

JOURNAL OF OPINIONS, IDEAS, & ESSAYS

Volume 2

Article 6

October 2015

Intersections of Art and Politics: Clemenceau, Monet and Republican Patriotism from Commune to Nymphéas

John Kim Munholland

University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, munho001@umn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://pubs.lib.umn.edu/joie>

Recommended Citation

Munholland, John Kim (2015) "Intersections of Art and Politics: Clemenceau, Monet and Republican Patriotism from Commune to Nymphéas," *Journal of Opinions, Ideas, & Essays*: Vol. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <http://pubs.lib.umn.edu/joie/vol2/iss1/6>

The *Journal of Opinions, Ideas, & Essays* is published by the University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing. Authors retain ownership of their articles.

 **LIBRARIES**
PUBLISHING

Intersections of Art and Politics: Clemenceau, Monet and Republican Patriotism from Commune to Nymphéas

Abstract

Abstract: “Intersections of Art and Politics: Clemenceau, Monet and Republican Patriotism from Commune to Nymphéas (1878-1927)”

In the aftermath of France’s defeat in the war of 1870-71 and the Commune uprising of 1871, the French sought a new political identity and sense of unity, which brought a new political regime, the Third Republic. At the same time, a younger generation of French artists began experimenting with new forms and techniques that came to be known as Impressionism. The Third Republic was born at the same time that a new generation of artists were emerging. While there was always a distance between the artistic and political worlds, two representative figures, the politician Georges Clemenceau and a leading Impressionist, Claude Monet, found themselves joined in a common cause, despite Monet’s dislike of political conflicts, in defending the newly formed republic from its opponents during three crises in France at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This paper examines this curious alliance of two friends and patriots during times of crisis during the formative years of the French Third Republic.

Keywords

Art, Politics, Clemenceau, Monet, Third Republic, republicanism, nationalism

Recent studies of impressionism have emphasized the connection between the artistic movement and the political environment in which it emerged.ⁱ This trend represents a move away from the interpretation of impressionism in purely aesthetic terms, detached from transformations that occurred in French politics and society from the 1860s to the 1880s. These studies agree on how a common purpose allied the impressionists in support of the Third Republic, as artists and republican politicians alike struggled to gain legitimacy in France during the 1870s. By 1880 with the triumph of the Third Republic, the cohesion of the impressionist movement began to unravel.ⁱⁱ Political differences among the impressionists at the time of the Dreyfus Affair in the late 1890s revealed that the early sense of unity and common purpose had disappeared as individual artists pursued their separate aesthetic and political agendas.ⁱⁱⁱ Politics became divisive, not only for the impressionists but for French politics and society during the crisis years of the 1890. The late 1880s and decade of the 1890s saw the emergence of a new radical right that rejected the values of republicanism and its heritage from the French Revolution of 1789.

One of the most interesting connections between art and politics, which remained consistent from the early years of the impressionist movement to the 1920s, was the relationship between Georges Clemenceau and Claude Monet and their mutual vision of democracy and patriotism embodied in the Third Republic.^{iv} This paper examines the ways in which this relationship reflected a common viewpoint amid the shifting artistic and political directions that marked the years between the Commune and the installation of Monet's *Nymphéas* in the Orangerie in 1927. Their shared commitment to the republic can be seen in their responses to three historical episodes: symbolic representations of the republic in the 1870s; the Boulanger

and Dreyfus crises of the late 1880s and 1890s; and the victory of the Third Republic in World War I.

Clemenceau and Monet first encountered each other during the 1860s, shortly after Monet's return from military service in Algeria at a time when Clemenceau was completing his medical studies in Paris. They frequented the cafes of the Latin Quarter, including the "Brasserie des Martyrs," where ardent republicans, such as Léon Gambetta, denounced the Second Empire of Napoleon III. At this time the relationship was casual. Their paths diverged when Clemenceau left for four years in the United States and Monet concentrated on promoting his early career. Clemenceau returned in 1869 on the eve of the Franco-Prussian war.

During the war and siege of Paris (1870-71), Monet and Clemenceau pursued different trajectories. Monet went into exile in England while Clemenceau served as mayor of Montmartre. Shortly after the outbreak of the Commune insurrection, Clemenceau was voted out of office, distrusted by the Communards for his efforts to mediate a truce and avoid the bloodshed that marked the suppression of the Commune at the end of May 1871.^v In the aftermath, Clemenceau returned to politics, and he was elected municipal councilor for Montmartre. As for Monet, he returned to France in early November, taking up residence in Argenteuil and maintaining a studio in Paris. His scenes of Paris from this period avoided representation of the destruction caused by the Commune and its suppression and emphasized, instead, France's recovery from the shocks of war and civil conflict.^{vi}

Although monarchists dominated the National Assembly elected in February 1871, a temporary republic was voted when the legitimist candidate, the Comte de Chambord, refused to accept the revolutionary *tricolore* as the flag of the nation, insisting upon the royal *fleur-de-lis*. Moderate republicans seized the opportunity presented in elections to the Chamber of Deputies,

which were based upon universal, adult male suffrage, to outbid the monarchists by assuring the French electorate that a moderate republic would best guarantee stability, avoiding the extremes of revolutionary violence or royalist reaction. Led by Léon Gambetta, republicans won majority control of the Chamber of Deputies in the 1876 elections. One of them was Clemenceau. But republican legitimacy was to be challenged in the years ahead by monarchists, Bonapartists and others hostile to republicanism and its association with the Revolution of 1789. The republicans themselves would also quarrel over the nature of republicanism. Was it to be a moderate or a radical republic?

As the republicans consolidated their power, they sought symbols that would identify republic and nation. One obvious symbol was the flag, the *tricolore*. Despite Chambord's legitimist opposition to the flag of revolution, the *tricolore* had broad acceptance that transcended several regimes of the nineteenth century, including the July Monarchy, two empires and two previous republics.^{vii} Already republican symbols had been painted. While Monet looked away from the destruction left by the Commune in his scenes of Paris in the 1870s, he filled two canvases with the colors of the republic: *The Rue Montorgueil, Celebration of June 30, 1878* and its twin *The Rue Saint-Denis, Celebration of June 30, 1878* (fig. 1), in which the words “*Vive la République*” appear on a flag. The date in the title, however, was politically neutral, chosen so as not to offend those conservatives who opposed Bastille Day as the national holiday.^{viii} Monet's paintings blurred class differences with their patriotic, republican messages. Set in the streets of a popular quarter of Paris, they reminded viewers that the Commune uprising also had been an expression of outraged and frustrated nationalism among the people of Paris, who had held out against the Prussians during the siege, but had been forced to capitulate by the

Versailles government. National reconciliation was found here under the patriotic banners of the republic.^{ix}

Finally, Clemenceau campaigned for a closing of the wounds opened during the Commune when he pressed for an amnesty for the Communards, who had been arrested and exiled to the penal colony in New Caledonia after the brutal suppression of 1871. In Monet's paintings of the flags and in Clemenceau's passion for republican justice, these two friends demonstrated their allegiance to a republicanism that was at once patriotic, just, and a guarantee of liberty. But the relationship remained distant for most of the decade that followed. Monet withdrew to the countryside, abandoning Paris as the site for his art, and Clemenceau became the watchdog of the republic, feared as the "breaker of ministries."^x They would be drawn together at the end of the decade as a threat to the republic emerged in the person of a man on horseback, General Georges Boulanger.

Boulanger was able to exploit popular discontent with the moderate republic that had strengthened its majority in the legislative elections of 1881. Under the leadership of Jules Ferry the Third Republic created a secular education system whose curriculum taught the virtues of civic duty to the republic. Religious teaching was banned in the public schools and the republic became militantly anti-clerical. Teachers were instructed to stress secular republicanism as a



Fig. 1 Claude Monet, *The Rue Saint-Denis, Celebration of June 30, 1878*, 1878. Rouen, Musée des Beaux Arts. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

legacy of the Revolution and to inculcate a patriotic loyalty to the state. In foreign affairs the new republic embarked on a program of colonial expansion. By the time new elections were held for the Chamber of Deputies in 1885, however, disillusionment with the moderate republic produced gains on both the left and right sides of the assembly at the expense of the moderate, centrist republicans. In the midst of this political turbulence, General Boulanger presented himself as a strong leader who could cut through the intrigues of parliamentary politics.

Initially General Boulanger became known as a general who was concerned with the welfare of the ordinary soldier, and Clemenceau obtained his appointment as minister of war in January 1886. Boulanger also was an ardent nationalist, who became known as “General Revenge,” in his call for a recovery of the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine, and was cheered during the Bastille Day military parades in Paris. His nationalism and denunciation of parliamentary weakness won him support from monarchists, who hoped to exploit his popularity as a way to discredit the republic and restore the monarchy. They began financing his political ambitions. With royalist support, Boulanger won a series of by-elections, which alarmed the republicans. The climax came in January 1889 when Boulanger won an overwhelming victory in a parliamentary by-election in Paris, the heart of republicanism. The Third Republic appeared in danger. Boulanger’s supporters urged him to march on parliament and clear out the corrupt politicians. The General, fearing arrest for treason, fled into Belgium, and the threat of a coup passed.

Although the Boulanger affair collapsed ignominiously and discredited the royalist cause, the movement’s populist appeal foreshadowed the emergence of a new, radical right politics in France that was based on a potent combination of conservative nationalism, anti-parliamentary sentiment, and anti-Semitism.^{xi} After having at first championed Boulanger, Clemenceau by

1889 had become alarmed over this new threat to Jacobin republicanism. In response to the menace posed by Boulanger and the radical right, Clemenceau reasserted his own commitment to the revolutionary legacy of 1789. The occasion was a speech that he gave in the Chamber of Deputies at the beginning of 1891. Rejecting conservative and even moderate republican criticisms of the Revolution's excesses, particularly the terror, Clemenceau rose to state that one could not pick and choose among the events of the Revolution. He concluded that, like it or not, the Revolution was a "bloc" that could not be dismembered.^{xii}

His rousing defense of the Revolution and its republican legacy won the admiration of Monet. The painter's decision to withdraw from Paris in the 1880s has been interpreted as his way of distancing himself from politics, presumably out of a distaste for controversy,^{xiii} but there is also evidence that he was concerned about the crisis provoked by General Boulanger's ambitions. In a letter to his wife, written while he was in the Midi, Monet expressed alarm over the "deteriorating" political situation, which was an obvious reference to the General's challenge to the institutions of the Third Republic.^{xiv} In 1888, when the letter was written, Boulanger was at the height of his popularity and tensions were high in the capital.

The next year Monet traveled to the heart of France, the Massif Central, where he began a series of paintings that depicted the rugged terrain of the Creuse river valley. It was on this occasion that he composed his *Study of Rocks, the Creuse*, which subsequently was renamed *Le Bloc* in homage to Clemenceau's January 1891 speech in defense of the Revolution. Shortly thereafter Monet offered *Le Bloc* to Clemenceau for purchase at whatever price he wished to pay.^{xv} Although

pursue this generous

Claude Monet, *Study of Rocks, the Creuse (Le Bloc)* 1889.
London. The Royal Collection, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Clemenceau did not
offer, it was clearly a

gesture of friendship and solidarity with

the Revolution and the

The best known

agreement between

on a political issue



an expression of Clemenceau's views on Republic.

instance of mutual Monet and Clemenceau occurred at the time of

the Dreyfus Affair. On this occasion Monet became engaged in political action, despite his dislike for such commitments. At the heart of the controversy was the question of republican justice and whether or not a Jewish army officer had been unfairly court-martialed for treason and condemned to life imprisonment on Devil's Island on the basis of flimsy and falsified evidence. Early in 1898 Zola published his famous open letter, "J'Accuse," in the pages of Clemenceau's newspaper, *L'Aurore*, attacking the government for covering up the injustice done to Dreyfus. Monet wrote Zola with a "bravo" for the author's courageous action. A few days later Monet signed a manifesto of the intellectuals, published in *L'Aurore*, in support of the paper's campaign to reveal the truth about the Dreyfus Affair. When Zola was charged with libel and brought to trial, Monet again wrote the author to express both his continued support and his regret at not being able to come to Paris to shake Zola's hand.

The Affair divided much of France. Families quarreled, and dinner parties ended in turmoil. Painters were split in their loyalties as Monet, Cassatt, and Pissarro rallied to the Dreyfusard cause while Renoir, Cézanne, and Degas joined the anti-Dreyfusard camp. When Zola was convicted, he fled to England to avoid the fine and prison sentence that the court imposed. Monet would follow Zola there in 1899, but not before he presented Clemenceau with a gift of *Le Bloc* as a mark of appreciation for his friend's militant campaign on behalf of

Dreyfus and republican justice. This gesture was a tribute that further strengthened the relationship between the artist and the politician, and it was a symbol of their commonly shared republicanism. When Clemenceau withdrew from *L'Aurore*, following a disagreement with the newspaper's main investor, he established a weekly that he named, significantly, *Le Bloc*.

The new weekly ran for sixty issues, and it showed that Clemenceau, while now accepting the institutions of the republic, remained committed to his Jacobin origins. But circumstances had changed. While Clemenceau's radical republicanism placed him on the extreme left in the 1880s, the decade of the 90s saw the emergence of a significant socialist movement that was hostile to the capitalism of the Third Republic. The decade also witnessed a wave of militant anarchism that rejected the authority of the state and engaged in terrorist acts to bring it down, including the assassination of President Sadi Carnot, whose candidacy Clemenceau had supported at the end of the 1880s. While Clemenceau had attacked conservatives and moderate republicans in the 1880s, he became alarmed over signs of social unrest and the threat of revolutionary upheaval at the turn of the century.

Clemenceau returned to active politics when he was elected senator from the Var in the 1902 elections, which are often seen as a sign of the triumph of radical republicanism in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair. Clemenceau's election was something of an irony, however, since he was a member of an institution that he had earlier tried to abolish. Nevertheless, having just fought against what he condemned as the anti-Dreyfusard reactionaries, notably the military and the Church, he became a champion of republican order against what he saw as another threat to republican institutions, this time from the anti-parliamentary left. For Clemenceau, the republic in 1906 was as absolute in its guarantee of the rights of the individual as it had been in the 1880s,^{xvi} but Clemenceau drew back from social movements that threatened the stability of the

republican order. His taste for republican order became apparent in 1906 when he became Prime Minister. France at the time was in turmoil, as it was swept by a series of strikes. In confronting these social tensions, Clemenceau became the self-proclaimed “number one cop” of France.

As for Monet, he not only went into a self-imposed exile in England, disgusted with the emotions aroused during the Dreyfus conflict, but he also resumed his artistic quest, beginning the *Nymphéas* project at Giverny. Paul Hayes Tucker sees this as a decisive moment in Monet’s career, when he developed a new, more abstract vocabulary that enabled him to pursue his explorations of nature in the lily pond of his garden at Giverny.^{xvii} This rethinking of his art took impressionism to its ultimate expression and what became by 1900, France’s national style of painting. This was Monet’s way of using art to restore the unity of the country that had been damaged by the quarrels of the Dreyfus controversy. The *Nymphéas* would preoccupy Monet during the last two decades of his life. They would be his final gift to France in homage to the sacrifice of the Great War and to Clemenceau’s role in pushing the country to victory.

In the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair, Clemenceau became a frequent visitor to Giverny. These visits intensified when Clemenceau purchased a country house and garden in the village of Bernouville, located northwest of Paris not far from Giverny. A common fascination with automobiles facilitated exchanges of visits between the two. It was during this time that Clemenceau became aware of Monet’s water-lily project. In July 6, 1914, during a visit to Giverny, he viewed two large canvasses that mark the development of the large-scale paintings that would become the *Nymphéas* panels.

Visits between Clemenceau and Monet continued through the war years. During the initial German offensive, which threatened Paris in 1914, Monet decided to remain at Giverny, adopting a more bellicose stand than in 1870.^{xviii} By the end of the year, as the front stabilized

into the static trench warfare that would characterize the fighting on the western front, Monet reported that he was back at work. Painting distracted him from the death and suffering of war, although he felt guilty for immersing himself in his investigations of color and form at such a time.^{xix}

Visitors to Giverny reported seeing a number of large paintings stacked on top of one another in Monet's studio in early 1915. Overcoming wartime shortages and transportation difficulties, thanks to Clemenceau's assistance, Monet obtained permission that summer to build a large studio to accommodate his massive canvasses. Work progressed quickly and by late October he had moved into his new workspace. A year later Clemenceau visited Giverny and was impressed with the work that Monet had completed. However, Monet did not focus exclusively upon his *Nymphéas* as an escape from the destruction of the war. He participated in committees and donated paintings for benefits to raise funds for war relief. At one point he accepted a government commission to paint the façade of the ruined Reims cathedral, but never fulfilled his commission, again turning away from any representation of scenes of destruction as he had done in the aftermath of the Commune and its suppression. The *Water Lilies* project became a positive affirmation of creativity amid the war's devastation.^{xx}

In the meantime, Clemenceau became Prime Minister for the second time at the end of the crisis year 1917, when the French Army had mutinied and the prospect of revolution appealed to war-weary troops and workers. Debates over the wisdom of war to the bitter end versus the possibility of negotiating a peace without indemnities or annexations appeared throughout the warring states of Europe, including France. Clemenceau's appointment meant all-out war. He cracked down on dissenters and defeatists, imposed censorship, and made the pursuit of victory his battle cry.

His defiance seemed presumptuous as France at the beginning of 1918 faced the grim prospect of confronting a German offensive on the western front without the support of its eastern ally, Russia, which had withdrawn from the war. Italy had been weakened by military defeat at Caporetto in the fall of 1917. Although the Americans had entered the war at the side of Britain and France, reinforcements were only slowly arriving to bolster the western front. Clemenceau was undaunted, although victory seemed distant as the German offensive pushed toward Paris in the spring and early summer of 1918, coming within artillery range of the capital. As the German offensive pushed westward, Monet defiantly proclaimed that he preferred to perish amid his life's work at Giverny rather than withdraw. When Allied forces stemmed the German advance and then broke the German lines at the second battle of the Marne, victory was assured, and the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918.

The next day Monet wrote to Clemenceau and offered two of the large panels to the French government as his modest way of participating in the victory and paying tribute to his friend, the “father of victory.”^{xxi} A week later Clemenceau and the art critic Gustave Geffroy arrived at Giverny, where they persuaded Monet to extend his donation to twelve panels that would be installed in Paris as a monument to peace and “to the glory of France.”^{xxii} When Monet thanked Clemenceau for having saved France, the crusty Prime Minister replied characteristically, “No, it was the infantry.”^{xxiii}

This was the beginning of the long and painful negotiations regarding the fate of the *Nymphéas* that preoccupied Clemenceau and Monet until the latter's death in 1926. While these negotiations have been well chronicled, certain aspects of the transaction reveal both the nature of the Monet-Clemenceau relationship and the stratagems, particularly an appeal to national duty that Clemenceau employed to get Monet to fulfill his commitment.^{xxiv} This task became more

difficult after Clemenceau lost his bid to become President of France in 1920 and retired from active politics. Still, Clemenceau had influence, particularly through Paul Léon, whom he had appointed as director of the École des Beaux-Arts in 1919.

Monet proved to be a difficult and irascible bargainer. Although he had promised Clemenceau the twelve panels as a gift, a year later he demanded that the state purchase his *Ladies in the Garden*, which had been refused by the jury of the Salon of 1867, for the sum of 200,000 francs. Here was Monet, not only acting as the shrewd businessman, but also exacting his revenge as an artist. When Léon reported the purchase price to the cabinet, Monet was reprimanded for his audacity and reminded that the sum of 150,000 francs had been authorized. He had to plead for the rest.^{xxv} Further delays occurred over the selection of a site for the installation. After initially planning for a circular installation on



Clemenceau and Monet at Giverny

the grounds of the Hôtel Biron, now the Rodin Museum, Monet agreed to the Orangerie, which Clemenceau had visited in the company of Léon and pronounced the best site available. Monet agreed after setting his exacting specifications. Finally, Clemenceau insisted that a contract be signed, which was done on April 12, 1922, in the office of a notary in Vernon. By the terms of the agreement, Monet would deliver nineteen (eventually twenty-two) large panels of *Water Lilies* by April 1924, to be installed in the Orangerie.^{xxvi} Clemenceau was delighted,^{xxvii} but his struggle to get Monet to deliver on the contract was just beginning.

Monet's difficulties with his cataracts caused long delays. He became deeply discouraged with his declining vision, which, when his condition became known, enabled Clemenceau's

enemies in parliament to question the wisdom of accepting this costly gift from a nearly blind artist.^{xxviii} After Clemenceau's cajoling, Monet reluctantly agreed to a cataract operation, but again delays occurred. Monet feared that surgery might leave him completely blind.^{xxix} The first operation came in January 1923, but was only partially successful. A second was planned for February, but again postponed to the following summer. During this time he could not paint and suffered from a condition (xanthopsia), which caused everything he saw to be tinted yellow. He became extremely discouraged and his mood did not improve after the second operation in July. He did not resume work until November 1923. Desperate to meet his deadline and unable to see what he had produced, Monet fell into despair and ceased work in February. He begged Clemenceau to ask for an extension of the deadline from Léon, and Clemenceau obtained what would prove to be an indefinite postponement.

A combination of Monet's poor eyesight and his own fear that he could not complete the *Nymphéas* to his satisfaction produced a destruction of canvasses that the painter considered inferior.^{xxx} As Monet's self-doubts and procrastination continued into the fall of 1924, Clemenceau changed his tactics. Rather than insisting that Monet was an artist who should remain true to his genius, Clemenceau decided to shame him on the basis of his obligation to France. In response to another letter in which Monet expressed his conviction that he could not meet his obligation, Clemenceau replied sharply that he had obtained a delay in the date for delivering the paintings, but he did not do so to satisfy the whim of a friend. He reminded Monet that the state had fulfilled its obligation and had expended the funds to remodel the Orangerie to Monet's specifications. Monet had an obligation to fulfill the commitments that he had made to the Third Republic.^{xxxi}

In his earlier letters Clemenceau's tone had been bantering and filled with good humor. Now he adopted a sterner manner that was tinged with anger at Monet's evasions of his responsibility to the nation. When he discovered that Monet had written to Paul Léon at the end of 1924, threatening to break his contract, Clemenceau replied in a way that placed the artist's obligation to the nation ahead of his own ill-humor. "My poor friend," he wrote, "I don't care how old, how exhausted you are and whether you are an artist or not. You have no right to break your word of honor, especially when it was given to France."^{xxxii} He threatened to break off his friendship with this "new" Monet, whose painting he still admired but whose childish and headstrong self-doubts he deplored. Monet appealed to Clemenceau to reconsider, but Clemenceau refused as long as the painter remained attached to his "monomania" and threatened to renege on his obligation to the nation. Eventually, Clemenceau relented, but only if Monet renounced his folly. In response to an appeal from the painter's stepdaughter, Clemenceau agreed to come to Giverny to see if Monet were in a more reasonable frame of mind. If not, he warned that he would stick to his views.

Reconciliation was achieved, and Monet resumed work on the panels, much to Clemenceau's relief. The painter fulfilled his obligation, but still could not part with what he considered his final masterpiece. It was not until after Monet's death in late 1926 that Clemenceau was able to have the paintings installed in the Orangerie.^{xxxiii} His appeal to Monet's sense of honor to France was the decisive argument that stopped the artist from abandoning his project. As Monet himself admitted, it was Clemenceau who prevented him from destroying his *Nymphéas*.^{xxxiv}

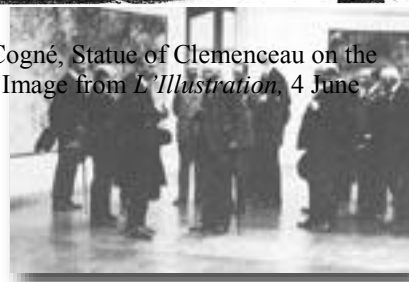
The installation of Monet's *Nymphéas* came as an anti-climax. Monet's gift to the nation was under-appreciated. Few people showed up to view the installation, and Clemenceau

observed that the only visitors were lovers seeking to be alone. as the consequence of failing eyesight 15and a loss of mastery and creativity at the end of his life.^{xxxv} Lionello Venturi claimed that Monet's talent had faded after the turn of the century. Yet even Venturi recognized the contribution of Clemenceau in winning Monet a reputation as a specifically French artist, "If Cézanne and Renoir are the French glories of universal art, Monet is an artistic glory of the French nation."^{xxxvi} But this was a legend created for a time that had passed, Venturi argued. The reappraisal of Monet's reputation would have to wait for a second postwar generation.



Fig. 3 Francis-Victor Cogné, Statue of Clemenceau on the Champs-Élysées, 1932. Image from *L'Illustration*, 4 June 1932, p. 180.

If Monet was criticized at the end of his career, so too was Clemenceau, who could not escape the attacks of his enemies. One of the harshest accusations came from Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the Allied Supreme Commander, whom Clemenceau had nominated in the last year of the war. Foch accused Clemenceau of weakness in negotiating the Treaty of Versailles, which left France without its natural frontier along the Rhine and a Germany still intact and strong enough to threaten France's security.^{xxxvii} Foch reproached Clemenceau as an old Jacobin republican who could not tolerate advice from the military. Clemenceau responded by defending the supremacy of civil authority in the republican system. He reminded Foch that he had to take into account the views of his British and American Allies, who found Foch's



Inauguration of Monet's *Grandes Décorations* in the Otangerie, 1927

intrusion to be unacceptable and a violation of the republican principle of civilian control over the military.

Clemenceau remained attached to the republican patriotism that had sustained France during the final drama of the war. In 1932 the installation of a statue of Clemenceau on the Champs-Élysées commemorated his role as the “father of victory.” For the French historian, Maurice Agulhon, Clemenceau’s statue marks one point in a French nationalist triangle, in this case republican nationalism, as do the Napoleonic and Old Regime military reference points found, respectively, at the Arc de Triomphe, and at the Invalides on the left bank. In his analysis of the political geography of Paris, Agulhon includes an image of Clemenceau’s statue, posed “as though he were watching the victory parade of July 14, 1919,” leaning against the wind and dressed as he had been when he visited the front in 1917-18.^{xxxviii} Agulhon then describes the base of the statue as a “natural” rock, replacing the style of outdated nineteenth-century pedestals.^{xxxix} But there is more to it than that. The rock at the base of the statue resembles Monet’s *Le Bloc* and reminds us that Clemenceau’s nationalism stood on a solidly republican foundation. It also symbolically links Clemenceau with Monet and reflects their common commitment to the republican patriotism that was a legacy of the French Revolution.

NOTES

ⁱ Among recent studies that connect art and politics, see Albert Boime, *Art and the French Commune: Imagining Paris after the War and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Hollis Clayson, *Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life under Siege (1870-1871)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Robert Gordon and Charles F. Stuckey, “Blossoms and Blunders: Monet and the State,” *Art in America*, Part I, (January/February 1979), 102-117, and Part II (September 1979): 109-124; John House, *Impressionism: Paint and Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004); Philip Nord, *Impressionists and Politics: Art and Democracy in the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); James H. Rubin, *Impressionism*

(London: Phaidon, 1999); Virginia Spate, *Claude Monet: Life and Work* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992); Charles F. Stuckey, *Claude Monet 1840-1926* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995); Bertrand Tillier, *La Commune de Paris, révolution sans images? Politique et représentations dans la France républicaine (1871-1914)* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2004); and Paul Hayes Tucker, *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).

ⁱⁱ House, *Impressionism: Paint and Politics*, 205-6.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nord, *Impressionists and Politics*, 7-8, 102-106.

^{iv} In her important study, Norma Broude (*Impressionism: A Feminist Reading* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 168) claims that political considerations were not at the heart of Monet's relationship with Clemenceau. The argument here is that, while perhaps not central, three instances of similar political gestures by the two men occurred at significant moments in the history of the Third Republic, and they reveal the enduring quality of Monet's and Clemenceau's commitment to republican patriotism.

^v Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Clemenceau* (Paris: Fayard, 1888), 109-111 and 133.

^{vi} Contrasting interpretations of Monet's attitude toward the Commune exist. Boime, *Art and the French Commune*, 50, 66ff, 132, and 137 criticizes Monet's attempt to gloss class conflict. Clayson, *Paris in Despair*, 369 and 463 ff., takes issue with Boime's contention that impressionist art was a conscious erasure of the Commune, although consideration of the Commune was minimized. Nord, *Impressionists and Politics*, 36-37 and 44, is more sympathetic to Monet's attempt to overcome the memory of the defeat and the Commune.

^{vii} Raoul Girardet, "The Three Colors: Neither White nor Red," in Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Krizman, ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 3: *Symbols*, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 3-28.

^{viii} The first celebration of July 14, Bastille Day, established as the French national holiday in 1880. Christian Amalvi, "Bastille Day: From *Dies Irae* to Holiday," in *Realms of Memory*, vol. 3, 121.

^{ix} Spate, *Claude Monet*, 127-28. Tillier, *La Commune de Paris, révolution sans images?*, 373, sees Monet's two paintings as "the return of a pacified and dominated crowd to the streets."

^x André Wormser, "Claude Monet et Georges Clemenceau: une singulière amitié," in John Rewald and Frances Weitzenhoffer, *Aspects of Monet: A Symposium on the Artist's Life and Times* (New York: Abrams, 1984): 193.

^{xi} See William D. Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism, and the Origins of the Radical Right in France* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989): 13-16.

^{xii} Duroselle, *Clemenceau*, 262-63.

^{xiii} Norma Broude rejects Paul Hayes Tucker's claim that Monet was trying "to forge a public identity for himself around the political life of his country." Broude's undervalues the significance of the political side of the Clemenceau-Monet relationship. See *Impressionism: A Feminist Reading*, 168.

^{xiv} Evidence for Monet's distancing himself from politics comes from his letter of February 15, 1889 to Berthe Morisot, in which he says he goes less frequently to Paris "where the only thing people talk about is politics," cited *ibid*. Tucker notes that there is other evidence of Monet's concern about the political situation at the time of the Boulanger affair and the war scare with Germany. See Paul Hayes Tucker, *Monet in the 1890s: The Series Paintings* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989): 11, 39.

^{xv} Stuckey, *Claude Monet*, 219.

^{xvi} Odile Rudelle, *La République absolue: aux origines de l'instabilité constitutionnelle de la France républicaine* (Paris: Editions de la Sorbonne, 1982) cited in Maurice Agulhon, *The French Republic*, tr. Antonia Nevill (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, US: Blackwell, 1993), 38, 42.

^{xvii} Paul Hayes Tucker, "The Revolution in the Garden: Monet in the Twentieth Century," in Paul Hayes Tucker et al. , *Monet in the Twentieth Century*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 26.

^{xviii} Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, vol. IV (Lausanne: Bibliothèque des arts, 1985): 80.

^{xix} Letter of 1 December 1914, cited in Stuckey, *Claude Monet*, 246.

^{xx} *Ibid*. 202; Spate, *Claude Monet*, 314.

^{xxi} Wormser, "Claude Monet et Georges Clemenceau," in *Aspects of Monet*, 198.

^{xxii} Gordon and Stuckey, "Blossoms and Blunders" (Part I): 109.

^{xxiii} Cited in Stuckey, *Claude Monet*, 249.

^{xxiv} This story has been ably told by Gordon and Stuckey, "Blossoms and Blunders" (Parts I & II), *passim*.

^{xxv} Paul Léon, *Du Palais-Royal au Palais-Bourbon: Souvenirs* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947), 195.

^{xxvi} Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, vol. IV, 104-105.

^{xxvii} Clemenceau to Monet, 17 April 1922, in *Georges Clemenceau à son ami Claude Monet: Correspondance* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), 101.

^{xxviii} Gordon and Stuckey, “Blossoms and Blunders,” Part I, 111, and Part II, 110.

^{xxix} Clemenceau to Monet, 5 May 1922, 12 and 15 September 1922, in *Georges Clemenceau à son ami Claude Monet*, 101-103, 110-111 and 112.

^{xxx} Monet to Coutela, 9 April 1924, *Ibid*, 150 fn. 1.

^{xxxi} Clemenceau to Monet, 8 October 1924, *Ibid*, 158.

^{xxxii} Clemenceau to Monet, 7 January 1925, *Ibid*, 162-63.

^{xxxiii} Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, vol. IV, 144

^{xxxiv} Gordon and Stuckey, “Blossoms and Blunders,” Part II, 121.

^{xxxv} Romy Golan, “Oceanic Sensations: Monet’s *Grandes Décorations* and Mural Painting in France from 1927 to 1952,” in Tucker *et al.*, *Monet in the Twentieth Century*, Tucker, Shackelford and Stevens, eds. 92.

^{xxxvi} Lionello Venturi, *Les Archives de l’impressionisme: Lettres de Renoir, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley et autres. Mémoires de Paul Durand-Ruel. Documents*, vol. 1 (Paris and New York: Durand-Ruel, 1939): 112.

^{xxxvii} On the Foch affair, see Duroselle, *Clemenceau*, 938-44.

^{xxxviii} Maurice Agulhon, “Paris: A Traversal from East to West,” in *Realms of Memory*, vol. 3: *Symbols*, 543-44. Clemenceau’s family objected to Cogné’s representation and its location as unworthy of the “father of victory.” See *L’Illustration*, 4 June 1932, vol. 182, no 4657, 180.

^{xxxix} Clemenceau’s family objected to Cogné’s representation and its location as unworthy of the “father of victory.” See *L’Illustration*, 4/6/32, vbl. 182, no. 4657, p. 180.