems, but the painting did not come until later. Mallarmé supported Monet's artistic talent when other Symbolist critics and writers thought that Impressionist artists merely reproduced illusions of objects, rather than transposing them to an imaginary space.

Yet, it became acceptable for Symbolist writers to link Impressionism with Symbolism in the early 1890s. Monet was one of these people who Mallarmé considered within the Symbolist frame work due to the disintegration of the object and the harmony achieved through the unification of colors. This disintegration causes abstraction by liberating the color from form, conveying suggestion rather than concrete analysis.

⁴⁷ James Kearns. *Symbolist Landscapes* (London: W.S. Maney and Sons Limited, 1989) 46.

⁴⁸ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 123. Letter to Alice Hoschedé from Monet on December 8, 1886.

⁴⁹ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 129. Letter to Stéphane Mallarmé from Monet on February 15, 1889.

⁵⁰ Rosemary Lloyd. *Selected Letters of Stéphane Mallarmé* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 185-186. Letter to Octave Mirbeau from Mallarmé on April 5, 1892.

Mallarmé's poems do not contain material reality, instead they suggest something. Monet's paintings became suggestive through the use of color and abstraction, and through the disintegration of the object as a signifier. For Mallarmé, the artist's aim was not to imitate nature, that would be impossible, but to recreate the effect the object produces. For example, a soaring bird is a symbol of joy and freedom. Therefore, the soaring bird acts as a symbol for the inner feelings of joy and freedom. Mallarmé achieved harmony through verse, and Monet achieved harmony through intermingling colors and past events. Through Mallarmé's influence, Monet was able to capture nature, and his own feelings about life in a profound and personal way.

Another hallmark of Mallarmé's poetry was his fascination with the oblivion or the void. As Robert Goldwater observed, "Mallarmé wished to do away with the symbol, eventually leaving nothing but the white page, evocative of all because it contained nothing."⁵¹ Art contains everything, but nothing because it does not exist. Symbolist writers seized inspiration and related all things through centralizing activity, creating a vehicle for self-contemplation.⁵² Mallarmé believed in a universal analogy, in the ultimate harmony or connectivity of all reality.⁵³ Mallarmé's influence of 'combining everything' spoke to Monet's obsession to capture the whole of nature. Presence and absence intermingled to form a mirror of repository or memories.⁵⁴ In the 1880s, Monet repeatedly painted the same object in hopes that the next one would be better than the previous version. However, the problem became difficult when he could not "refind" the previous weather effects.⁵⁵ Then in 1893, Monet looked within himself, rather than out at nature when he stated that he had difficulty in "refinding myself."⁵⁶ As one can see from the

⁵¹ Harry Rand. *Manet's Contemplation at the Gare Sainte-Lazare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 99. The Goldwater quotation is here.

⁵² Laurence Porter. *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 256.

⁵³ Robert Greer Cohn. *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965) 2.

⁵⁴ Laurence Porter. *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 261.

⁵⁵ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 111. Letter to Alice Hoschedé from Monet on March 26, 1884.

⁵⁶ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 176. Letter to Durand-Ruel from Monet on January 24, 1893.

previous two statements, Monet's philosophy of art shifted from looking outward to looking inward in self-contemplation. Monet scholar, Virginia Spate, discusses this transitional period from the 1880s to the 1890s. "Monet's ever more acute 'researches' into his own perception of light were appropriated by Symbolist writers concerned with inner life, while his leftist defenders sought to preserve the 'scientific' nature of his paintings."⁵⁷ Spate discusses the transition toward Symbolism which leads Monet to concentrate more on his inner thoughts and desires. Spate even discusses the fragmentation of time in Monet's 1890s paintings by stating, "Monet began to develop modes of painting which gave continuity to consciousness as it engaged with the passage of time."⁵⁸ This gradual transition from the late 1880s to the 1890s can be seen in two paintings which illustrate Monet's change in artistic philosophy.

Monet begins to use memory to reach into his past in order to reinvent his art as *Camille and Jean on a Hill* from 1875 and *Lady with a Parasol* from 1886 illustrate (Figures 10 and 11). The painting of *Camille* depicts her turning toward the artist on a windy day. Her umbrella, scarf and skirt blow in the wind as the clouds move above her. The foreground's low vantage point consists of a grassy hill which also moves with the wind. *Camille's* features, though not completely clear, can be deciphered. Monet's title also indicates that this is his wife *Camille*, who along with his son *Jean*, stand in the distance. The painting from 1886 depicts his step-daughter, *Suzanne Hoschedé*, and appears to be an almost exact reproduction of the painting from 1875. *Suzanne* turns to look at the artist as she fights with the wind that pushes her umbrella, scarf, and dress. The hill, once again from a low vantage point, shows vitality through the movement of grass. The main differences between both paintings lie in their use of color and the fact that *Suzanne's* features are hidden. The title of the painting does not offer the viewer any information as to the identity of the young woman. According to Monet's step-son *Jean-Pierre Hoschedé*, Monet caught sight of *Suzanne's* silhouette against the sky and exclaimed, "But it's like *Camille*! Well tomorrow we will come back and you'll pose

⁵⁷ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 202.

⁵⁸ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 202.

here.”⁹⁹ Monet’s visit with the Hoschedés to Etretat evoked a remembrance of the past that he shared with Camille.

Luncheon, from 1868-70, and *Luncheon under the Awning* from 1886 are two other paintings by Monet that show an infusion of past and present (Figures 12 and 13). *Luncheon* depicts a family lunch with Monet’s previous wife, Camille, and their son Jean. Monet’s chair is across from Camille’s with the chair pushed out, awaiting Monet. There are two women in the background, the woman resting against the window appears to be a guest, and the woman by the door appears to be the maid. The motif has a strong diagonal pull which takes the eye through the residence. The painting is a very natural portrayal that offers a clear perception of the surrounding world. *Luncheon under the Awning* from 1886 is less naturalistic because Monet was already working within the Impressionist style. This lunch takes place outside at a picnic table. The strong diagonal pull once again leads the eye to the empty end of the table, presumably where Monet and the rest of the family would sit. Sitting on the other side of the table, rests Alice Hoschedé and the young Michel Monet. The background shows the landscape of their home at Giverny. Once again, this painting resembles the previous luncheon through strong diagonals, but most importantly, through the concept of a wife and child sitting at the table, and the empty chair left for Monet to inhabit. Both past and present were remembered and united together to bring these events to a conclusion.

As the previous paintings illustrate, Monet was acutely aware of the fragmentation of time and the desire to use painting as a means to bring the past and present together. In this way, he created a circle of events to illustrate the passage of time through his personal losses and gains of family and friends, but also to show that they are still with him and connected to his psyche. Writing for the Symbolist journal, *La Cravache parisienne*, Georges Jeanniot claimed that the paintings of Monet spoke not only to the eyes, but also to

⁹⁹ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 175.

the most sensitive nerves and imagination. The paintings suggest the psychological character of things which had struck the memory.⁶⁰

After a year of being acquainted with Symbolists such as Mallarmé, Monet became influenced by them. He even gave Mallarmé a painting in 1890, in which the poet went into “rapture” as a result.⁶¹ Mallarmé’s friendship with Monet continued to grow as correspondence indicates. The two men had an appreciation for each other’s work. They shared similar goals of achieving mystery and allusion in one’s work and stressing a hyper-consciousness toward nature. Mallarmé’s poetry was considered difficult to understand, even by the standards of those who were well educated.⁶² The French writer for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Albert de Lostalot, commented that the public was hostile to Monet’s art because he painted in a foreign language to which he alone and a few initiates possessed the secret. The art of Mallarmé and Monet were considered by most people, above comprehension. They both wanted to create a new language in art which stemmed from self-contemplation and a need to express the inexpressible. They attempted to achieve these goals through mystery, harmony and ambiguity, which created a fluctuation between dream and reality evoking a feeling of transcendence. For the viewer or reader to feel this sense of transcendence, material reality had to be dissolved. Mallarmé found a way to link dream and reality through the use of organic unity, which he learned through Edgar Allen Poe’s writings.

This metaphysical component made a strong impact during the “second Symbolism” and included such writers as Stéphane Mallarmé, Camille Mauclair, and Octave Mirbeau. Organic unity was tied to a pantheistic concept that an individual’s body and soul were related to nature and the universe. Humans were not superior to nature, but actually a part of nature.⁶³ In Greek, *pan* means “all,” *theos* means “god,” and *en* means

⁶⁰ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 193.

⁶¹ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Monet in the '90s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 93. Letter to Berthe Morisot from D. Rouart, 1950.

⁶² Harry Rand. *Manet's Contemplation at the Gare Saint-Lazare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 99.

⁶³ Shearer West. *Fin De Siècle*. (New York: Overlook Press, 1994) 124.

“in,” which together means “all is God.” The term pantheism became more widely used when the German philosopher K.F. Krause (1781-1832), a student of Hegel, theorized that the deity was a divine organism inclusive of all lesser organisms. Therefore, God includes nature and humans and that the universe is God.⁶⁴ Then, philosopher Bernardino Varisco (1850-1933) affirmed Krause’s theory that God includes nature and that there is no dead, mindless matter.⁶⁵ Finally, the English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) developed a comprehensive metaphysical system where nature transforms atoms to people, and God is characterized as the unification of all things.⁶⁶

Symbolist writer Paul Claudel exclaimed this belief in pantheism by saying, “Hail O world bountiful in my eyes! I am in you, and you belong to me, and your possession is mine.” This feeling of being one with nature became well accepted in Symbolist circles. When Monet entertained close friend Georges Clemenceau, they often discussed his work. Monet told Clemenceau, “I simply direct my efforts towards a maximum of different appearances, in close correlation with unknown realities. When one is on the plane of concordant appearances, one cannot be far from reality, or at least from what we can know of it.” This statement shows that Monet felt some sort of force in nature that deals with the metaphysical. Monet’s personal and artistic philosophy match pantheism, as many Symbolist poets and critics agreed. Art Historian John House concurs; he states, “By all accounts, Monet was an atheist. In a generalized way, though, he seems to have felt some sort of force in nature; close friends, at least, attributed to him a form of pantheism.”⁶⁷ Camille Mauclair and Octave Mirbeau were Symbolist supporters who discussed Monet as being a pantheist.

⁶⁴ Charles Hartshorne. “Pantheism.” *Encyclopedia of Religion*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987) 165-171.

⁶⁵ Charles Hartshorne. “Pantheism.” *Encyclopedia of Religion*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) 165-171.

⁶⁶ Charles Hartshorne. “Pantheism.” *Encyclopedia of Religion*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) 165-171.

⁶⁷ John House. *Monet: Nature into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 224.

Mauclair wrote a book entitled *Claude Monet*, in which he discussed Monet's artistic philosophy. Mauclair described Monet's intense love for nature which manifested itself through his paintings. However, the paintings were not naturalistic, they suited Monet's artistic goals instead. Mauclair believed that the objects themselves were not important, and were used only to emphasize color, shapes, and points. Yet, these shapes and colors served other purposes as signs or symbols that meant something more personal to Monet. Mauclair believed that Monet was incredibly sensitive to nature and could see things within nature that most people could not interpret, such as atomic life forces. "Monet understood its (nature's) language before he essayed to speak it. All his work is one pantheistic poem, an unfolding of the imagination."⁶⁸ Mauclair claimed that Monet spent hours in communion with nature in order to understand himself and nature more clearly. According to Mauclair, Monet's art is a continuous metamorphosis that left the public face to face with the eternal, "the truthful hallucination of a pantheist."⁶⁹ French critic, Octave Mirbeau, was a Symbolist sympathizer, who like Mauclair, saw Monet as a pantheist.

Mirbeau was a novelist, journalist and one of the highest paid art critics of the time.⁷⁰ In 1886, Monet visited Mirbeau on Noirmoutier Island in Brittany. This visit was the start of a life-long friendship that inspired a spiritual awakening. Mirbeau shared Monet's intense love of nature, and both men were avid gardeners. Yet, writing was Mirbeau's first love, as painting was for Monet. Mirbeau's novel, *L'Abbe Jules*, teaches a lesson of freedom and harmony to those who will listen, which fits into his pantheistic beliefs about nature.⁷¹ Mirbeau's writings were extremely important for Monet since they promoted and defended his work.

⁶⁸ Camille Mauclair. *Claude Monet* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1924) 41.

⁶⁹ Camille Mauclair. *Claude Monet* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1924) 45.

⁷⁰ Christopher Lloyd. *Mirbeau's Fictions* (Durham, England: University of Durham, 1996) 2.

⁷¹ Reg Carr. *Anarchism in France: the Case of Octave Mirbeau* (Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 1977) 22.

In his 1891 article, he associated the art of Monet and the writings of Mallarmé, bridging the gap between Impressionist and Symbolist interpretation.⁷² Mirbeau witnessed what he called, the underlining forces of nature in Monet's art. He believed that Monet's art depicted both present and eternal, tangible and intangible mysteries of nature. According to Mirbeau, Monet's work as a Symbolist painter narrated nothing, but suggested everything.⁷³ Mirbeau also stated that Monet's pantheistic view of nature is composed of invisible energies which penetrate its every aspect, and is endowed with its own thoughts, moods and reveries to which the artist has access.⁷⁴ This statement clearly illustrates something beyond naturalism, into the unknown realm of personal introspection mixed with the spiritual. When Mirbeau refers to "mysteries" within nature and the "unknown realm," it appears that he is speaking in metaphysical and spiritual terms. It is if Monet had a deeper connection with nature, thus understanding the metaphysical life force behind human existence. Monet often responded favorably to articles that pleased him.⁷⁵ However, this article in particular was greeted with much warmth. Interestingly, after reading the article, Monet sent Mirbeau one of his recent paintings of the Customs-Officers' cabin, otherwise known as the coast guard's cabin on the Normandy Coast.⁷⁶ Monet may have sent Mirbeau the Norman painting to validate his assumptions. Writers such as Mallarmé and Mirbeau were not the only supporters of Monet's movement toward Symbolism. Artist like Edgar Degas and Paul Gauguin called for a deeper understanding of the self.

Edgar Degas was accepted by Mirbeau and Mallarmé as being a Symbolist sympathizer, but Degas was more than just sympathetic, he was actively influenced by their philosophy. He was often associated with the Symbolist movement due to his landscape paintings. Degas's work shows the disintegration of the object, and the serial representation of the same location which was similar to Monet. Mirbeau compared Degas

⁷² James Kearns. *Symbolist Landscapes* (London: W.S. Maney and Sons Limited, 1989) 48.

⁷³ James Kearns. *Symbolist Landscapes* (London: W.S. Maney and Sons Limited, 1989) 46.

⁷⁴ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 169.

⁷⁵ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 169.

⁷⁶ Octave Mirbeau. *Correspondance avec Claude Monet*. (Tusson, Charente: Du Lerot, 1990) 33.

Letter to Claude Monet from Mirbeau on December 30, 1884.

and Monet's work to music and symbolism, and when Mirbeau and Monet were together, they talked about the motif's color as if it were the most important feature.⁷⁷ Unlike writers, these painters could not use words as symbols. Instead, color was used to depict the inner emotions of the artist.

Degas's *Steep Coast* 1890-2, painted four years before Monet began to create his own dream landscapes, gave Monet time to see this painting which he mentions to his son-in-law Theodore Robinson (Figure 14).⁷⁸ Degas once exclaimed, "A landscape is a state of mind"⁷⁹ and believed that "one sees as one wishes to see."⁸⁰ He wanted to be free from the tyranny of nature by painting from imagination and memory. It seems nature was tyrannical for Degas for two reasons. First, he had difficulty seeing in bright light which hurt his eyes.⁸¹ Second, he had been told as a young man by the painter Jean-Auguste Ingres to paint from memory and not nature.⁸² Memory provided freedom from the shackles of direct observation of realism and naturalism. Degas told his friend Jeanniot, "It is very good to copy what one sees; it is much better to draw what you can't see any more but in your memory. It is a transformation in which imagination and memory work together. You only reproduce what struck you, that is to say the necessary. That way, your memories and your fantasy are freed from the tyranny of nature."⁸³

Monet had been chained to nature's duration by trying to capture exact moments of time which is impossible. Degas provided freedom from nature's ever changing ways. He told Monet that he wanted to paint "fantasy landscapes, or nature from memory that had been digested in imagination."⁸⁴ In 1890, Degas began to create monotypes to illustrate these points as seen in *Landscape in the Mountains* (Figure 15). Degas traveled

⁷⁷ James Kearns. *Symbolist Landscapes* (London: W.S. Maney and Sons Limited, 1989) 138.

⁷⁸ James Kearns. *Symbolist Landscapes* (London: W.S. Maney and Sons Limited, 1989) 219.

⁷⁹ Richard Kendall. *Degas Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 213.

⁸⁰ Richard Kendall. *Degas Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 209.

⁸¹ Richard Kendall. *Degas Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 209.

⁸² Richard Kendall. *Degas Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 210.

⁸³ Georges Jeanniot. "Souvenirs Sur Degas," *Revue Universelle*, October 1933: 158.

⁸⁴ Richard Kendall. *Degas Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 213.

throughout France and had remembered certain scenery, which was then translated through imagination on to the canvas. According to the philosopher Henri Bergson, “matter, as grasped in concrete perception which always occupies a certain duration, is in great part the work of memory.”⁸⁵ Bergson also argued, “that experience might be expressed as a stream of continuous flow of time, and draw attention to the individuals role in selecting and transforming this experience. Events melt into one another, without a precise outline.”⁸⁶ Degas and Monet both compiled past and present events (personal and artistic) into their art, using particular colors and images chosen from the past which interested them.

Fifteen years younger than Degas, Paul Gauguin was in many ways like his pupil. Similar to Monet and Degas, Gauguin began in the 1870s within the Impressionist circle. Degas and Gauguin’s friendship grew in the 1880s due to their similar interest in the Symbolist philosophy. Degas supported Gauguin’s work, buying *La Belle Angéle* from him in 1891 during financially difficult times (Figure 16). Though Gauguin was influenced by Degas, Degas was also influenced by Gauguin’s vivid color, imagination, texture, strong contour lines, simplified composition and fusion of colors. Gauguin believed that color was the language of a dream.⁸⁷ Like Mallarmé, Gauguin told artists not to copy from nature; that art was an abstraction and should be created as God created the universe.⁸⁸ Unlike Monet, Mallarmé and Mirbeau, Gauguin’s religious framework was based on Christianity.

Gauguin won respect from Symbolists like Mallarmé, being invited to his monthly dinner parties.⁸⁹ Another Symbolist critic that supported him was Albert Aurier, who wrote the Symbolist criteria for painting. Aurier believed that Gauguin was the first

⁸⁵ James Kearns. *Symbolist Landscapes* (London: W.S. Maney and Sons Limited, 1989) 226.

⁸⁶ James Kearns. *Symbolist Landscapes* (London: W.S. Maney and Sons Limited, 1989) 224.

⁸⁷ “Degas and Gauguin” *Apollo* September (1996): 48-51.

⁸⁸ Pierre-Louis Mathieu. *The Symbolist Generation* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990) 70.

⁸⁹ Pierre-Louis Mathieu. *The Symbolist Generation* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990) 70.

Symbolist painter, and his criteria followed Gauguin's vision.⁹⁰ Aurier outlined that Symbolist painting should express an idea, this idea will be expressed through forms or signs; these signs should be generally understandable using objects in a subjective manner; and the painting should be decorative (an influence of Japanese art to which Monet, Degas and Gauguin also adhered).⁹¹ Based on these principles, Aurier ridiculed Impressionism for its imitation of nature. Gauguin's *Vision after the Sermon* from 1888 opposed the naturalistic Impressionist style (Figure 17). This painting captured introspection through a group vision that touched on the invisible and the spiritual. Stylistically speaking, the paintings abstract, decorative, thick contour line and brilliant colors spoke to Symbolist notions of a dream that still had root in a form of reality. Monet's 1890s Normandy Coast paintings, though stylistically different than Gauguin and Degas, had the same Symbolist concept behind them. Monet shared their philosophy about memory, dream, and the invisible world-captured while still retaining a sense of reality. These concepts of capturing the impossible had always been a part of Monet's goal. He studied literature and paintings in order to answer questions that developed throughout his painting career. The Symbolist philosophy was compatible with Monet's own maturing philosophy on art. Symbolists like Mallarmé, Mirbeau, Degas and Gauguin empowered Monet to meet his goals during the 1890s Normandy Coast campaign.

⁹⁰ Beth Rae Gordon, "Aboli Bibelot? The Influence of the Decorative Arts on Stéphane Mallarmé and Gustave Moreau," *Art Journal* Summer (1985): 105-112.

⁹¹ Pierre-Louis Mathieu. *The Symbolist Generation* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990) 66.

CHAPTER THREE THE 1890s NORMANDY COAST PAINTINGS

“Matter or mind, reality has appeared to us as a perpetual becoming. But preoccupied before everything with the necessities of action, the intellect, like the senses, is limited to taking, at intervals, views that are instantaneous. Thus we pluck out of duration those moments that interest us.”⁹²

Philosopher Henri Bergson was well known in French literary circles during the 1880s.⁹³ He was influenced by monism which in comparison to pantheism, believes in a life force within oneself and nature. His best known books are *Time and Free Will* (1889), and *Matter and Memory* (1896). According to Bergson, body and soul are tied to nature. He tied this metaphysical belief to human consciousness which he believed was always in a state of flux. Human existence is not like a set of detailed photographs. Instead, it is highly selective, always pragmatic and self-serving. Bergson believed that humans pay attention to what matters most to them, and the conception formed of our surroundings is built up in terms of our interests. In this case, reality is a continuous flow, without separable units.⁹⁴ Therefore, consciousness cannot be charted. Instead, it is the product of duration or prior experiences and the realities of the moment that humans remember. Bergson saw everything as a part of everything else, and believed that humans were a part of this flow of all things.⁹⁵ Monet may have heard of Bergson during the 1880s through his association with the Symbolists, and/or through newspapers.

Ideas of painting a series devoted to a single subject were in direct correlation to issues of time and space that Symbolists and philosophers such as Bergson formulated. The following paintings illustrate these ideas. Monet used color to weave the past and present together, as he picked moments in time that interested him. These works

⁹² Henri Bergson. *Creative Evolution* (New York: Modern Library, 1944) 287-288.

⁹³ Bryan Magee. *The Story of Thought* (New York: DK Publishing, 1998) 214-215.

⁹⁴ Bryan Magee. *The Story of Thought* (New York: DK Publishing, 1998) 214-215.

⁹⁵ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Monet in the '90s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 274.

illustrate Bergson's theory that time is not static, and is in a state of constant flux. There is no proof that Monet ever read Bergson, but he did read Symbolist literature which often reflected Bergson's view. He had the opportunity to talk with Symbolists at Berthe Morisot's dinners and at Impressionist gatherings which took place on a monthly basis at the Café Riche in Paris. Monet attended these meetings.⁹⁶ There was a belief by Symbolists that colors could symbolize a moment within time and create an eternal instant, a link in a chain of events in which "the gods bestow the pure spirit of life that flees with time" according to Pierre Louys. The Symbolist André Fontainas believed that the search for eternity arouses a whole series of sensory echoes. Notice the reference to a "whole series" which reflects Monet's series paintings that echo past events in order to create a circle or whole. Monet observes things in time, as he stores memories to be used later. Fontainas also claimed that Monet saw and expressed the living element of a moment in nature, suggesting that the moment was not isolated, but possessed a vital element which propelled it in time.⁹⁷ It is not clear whether Monet knew Fontainas's work. However, Monet read articles by Symbolists, and was acquainted with many writers and critics from the movement, as previously stated. Monet was finally able to harness the moment which passes, and life which continues. This continuation leads Monet to a synopsis of his entire artistic career on the Normandy Coast. Monet's 1890s paintings shared an adherence to the same unity within nature and pantheistic ideas that inspired Symbolist writers. Monet was looking at Symbolist literature for answers to questions that had been forming in his mind for a very long time. "I am tired of working incessantly and of fighting like this against the weather changes."⁹⁸ Painting the *enveloppe* in various weather conditions did not satisfy him any longer.

Monet visited the Normandy Coast throughout the 1890s, experimenting with what he had learned toward the previous decade. In the 1890s, he began the Falaises series which was a small group of only twenty-four paintings, and some of the most unusual

⁹⁶ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Monet in the '90s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 93.

⁹⁷ André Fontainas, "Claude Monet" *Mercure de France* July 1898, 160, 164-5.

⁹⁸ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 108. Letter to Alice Hoschedé from Monet on February 16, 1883.

paintings created. This chapter offers a brief look into Monet's personal and financial life, an illustration of paintings during the 1890s, an analysis of the 1880s and 1890s paintings to illustrate their artistic differences, an analysis of the objectives of the 1890s paintings, and the outcome of the Symbolist and pantheistic influences that Monet experienced later in his career.

By 1892, Monet's life was improving for personal, financial and artistic reasons. Alice Hoschedé's husband had passed away the previous year which enabled her to marry Monet. His step-daughter Suzanne was soon to wed, and Monet was asked to escort her down the aisle. Monet's shrewd business sense began to pay off. Between 1891 and 1904, his income increased from over 100,000 francs to 270,000 francs, making him a very wealthy man.⁹ When Monet began to paint on the Normandy Coast during the 1890s, his life was finally complete and secure with the large new family that encircled him. With his new found security, Monet returned to the Normandy Coast villages of Dieppe, Pourville, Varengeville, and Fécamp. He commenced painting with caution, since the sites chosen each had to serve for a whole series of studies. The segmented landscape from the previous decade faded, as he found his voice in art through a new unity and harmony which is illustrated in the following paintings.

The elements in *Falaises de Pourville*, are not segmented from each other, but mingle with a common uniformity of light, color and texture that runs like a thread, tying the beach, sea, grass and cliffs together with a purple glow (Figure 18). This 1896 composition swings around in a semi-circle as the outline of the tide brings the eye from the background to the foreground in one swift movement. There are no boats, tourists, restaurants, or hotels in this painting, only earth, sky and water intertwined to form a whole. The grass and cliffs melt together in harmony. The dreamy quality that Monet began during this year became even more apparent in 1897, as the paintings reveal a hallucinatory state of mind. The importance that was placed on various times of the day and weather effects vanishes. Instead, Monet used unidentifiable times of the day when

⁹ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 201.

creating his paintings. This challenged the former belief that he was only interested in fleeting moments of time or specific light. As he painted more from memory, feeling and imagination, the notion that he only painted from nature disappeared. Instead of becoming a slave to nature's fleeting moments, Monet tried to transform nature into a reflection of himself and his art. Monet would most likely agree with Bergson's theory on duration. Time is in constant flux and cannot be captured through the eye alone.

Monet's *Sur la Falaise près Dieppe*, illustrates an extraordinary change in color which has not been seen in previous paintings (Figure 19). Viewers find themselves on a cliff looking at the sea where they gaze upon a range of colored grass, rather than typical green grass. The colors are soft pastels of pink, orange, yellow, green and blue. The cliffs stretch around the ocean and contain calm waters. The mid-ground depicts boats sailing in the sea, and its color incorporates the green and pink color of the cliff. The sky fills the background with blue, yellow, green, and orange which reflects the same colors in the sky, ocean and earth. This creation of color unifies rather than separates the elements. All of these elements are from the earth, therefore tied by a similar biological make-up. Monet illustrated this commonality by mixing the elements' colors.

Mixing these colors blends the landscape together. The cottage that Monet painted in the 1880s now becomes less pronounced and important as edges soften. The cottage that was once used as a surrogate for Monet in the 1880s, does not act as a self-portrait anymore. It is now intermingled within the landscape's swirling colors, forever bound to nature. By connecting the cottage to the earth, water and sky, both the cottage and Monet become whole and eternal. *La Gorge de Varengeville*, provides an excellent example of the cottage's change in importance (Figure 20). Monet painted the cottage many times, but he did so repetitively from similar vantage points. Here, the viewer gazes hypnotically down the path to the cottage. The foreground glows with pinks, greens, oranges, blues, and dark purples. The cottage in the mid-ground captures all of these colors from the grassy cliff which unites the cottage to the earth. The sea holds a light blue and purple color which matches the purple sky and then connects with the earth. One still finds the

green of grass, the blue of the sea, and multi-colored sky, but instead of being placed in their designated areas, colors are combined. This creates unity and harmony which hypnotically calms the viewer. The cliffs become more abstract as edges rise vertically instead of horizontally, and block the majority of sea and sky. This conversion gives the cottage less importance when contrasted with the 1880s paintings. The cottage is the same color as the earth, sea and sky which gives it a sense of harmony, rather than turmoil.

Monet began to focus in on the cliff's edge, which created an abstract vertical cliff in order to create a better sense of unification as *La Pointe du Petit Ailly* illustrates (Figure 21). The cliff tilts upward into a vertical upheaval of rock and grass. In the foreground, the cottage stands out with a bright pink roof which is cut off at the bottom. The cliff's edge covers half of the sky and sea so that only a small portion of these elements can be seen. The cliff incorporates streaks of green grass with pink, yellow and purple areas. The sky's pink and yellow color match the cliff's yellow and pink patches. The sea appears white, pink, yellow and blue. The composition still creates a sense of harmony and calm, but far less than the previous compositions that incorporated more unity through colors and soft edges. In this painting, Monet does not use perspective. The cliff does not recede into space, but acts more like a wall that ascends upward. This early use of abstraction took time and maturity to develop.

La Pointe du Petit Ailly also incorporates Monet's use of abstraction which was influenced by the Japanese artists' flat composition and strong geometric form. Monet had been interested in Japanese art most of his artistic career, and used its decorative quality in many of his previous paintings.¹⁰⁰ Though Japanese stylistic concepts play a role in this painting, other issues are active, too. For example, the cottage becomes almost unrecognizable as it melts into the cliff. The cliff vertically rises into a geometric shape, and incorporates green, yellow, purple, orange, white and shades of blue. Monet removed the sky and ocean completely and only depicted the towering cliff, but these elements still exist within the composition through color and form a single, unified composition. This

¹⁰⁰ John House. *Monet: Nature into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 57-58.

painting directly illustrates Monet's effort to find complete unity. One element incorporates the sea, earth, water and sky.

The changes that took place during the 1880s and 1890s are also evident through the use of comparison and contrast. In a first comparison, *The Beach at Porte d'Amont*, 1883 and *Sur La Falaise près Dieppe*, 1897, both have very similar and dissimilar attributes (Figures 22 and 19). The 1880s painting is more naturalistic, where the 1890s painting is unnatural due to the bizarre color of the landscape. Yet, both paintings offer similar vantage points, with sailboats, earth, water and sky as their principal elements, and share similar colors as well. Pink, red, white, blue, green, yellow and orange are found in both paintings. However, the 1890s colors are imagined and unclear, something similar to a dream. Atmospheric events that could not be captured, are now being harnessed and redefined through Monet's own personal feelings toward nature. In March 1893, Monet wrote a letter to his biographer, Gustave Geffroy stating, "Regretfully I can only repeat that the further I get, the more difficult it is for me to convey what I feel; and I tell myself that anyone who claims he's finished a painting is terribly arrogant."¹⁰¹ Here, Monet comments about the need to convey what he feels toward nature, rather than being concerned about spontaneity, an attribute of his early Impressionist style, or conveying what was actually seen. Instead, the importance rests in his own inner feelings about these personal places that he loved dearly.

The second contrast deals with the paintings, *Cliffs at Varengeville*, 1882 and *La Gorge de Varengeville* from 1897 (Figures 23 and 20). The color does not melt together in the 1880s painting. Instead, one finds a rock formation that appears heavy. The foreground's green grass with yellow shrubbery imposes a prickly texture. The cottage rests at the bottom of the cliff as its rooftop protrudes above the hill. The dark blue of the sea shows signs of green within its depths. The sky is both gray and blue, showing a darker day. This painting seems more monumental and natural because of the strong

¹⁰¹ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 178. Letter to Gustave Geffroy from Monet on March 28, 1893.

material quality that segments each element from each other. However, the 1890s painting, *Gorge de Varengeville*, shows an imaginary landscape. Monet used color as a symbol to form connections with past and present landscapes. All the colors in *Cliffs at Varengeville*, can be reclaimed in *Gorge de Varengeville*, but the purpose changes. The 1890s paintings transcend the previous desires about weather and seasonal changes. Instead, retrospection takes their place of importance. As the colors are interwoven, so are memories of past and present events, merged together through color. The color's hallucinatory effects reminds one of a dream, a dream of the past and present finally united. Again, Bergson believed that humans pluck from the duration of time the moments that are important to them. Here, Monet takes personal and artistic moments from the past and brings them to the present through the use of symbolic colors and imagination. For example, the cottage's contours merge with the entire painting, instead of being singled out. The cottage no longer battles with the surroundings. Unity and harmony prevail as the cottage joins the landscape. Monet begins to focus on the cottage and the point of the cliff's edge to create a feeling of an enclosed space. He accomplished these goals with abstraction.

Cliffs of Les Petites Dalles of 1880 and *La Pointe du Petit Ailly*, of 1897 will serve as the final contrast (Figures 24 and 25). When examining these two paintings, it becomes obvious that Monet was reminiscing about his past life and early artistic style from the 1880s. He attempted to incorporate them into his new life and new philosophy toward art. *La Pointe du Petit Ailly* becomes a melting pot of colors that previously defined certain elements in *Cliffs of Les Petites Dalles*. The green grass, blue sky, greenish-blue sea, orange, white and yellow striations of the cliffs, and people are all defined in *La Pointe du Petit Ailly*. Both paintings share the same colors, and the people are defined by the almost non-existent, human-made cottage at the bottom of the composition. Blue acts as a strong force giving a somber temperament to both paintings. *La Pointe du Petit Ailly* is less complex in composition, but not in artistic philosophy. The abstraction that Monet implements gives a sense of the whole or the eternal, a whole that engulfs viewers in

order to make them feel one with the elements. Bergson would probably refer to this as an eternal instant capturing nature's life force. The 1880s painting does not make viewers feel a part of nature. In fact, there is a greater sense of alienation, a feeling of disconnection from the world.

The previous contrasts have shown a dramatic difference in style. Yet, further exploration of why these differences occurred needs additional explanation. Monet once claimed that he wished to be buried in a buoy and set off to sea.¹⁰² Monet often professed his love of the sea and as the previous quote suggests, wished to be surrounded by water for eternity. This also implies a need for unity within nature, water in particular. Therefore, Monet begins to deal with issues of unification. The 1890s paintings show Monet working on various aspects of unification that deal with time and space, past and present. He achieves this by working on a combination of parts to create a complete and final conclusion to his personal experiences on the Normandy Coast. This final conclusion gives him a sense of closure. The various "parts" to the painting include memories from the past and present while compartmentalizing the elements which not only unify, but eternalize his experiences.

The cottage, which Monet painted as a separate entity in the 1880s, provides a good example of how Monet began to unify the cottage into nature during the 1890s. The cottage was to be integrated into the final paintings of the Normandy Coast. The 1880s cottage is self-contained and battles against harsh weather conditions. The 1890s version of the cabin becomes a part of the landscape, unified by color and harmony. The weather conditions are not harsh, but are calm in unidentifiable times of the day. Harmony prevails and the cottage loses its identity within the dreamscape. From the 1880s to the 1890s, the composition begins to focus on the cliff and the elements begin to merge into an abstract dream of wholeness. The cottage's place of importance diminishes completely in the 1890s in order to merge into the landscape. Monet, a middle-aged man in self-reflection, learned to express his feelings toward nature by artistically manipulating the environment that

¹⁰² Paul Hayes Tucker. *Monet in the '90s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 204.

previously controlled him. Monet learned to control the uncontrollable through the Symbolist imagination, and his pantheistic love of nature. Symbolist writer, Stéphane Mallarmé and Monet had been friends during the 1880s, their closest association began during the 1890s.¹⁰³

Just as Mallarmé's poetry could be used for self-contemplation, Monet's paintings could be used for self-reflection. By looking at a few paintings from the Normandy Coast campaign during the 1890s, Monet could reflect on his personal and artistic life over decades of time. He did this through the use of imagination which was learned from Symbolists like Mallarmé. Mallarmé expressed his feelings about art in an 1891 interview with Jules Huret stating,

“there should be an allusion (to art). The contemplation of objects, the image emanating from the dreams they excite, this is poetry. To name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment, which is created by the pleasures of gradually apprehending it. To suggest, that is the dream. That is the perfect use of mystery which constitutes symbol: to evoke an object little by little in order to reveal a state of mind, by a series of decipherment.”¹⁰⁴

Monet's' paintings during the 1890s were discussed by several of the writers in Mallarmé's circle. Mirbeau, who was good friends with Monet and Mallarmé, linked both of the artists together through their belief that art should go beyond the description of an object, to a deeper understanding of the self. Symbols were utilized to piece together rather complex dream states of consciousness. Monet used various tools or symbols to piece together his life on the Normandy Coast and deal with unity and harmony. Then he used repetition and serial painting to explore aspects of time and space which finally created a résumé of his life on the Normandy Coast.

Instantaneous was a word which Monet used to describe his art. It implies painting a quick impression of a scene in nature, which only lasts for a short time, and then never returns. Yet, there seems to be a deeper significance to the meaning 'instantaneous' which

¹⁰³ John House. *Monet: Nature into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 223.

¹⁰⁴ John House. *Monet: Nature into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 223.

Octave Mirbeau noticed. The critic wrote in 1889 that Monet's thoughts were governed by "the characterization of a piece of ground, a bit of sea, a rock, a tree, a flower, a figure in the light particular to it, in its instantaneity, that is, in the very minute when his sight settled on it and embraced it, harmonically."¹⁰⁵ In the 1890s, Monet took all these pieces of landscape and brought them together to form harmony. However, the motif is not a single moment in time, but an encapsulation of many years. After Monet obtained his first impression during the 1880s, he returned again in the 1890s. He used his memory from past paintings to unite the past with the present by using of symbolic colors, and merging elements harmonically together into an organic whole. He was dependent on memory to verify the moment when he could return to the past and eternalize it with the present. This enabled him to bring back the past which previously evaded him.

Another tool that Monet used to achieve his goals was repetition and serialization. This was a way for Monet to compare and invent new ways of creating a whole, or a record of a chosen sight. In February 1896, Monet wrote from Pourville to Durand-Ruel's son, Joseph, who had joined his father's business, "I need to see the sea again, and am delighted to see again so many things that I did fifteen years ago."¹⁰⁶ He told his biographer Geffroy days later, "I'm a bit timid, but at last I feel I am in my element."¹⁰⁷ Monet's use of repetition allowed him to gather previous motifs and unite them with his present life, and to employ his new artistic philosophy of gathering parts to create a whole. In Geffroy's preface to Monet's 1892 exhibit, he described the series painting as "the study of the same landscape in which the passage of time was represented in phases which closely follow one another and are so unified that one has the sensation, through these fifteen canvases, of a single work with inseparable parts."¹⁰⁸ Geffroy's article implies a pantheistic idea of nature in Monet's paintings. In a letter written to Alice Monet on

¹⁰⁵ Octave Mirbeau, "Claude Monet," *Exposition* (1889), 15.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 180. Letter to Joseph Durand-Ruel from Monet on February 25, 1896.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 180. Letter to Gustave Geffroy from Monet on February 28, 1896.

¹⁰⁸ Gustave Geffroy. "Série des peupliers des bords de l'Epte." *Galleries Paul Durand-Ruel, Exhibit Catalog*, March 1892. Preface.

March 9, 1893, Monet stated “What’s the good of working when I don’t get to the end of anything? This evening I wanted to compare what I’ve done now with the old paintings.”¹⁰⁹ Here, Monet makes an aesthetic decision to create a painting, rather than trying to transpose the *enveloppe* onto the canvas. Art goes beyond a picture of nature to pure aesthetic creation developed by one’s imagination. This concept is important because future artists build upon this concept which soon develops into modern art. Monet’s interest in the past and his new skill of creating an environment aids him in finding a final solution.

Monet’s desire to return to earlier works created a kind of synthesis to sum up his earlier impressions. Monet once conceded that his pictures “are only repetitions of the same motifs.”¹¹⁰ Perceived wholeness made it easier for Monet to live with himself since he could not capture the impossible. He could not control nature’s duration, but he could manipulate it to meet his own needs. The Normandy Coast provided a way for Monet to capture the duration of time through his own experimental means. *Plein air*, Stéphane Mallarmé recognized, was the arena for durational experiences wrapped up in a lifetime. He hoped that some words, put together, would mean everything.¹¹¹ This was similar to Monet’s goal of encapsulating everything. Monet’s repeated return to sites and working against past canvases became the norm in the 1890s. His paintings are fueled by all parts or elements, past and present, that make up the substance and résumé of his life: where he grew up as a child, lived and visited with his first wife and children, and brought his second wife and new family, and finally, where he wished his final resting place to be. The Normandy Coast was personal to him because it allowed him to revisit the past and include new ideas that he had learned. These returns created a full circle . . . a way to recapture past subjects and reinvent them according to his new thoughts and emotions. The outcome was Monet’s *Water Lilies* series which Mirbeau described as, “the milieu for this

¹⁰⁹ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 176. Letter to Alice Monet from Monet on March 9, 1893.

¹¹⁰ Steven Levine. *Monet, Narcissus, and Self Reflection* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 30.

¹¹¹ Laurence Porter. *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 260.

prodigious painter . . . who enchants our dream with the whole of the dream mysteriously enclosed within nature.”¹¹² This eloquently describes Monet’s artistic future which began to mature on the Normandy Coast in the 1890s.

¹¹² Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 183.
Octave Mirbeau. “Claude Monet” (1891).

CHAPTER FOUR THE CREATION OF AN ENVIRONMENT

"I was tempted to use the theme of water lilies to decorate a living room. Transferred to the walls, enveloping the entire room with its unity, it would have created the illusion of wholeness without end, a wave unbounded by any shore or horizon."¹¹³

Monet's obsessive need to control the environment came to fruition in the 1890s Normandy Coast paintings. There, Monet used just a few canvases to create a résumé of his life on the coast. The result was a single whole of his life, the past and present combined, essentially eternalized forever. In 1903-4, Monet began to work on the *Water Lilies* series. This project engaged him until the end of his life and became an extension of the 1890s Normandy Coast paintings. Yet, this time, his Symbolist and pantheistic tendencies would be stretched to the limit. Monet engulfed everyone in his dream of wholeness and unity. Therefore, it was not just the past and present that would be connected and eternalized, but a world where eternity would rein, and life would never end. Symbolist writer, Paul Valéry noticed this characteristic of Monet's art when he stated, "The painter does not paint what he sees but that which will be seen."¹¹⁴ Like the Normandy Coast paintings from the 1890s, the *Water Lilies* series was not just about light on a beautiful garden; it was bound to larger issues.

Though this chapter primarily focuses on the *Water Lilies* series, it is closely related to the previous chapter because it continues the vital progression of Symbolist and pantheistic influences. In the art world, one sees many prints by Monet, yet none from the 1890s Normandy Coast paintings. Their popularity pales in comparison to his other work because they are normally thought of as being strange and different from his other work. Yet, all of Monet's paintings work toward the end result of the water lilies. Each painting

¹¹³ Denis Rouart. *Monet, Water-Lilies or the Mirror of Time* (New York: leon ameil, publisher, 1974) 61.

¹¹⁴ Denis Rouart. *Monet, Water-Lilies or the Mirror of Time* (New York: leon ameil, publisher, 1974) 119.

is a step in maturity toward that ultimate goal. The Normandy Coast paintings are the closest in that evolutionary process. They are not strange in their use of abstraction and color, in fact, they are very similar to the *Water Lilies* series theoretically. To understand this thesis presented, one must see the connection between the Normandy Coast paintings and the *Water Lilies* series. When seen in this light, the Normandy Coast paintings will not seem so odd. Instead, they become essential to Monet's maturation process.

This chapter will illustrate the progression of the *Water Lilies* series, describe what the Musée l'Orangerie offered, and show how Symbolism and pantheism manifest themselves in these works. Monet seemed to know that this series would be his final farewell to the art world. His health was fading, but more importantly, he could not depend on his eyesight which was deteriorating, even though he had had eye surgery. In 1925, a year before his death, Monet stated, "I feel even more that it's the end for me in terms of painting. I'm beginning to think of nothing else. It's the end."¹¹⁵ Monet was correct in his assumption. He died in December 1926 of pulmonary sclerosis.¹¹⁶

Monet did not need to go any further than his garden to find landscapes that fit his artistic philosophy. In 1897-98, the same years he went to the Normandy Coast, Monet painted the pond in his garden at Giverny. The first group of water lily paintings are small (70 X 100 centimeters in size) but important because they are the first. In *Water-Lilies, Evening Effect*, Monet limited the pond's spatial dimensions to show just the water and a few water lilies, offering a humble beginning for what would become an ambitious project (Figure 26). In *Paysage d'eau, Nymphéas* from 1903-1904, he increased the size by ten centimeters and focused on a greater number of water lilies, gradually making the space recede (Figure 27). He raised the surface radically so that the surface occupies most of the composition, leaving the undergrowth. The compressed space and radical foreshortening stress notions of near and far, while suggesting a curvature to the pond's surface. There is

¹¹⁵ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 264. Letter to André Barbier from Monet on May 22, 1925.

¹¹⁶ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 223.

no indication where the composition starts or ends. In *Nymphéas* from 1907, Monet allowed his vision to leap further into the composition which still recedes in an upward and downward motion (Figure 28). Evidence of the trees and bank were taken out. The water acts as a mirror, encapsulating the sky and water in its depths. *Nymphéas* is particularly interesting because Monet made the canvas round, rather than square. Therefore, the shape of the canvas matches the shape of the pond. In *Willow Fronds, Nymphéas and Clouds* from 1914-1917, the composition becomes both square and rectangular (Figure 29). He began to have ideas for a decorative program and used these paintings to test his ideas according to scale. By this time, the paintings were one hundred centimeters larger in contrast to the water lilies from the late 1890s. These working canvases were used to experiment with canvas size. From 1917-1926, Monet continued to work on the *Water Lilies* series that would ultimately go into the Musée l'Orangerie. The paintings are long rectangular canvases about six hundred centimeters long. Light and dark, sky and water, reflection and depth intermingle in a continuous cycle. Here, Monet destroyed the concept of the 'view' and in doing so, the western tradition of landscape. Paul Gauguin, Edgar Degas and Monet were pioneers in this type of drastic abstraction -- Gauguin in the late 1880s, Edgar Degas in 1890-1892, and Monet in the late 1890s. All three artists were inspired by abstract modes of thinking manifested in Symbolism.

In order to describe the Musée l'Orangerie and the water lily panels, one must first understand the background for Monet's vision. According to Monet, the *Water Lilies* series was originally his idea, stating, "I'm pursuing my idea of a *Grande Décoration*. It's a huge thing that I've undertaken, above all, at my age . . . it's a question of the project which I have had for a long time now."¹¹⁷ In 1916, under the influence of his friend Clemenceau, who was the Prime Minister of France, Monet built a large studio in order to begin painting his decorations. Clemenceau promised to support Monet by finding a building that would adequately support his *Grande Décorations*, and Monet promised to finish and give the paintings to the French Government. Until 1922, it was only an oral

¹¹⁷ Richard Kendall. *Monet by Himself* (Boston: Bulfinch Press Book, 1990) 249. Letter to Koechlin from Monet on January 15, 1915.

agreement. After World War I, the French Ministry of Fine Arts, then lead by Paul Léon, could not afford to build a new building to house Monets' paintings.¹¹⁸ Instead, they offered to renovate an old building to his taste. Monet made many demands on how the building should be renovated, but he finally decided to sign the agreement on April 12, 1922. The building would have two interconnected elliptical rooms holding twenty-two panels (Figure 30). The panels are a never-ending cycle of morning leading to evening. The contract stipulated that the paintings should never be varnished or altered in any way. In fact, Monet insisted that they be glued to the walls, in this way, he would feel confident about their immobilization. The contract also stated that no other paintings could be added, and that the panels should be joined invisibly to the next. The ceiling supports a large mirror that reflects the floor and parts of the panels (Figure 31). In this way, one feels engulfed and a part of Monet's environment. With state support, Monet was able to see his dream come to life, and the results were astonishing.

The result of the Musée Orangerie is strangely magical, due to the feeling of being submerged in a dream world. The pond that viewers once circled, now encircles the viewer, like nature itself. Thiébaud-Sisson believed that upon entering the Musée l'Orangerie, one would have "the illusion of finding himself . . . on an island . . . in . . . the center of the water lily pond."¹¹⁹ This dream world was to be perfect, and completely self-contained, where old dreams were gathered cumulatively, in order to continue through time.¹²⁰ The paintings are not separate panels, but a continuous pattern, a circle without end. It is important to remember that Monet was going blind at this time, and could no longer paint in full sunlight.¹²¹ Concepts of day and night were captured through fragments of past memories which he united into a cumulative experience, similar to the Normandy Coast paintings of the 1890s, which built a résumé of his life experiences on the coast. Being submerged into a never-ending life force was important for Monet, so much that he invites everyone to share in this experience. Perhaps it was his way of continuing on with

¹¹⁸ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 217-218.

¹¹⁹ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 217.

¹²⁰ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 303.

¹²¹ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 304.

life after death. His previous statements about wanting to be buried in a buoy and sent off to sea match his philosophy about art, nature and life and imply that he wanted to be surrounded by water and held there forever. Symbolist influences helped Monet achieve this goal which is manifested in the Musée l'Orangerie.

Mallarmé's insight had an effect on these paintings, and it is apparent when you compare his Symbolist message with the water lily panels. One might wonder why Monet depicted water lilies for his final conclusion? A poem by Mallarmé discusses a pond of dreams, one which "hooks our own image, mindless of the silver scales of fish."¹² There was both absence and presence in Monet's work, something that could not be fully grasped. Mallarmé stated, "You must always remove the beginning and end of what you write. No overture and no finale."¹³ This sounds very similar to Monet's message of producing an illusion of an endless whole, one with no horizon and no shore. For Mallarmé and Monet, there should be no beginning nor end. In this way, the poem and painting remain never ending; one is lost in a dream and/or the life force of nature. Monet did read Mallarmé's poetry. For example, Monet was supposed to create a drawing to accompany one of Mallarmé's poems, as previously mentioned. However, it is unclear whether Monet read Mallarmé's poem dealing with the pond. Yet, there may be another plausible explanation for Monet's use of flowers.

There are many occasions when flowers accompany the women of Monet's life, such as Camille, Alice and his adopted daughters. Monet painted *Portrait of Suzanne with Sunflowers* in 1890 (Figure 32). This painting was done toward the end of Suzanne's short life. Mirbeau coined this painting as the "infinitely sad" figure of Suzanne.¹⁴ Mirbeau goes on to say:

¹² Rosemary Lloyd. *Selected Letters of Stéphane Mallarmé*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988) xii.

¹³ Rosemary Lloyd. *Selected Letters of Stéphane Mallarmé*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 32. Letter to Méry Laurent from Mallarmé.

¹⁴ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 212.

She is as strange as the shadow which envelops all and which is, like her, troubling. But still more strange are these three huge flowers of the sun which turn above and in front of her forehead, like three stars without rays, of an unexpected green with metallic reflections. Involuntarily, one thinks of one of those figures of women, specters of the soul, that are evoked in certain poems of Stéphane Mallarmé.¹²⁵

According to a Monet scholar, Virginia Spate, these flowers are symbols.

Since the sunflower turns to follow the sun, it was traditionally used as a symbol of the sun's life-giving force (one of its names in French is *soleil*). Yet, the drooping head of the dead sunflowers became an equally appropriate symbol for death. Sunflowers, like water-lilies and other plants painted by Monet, were used by some Symbolists to convey literal meanings derived from literary or artistic sources; yet such symbolism originates in the natural characteristics of flower or plant, which are not necessarily codified into a fixed meaning.¹²⁶

Spate's observation is valid, but what symbol did the water lilies hold for Monet? It is important to remember that Monet, along with other artists and writers of the time, associated women and flowers together. It is also important to remember Monet's love for water. Most flowers can not live in water because their roots will rot without soil. Yet, water lilies as aquatic plants flourish within water, the life force of all living things. Water lilies may have been special to Monet because they symbolized women living eternally within nature's life force. It also combined the two things in nature that Monet seemed to love most, water and flowers. For these flowers, Monet designed a Japanese style pond to be used as a vehicle for transcendence. Like Japanese gardens, his pond was supposed to promote a personal journey for all who entered.

The Musée l'Orangerie was a dream forming since 1897. During that time, a journalist named Maurice Guillemot, visited Monet at Giverny. According to Guillemot, Monet wanted him to "Imagine a circular room in which the walls above the baseboards would be covered with (paintings of) water, dotted with these plants to the very horizon.

¹²⁵ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 212.

¹²⁶ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 212.

The tones are vague, lovingly nuances, as delicate as a dream."¹²⁷ The dream-state that Monet created through the water lilies was safe and secure. Monet's desire to control nature is manifested within the *Water Lilies* series. The Symbolist critic, Octave Mirbeau, saw Monet's art as a mysterious dream enclosed within nature.¹²⁸ Author, Camille Mauclair, believed that Monet taught others that the world is what we create.¹²⁹ Many Symbolists saw Monet as a pantheist. Mauclair wrote an entire book based on this fact and titled it, *Claude Monet*. Though Monet was not religious in the traditional sense, he did want to understand creation. His abstract paintings deal with rediscovering the world at the level of elements. This was Monet's religion, an unspoken belief in pantheism.

"I have no other desire, than to merge myself more intimately with nature."¹³⁰ Monet made this statement in 1909 when he was developing the water lilies. One can see that he needs to feel a part of nature. His dream of being submerged in something is manifested in the *Water Lilies* series which encircles the viewer, creating a feeling of being submerged in water. This probably helped Monet fulfill a pantheistic goal of feeling intimately attached to nature's force. Monet told his friend Clemenceau that he felt a close correlation with unknown realities of the universe.¹³¹ Monet connected space and time in his art through abstraction. He abolished distance between forms, then broke them down further to illustrate the natural flow of the universe. When a viewer sees a painting on the wall, his/her mind instantaneously separates the viewer from the painting. Logically, humans know that there is a separation between the painting and the viewer. However, Monet unites the separation of painting from viewer through his use of pictorial space and volume. He creates the illusion that the viewer is a part of a continual life force in nature, creating a feeling of transcendence. Pantheists want to join the universal flux of life, and for Monet, this was a part of the stability that he craved. He placed his faith in nature, not in some unseen force, such as God, but in something concrete. Monet wanted to live

¹²⁷ Paul Hayes Tucker. *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 198.

¹²⁸ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 212.

¹²⁹ Camille Mauclair. "Exposition Claude Monet" *La Revue Independent* Apr. 1892, 418.

¹³⁰ Roger Marx, "Les Nymphéas de Claude Monet" *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 41 1909, 524-9.

¹³¹ Joel Isaacson. *Observation and Reflection* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 1978) 12.

forever, and his way of continuing on after death was through his water lilies. His whole life was wrapped up in the panels and their arrangement. Here, he could continue to live through his art, while including others in this life force at the Musée l'Orangerie.

The Musée l'Orangerie shows fragments of the whole, until the viewer spends time conceiving the fusion of elements into a living whole. This is not shown at the start, but rather experienced and made real.¹³² Monet was not a scientist, nor did he read Chinese philosophies about a fluid which animates all life (being water). He seemed to discover a universal current through his own intuition.¹³³ For Monet, there were no limits to the universe or to what he could create through art. When one looks at the Musée l'Orangerie, the possibilities are unlimited, and our imaginations can wonder in a dream. Obtaining this goal was a difficult task. French painting had been rational and used logical pictorial space which Monet abandoned. At first, critics opposed Monet's ideas and rejected his paintings, but toward the end of his life, he was accepted, and even given his own museum. In the *Water Lilies* series, one witnesses the vibration of life which contains Monet's spirit as he intended.

There are stories in French myth which discuss this idea of merging humans and nature. The age-old French phrase for 'still water,' 'les eaux mortes' was discussed in terms of an unconscious desire for reintegration in the primal element. One such myth was the legend of *Ophelia*, a young woman who drowned in a stream (Figure 33). Monet's painting of *Camille on her Death Bed* reminds one of this French myth (Figure 2). Camille appears to be floating in a watery grave, and returning to nature, the life force. There are other examples of how Monet showed humans and even himself in a watery enclosure, though he rarely painted self portraits. Yet, when painting his *Water Lilies* series, he created a self portrait of his head surrounded by black paint in a circular form, reminding one of Camille's painting. He kept the self portrait of himself on top of a canvas

¹³² Denis Rouart. *Monet, Water-Lilies or the Mirror of Time* (New York: leon ameil, publisher, 1974) 109.

¹³³ Denis Rouart. *Monet, Water-Lilies or the Mirror of Time* (New York: leon ameil, publisher, 1974) 113.

from one of the *Water Lilies* series, which surrounded his studio. This is shown in a photograph from 1917 (Figure 34).¹³⁴ There is a final example of a photograph that Monet took of his pond. The photograph shows Monet purposefully leaning over to show his shadow within the pond (Figure 35). Monet gazes down from the bridge and looks at his black shadow surrounded by water. All of these paintings show how Monet wanted to submerge himself, and his loved ones in nature's life force in order to transcend time.

¹³⁴ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 307.

CONCLUSION

“I would not wish to die before having said all that I had to say, or at least having tried to say it.”¹³⁵

This statement was made in 1925, toward the end of Monet's life. It speaks to his vision of wanting to create a résumé of his life from fragments of past experiences and memories accumulated over time, which symbolized the whole of his life. Monet finally harnessed a moment in time which would last forever, while still containing the world (earth, water, sky and the *enveloppe*). This process began to develop as he matured artistically. There were many steps involved in this process of maturation, but the largest step taken was his involvement with the Symbolists in the late 1880s. The 1890s then show a dramatic change in style through the use of pastels and abstraction which create a greater harmony contrasted with the stormy beach scenes of the 1880s. He moves into the next century with ideas for the *Water Lilies* series. The water lilies were extremely important because they were to conclude his life's work. He fought to finish them through the death of many friends and family, blindness, illness, and the disintegration of the world he had known. Yet, the water lilies served as a dream where Monet could create his own world of peace, love and security, hidden within Giverny. The fluidity shown in the water lilies series shares a common element which is similar to all of his paintings, that of water. Whether fluid, frozen or vaporized, it exists within all of his work. It is a cycle of life that Monet saw himself within, a dissolution of the self to become one with nature.

Monet's life was in a period of flux during the 1880s due to the death of his first wife Camille Doncieux-Monet, his intimate relationship with the married Alice Hoschedé, the illness of two of her children, the separation from group exhibitions with Impressionists, and the challenge of finding satisfaction artistically. Through correspondence with Alice, it is evident that Monet struggled with all of these issues. His

¹³⁵ Virginia Spate. *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 314.
René Delange, “Claude Monet,” *L'Illustration* January 15, 1927.

paintings illustrate stormy weather instead of a tranquil scenes. The ocean compelled him to paint his deepest feelings. His insecurities about life made him obsessively controlling in order to maintain the lifestyle to which he had become accustomed. This controlling behavior was apparent in his interaction with family, friends and business partners.

In the later part of the 1880s, Monet became associated with the Symbolist movement. He attended Berthe Morisot's monthly dinner parties where he became friends with many Symbolist writers who inspired him artistically. Organic nature and the power of the imagination were exalted by the Symbolists who believed that the world was too focused on material culture. To suggest something through art, instead of stating a message clearly, was considered a higher form of art. These ideas slowly sank into Monet's perception, and he eventually mirrored these ideas in the 1890s. Through symbolism, he could use his imagination to create, control and finally transcend time.

Monet incorporated what he learned from the Symbolists during the 1890s and began to use some of their philosophies in his Normandy Coast paintings. Monet's imagination and use of symbolic colors united his entire career on the coast. He used pastels to create a sense of harmony which unites unidentifiable times of the day. This new found harmony was the result of Monet's financial and personal success, including his marriage to Alice Hoschedé, which made him feel secure. The paintings on the Normandy Coast are unusual paintings, and some of the most unusual paintings of his entire career. His intent was to sum up his life on the Normandy Coast, past and present, and to encapsulate all his personal and artistic feelings in just a few paintings. In this way, he could capture and control his life in a complete circle, as a résumé of his entire life, at the place he held so dear. This was to be Monet's last painting campaign on the coast. The place that he visited so often, became a place in his imagination.

As discussed previously, the *Water Lilies* series at the Musée l'Orangerie was his final farewell to the world he knew. Here, Monet stretched the limits of his imagination to include and encircle others into this life force of nature. He achieved this goal by

engineering the design of the Musée Orangerie into the shape of a pond, and through the *Water Lilies* series which pulls us into his dream world. The series reveals a never-ending process of morning to dusk which shows that time is a continuous whole. Monet kept these paintings until his death, not letting them leave his studio beforehand. Then, the paintings were glued to the walls of the Musée l'Orangerie at his request, never to be altered or removed. This created environment holds so much more than just his paintings, it retains his very spirit and the knowledge that he accumulated throughout his entire life. The world he created at the Musée l'Orangerie was a perfect world. His struggles in the 1880s were a result of not having the tools to capture time and space. In the 1890s, he learned to take the past and present and merge them into one. The *Water Lilies* series also illustrates the transcendence of time and space, into another world - a world where nature and the self merge in a special unity, lasting forever. When Monet died, he requested that it be simple. He did not want a ceremony or an elaborate grave. Before his coffin was laid to rest within the earth, close friends laid a single shaft of wheat on his grave, signifying a life directed by nature.

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FIGURES

Figure 1

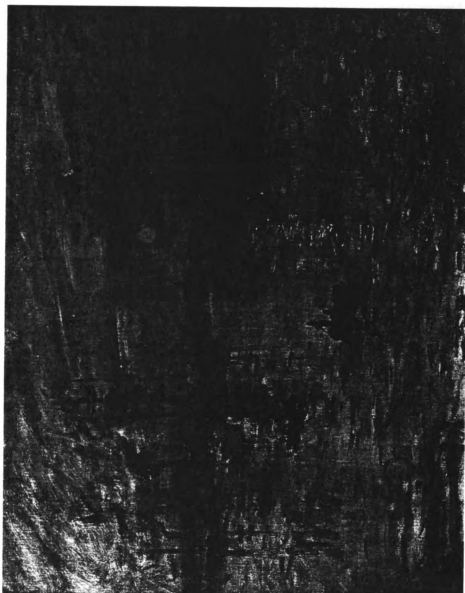


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

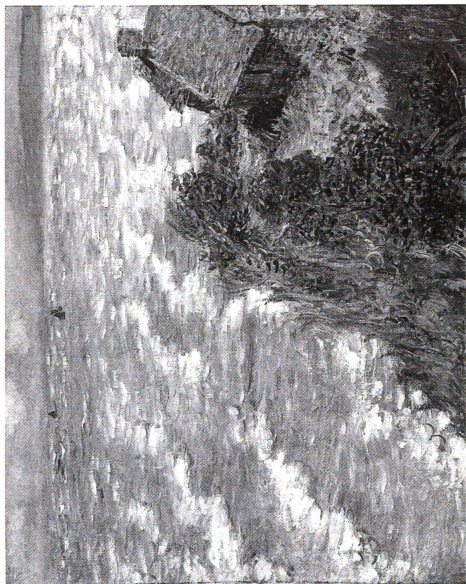


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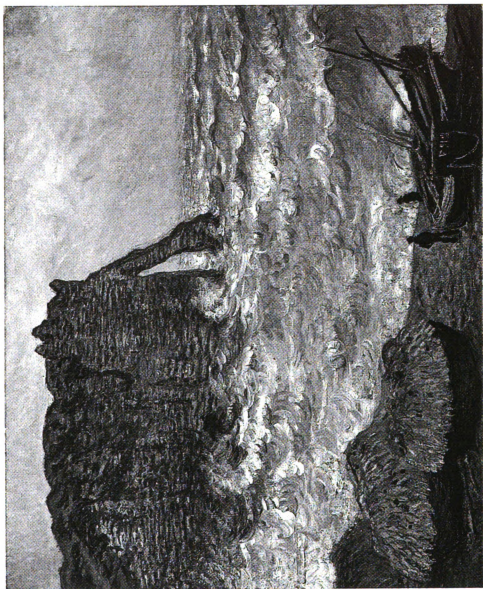


Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

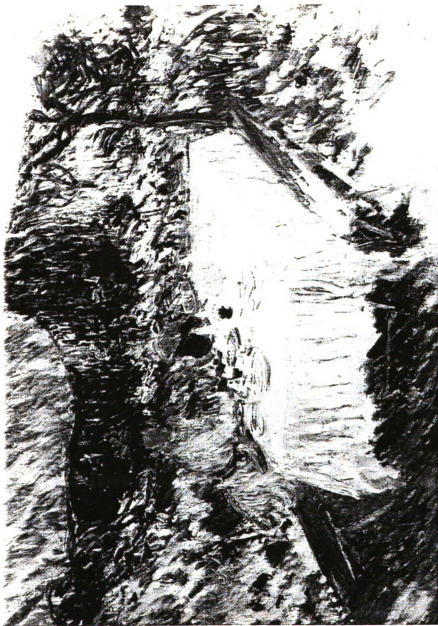


Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22

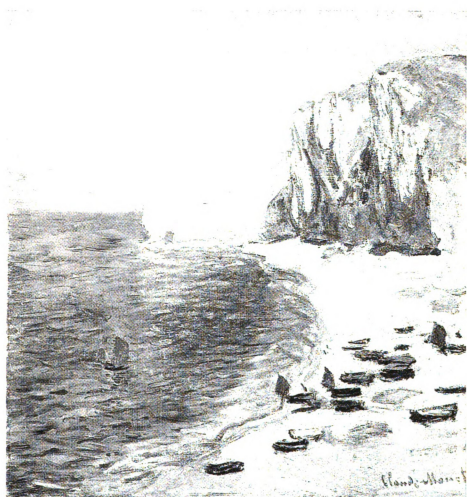


Figure 23



Figure 24

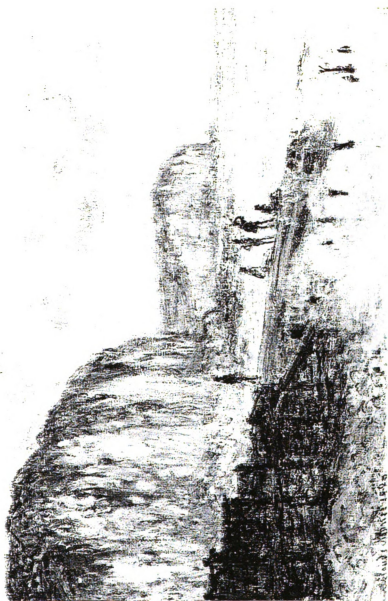


Figure 25



Figure 26

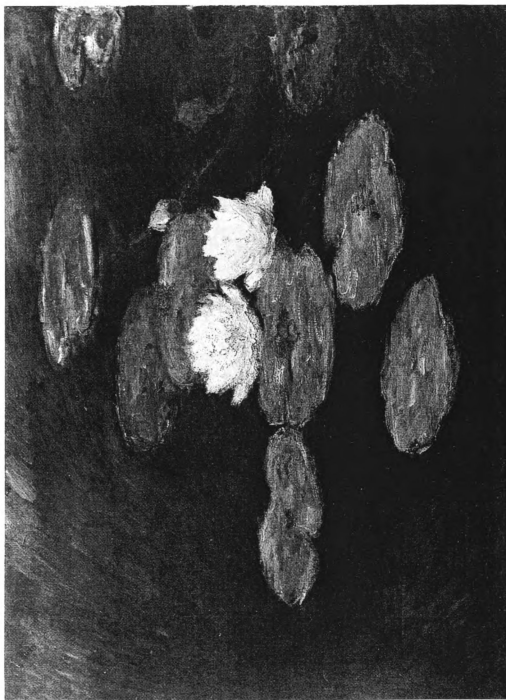


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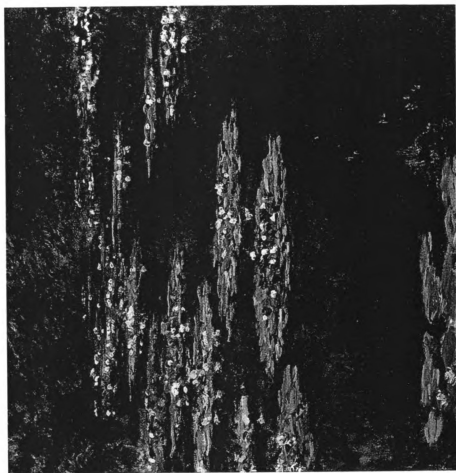


Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30

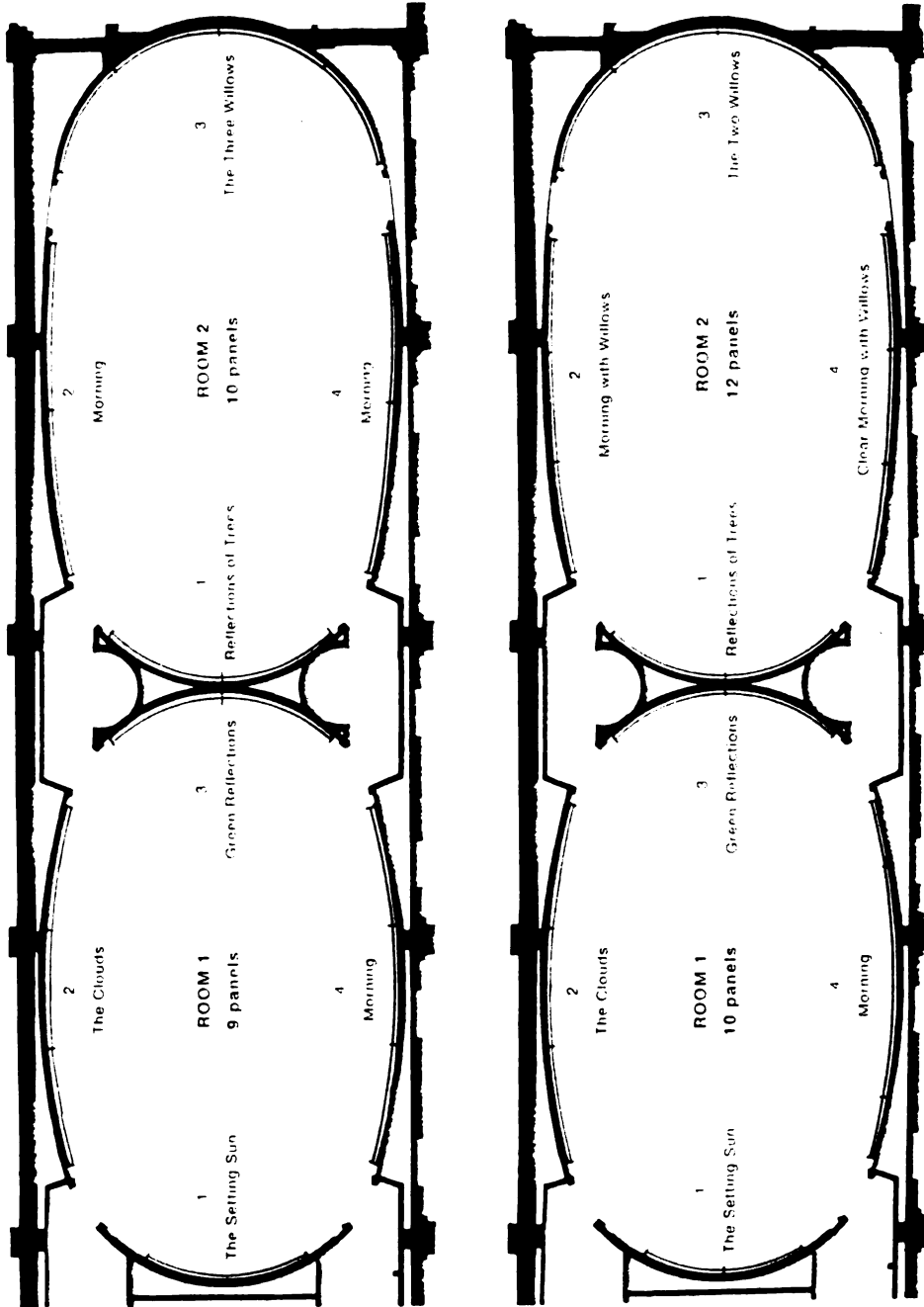


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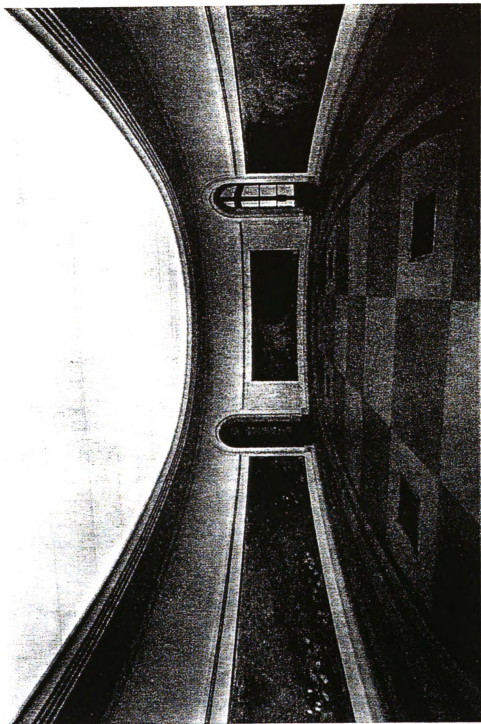


Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35

