

# The Development of The Third French Republic; Impressionism

Discussion  
Lesson

14

**Comment [J1]:** We decided as a group that *Evolution of Impressionism* would be a more relevant title than *The Third French Republic; Impressionism*, but during the meeting held with representatives from our group, you suggested *Development of Impressionism* instead to remove the controversial word *evolution*. The change has been made accordingly.

## OBJECTIVES

By the end of this discussion, you should be able to do the following:

- Explain how France's defeat at the hands of the Germans changed the French her attitude toward art and culture.
- Explain how social, artistic, and technological changes influenced the course of French art in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> nineteenth century.
- Explain the principles of Himpressionism and how they varied from traditional art.
- Explain the use of symbols in Symbolist poetry; and write some Symbolist poetry of your own.
- Explain the devices in Debussy's music that correspond to visual Himpressionism and poetic Symbolism.

**Comment [B12]:** While we are aware that traditionally countries were referred to with feminine pronouns, in light of gender neutrality, we chose to eliminate all gender-specific pronouns.

## KEY TERMS

By the end of this discussion, you should understand the following terms:

- Impressionism
- Motif
- Symbolism

## PREPARE

Study the following instructional material:

In many ways, France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 was as important in ushering in a new era for her the French as it had been was for Germany. France had long been the greatest military power on the continent. She It was the first great nation-state in the Middle Ages and dominated the political scene during the religious wars of the seventeenth century. King Louis XIV, the so-called "Sun King," built a palace of unprecedented opulence luxury at Versailles, the envy of all aspiring European monarchs.

**Comment [B13]:** We added the year of the defeat in order to give a historic frame of reference.

**Comment [B14]:** We didn't feel this sentence was needed to understand the point of this paragraph, which is that France's defeat was a turning point in its history.

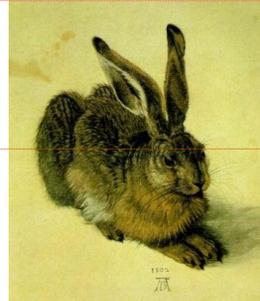
~~In~~ During the French Revolution of the late 18<sup>th</sup> ~~eighteenth~~ century, the people deposed and beheaded their monarch, ~~and they~~ which ushered in a reign of political anarchy called the First Republic. ~~Order was restored by~~ Napoleon Bonaparte, a military hero who was ~~voted~~ ~~given~~ dictatorial powers, ~~restored order~~ and eventually had himself crowned emperor.



Through it all, France's armies brought confusion and destruction to her enemies. The combined forces of all the nations of Europe finally brought about Napoleon's defeat in 1815, but France quickly recovered and once again became a looming presence. Another revolution in 1848 overthrew deposed the last Bourbon monarch and set up a Second Republic. This one, like the first, quickly became an Empire under a member of the Bonaparte family. This time it was Napoleon's nephew, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, who was crowned Napoleon III. (Napoleon I had an infant son who reigned for three weeks when the old emperor abdicated). His The Second French Empire was a conscious attempt to capture the glories of the past, and the new Emperor favored art that was as big and bombastic as his ego.

**Franz Winterhalter (1805–1873), Emperor Napoleon III**

But Napoleon III's defeat at the hand of the Germans in 1871 brought an end to these glories. Napoleon was traded for a Third Republic, and the pretensions of the Second Empire were abandoned, and the French decided that, if they could not be the military masters of the world militarily, the door was still open to them culturally.



**Comment [J5]:** We felt that this paragraph focused too much on historical events and tried to cut out details we felt unnecessary to the point.

**Comment [BI6]:** We felt this pronoun was unclear.

**Comment [J7]:** The artist and title of the rabbit painting were incorrect. It was actually done by Albrecht Dürer (c. 1471–1528) and it is titled *Young Hare*. This image can be found on the Wikipedia page on Albrecht Dürer.

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Winterhalter (1805–1873), Emperor Napoleon III

**Technology and art**

These political changes were accompanied by two technological advances that were to permanently change the face of art during this time of political change. The first of these advances was the invention of the camera. Since the Renaissance, the ideal for a painter was one who had the ability to capture, as accurately and realistically as possible, the form, colors, features, and personalities of the things subjects of in the natural world as realistically as possible. **Hans Holbein, c. 1497(1593) A hare**

The camera changed all of that. Henceforth, no painter would ever be able to compete with this device for sheer accuracy and lifelike imitation. Painters would have had to find some other purpose if the art form was to survive.

The second technical invention was oil paint offered in metal tubes. Up to this time, painters had to mix their own paint, and since it would dry in a few hours, they could only make enough for immediate use. This tied artists to their studios. But now a painter could easily pack a kit, throw in his tubes of paint, and head for the countryside.

**Albrecht Dürer  
Hans Holbein, (c.  
147197–152893),**

**Impressionism**

Both of these changes are reflected in the work of a group of 19<sup>th</sup>-century-nineteenth-century painters that have come to be known as the **Impressionists**. This group centered on the work of Edouard Manet (1832–83), whose avowed purpose goal was to rid painting of any practice that he considered stale and meaningless. Conventional painters of Manet’s day claimed ~~that~~ they had discovered the secret of representing nature; Manet believed ~~that~~ this claim was based on a misconception. Traditional painting, he believed, represented ~~men or~~ and objects under ~~very~~ artificial conditions—; models posing in the light of a studio, and while the painter ~~using~~ used the interplay between light and shade to create a sense of solidity and roundness.‡

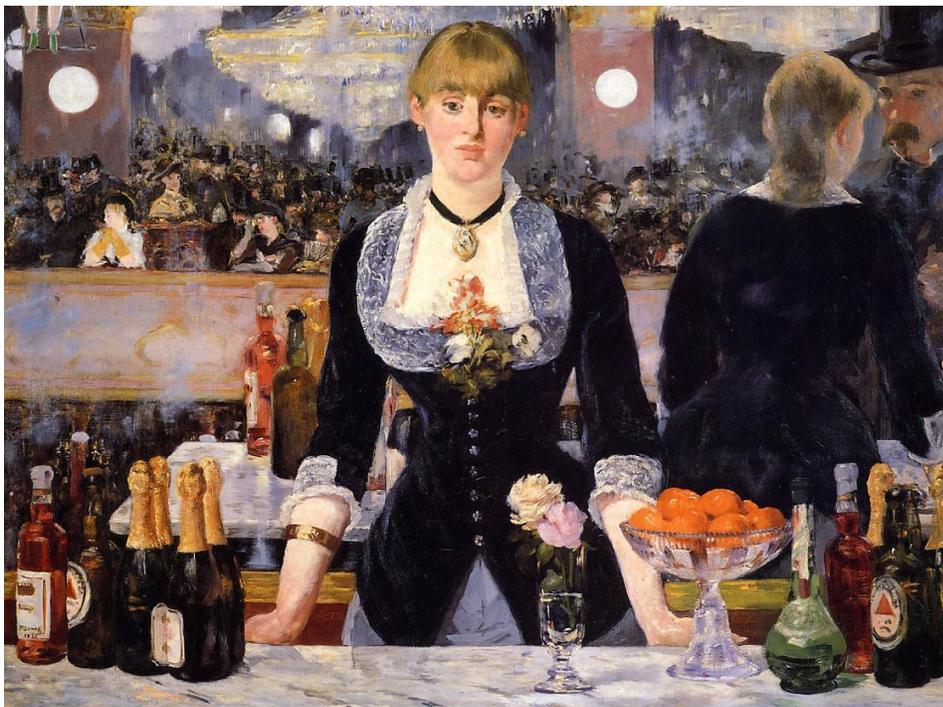


Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), *Still Life with Plums*

The public had become so accustomed to this manner of representation, ~~that~~ they forgot ~~that~~ things don’t really appear ~~this that~~ way in real life. ~~In real life,~~ Manet believed that, in real life, the contrasts between light and shade ~~were are~~ not nearly so even. The lit parts are much brighter, ~~than in the studio,~~ and the unlit parts are dappled ~~in to~~ various shades of gray. According to Manet, “if we look at nature in the open, we do not see individual objects each with its own colour but rather a bright medley of tints which blend in our eye or really in our mind.”‡ This same idea holds true with line.‡ ~~‡~~ The old paintings were concerned with ~~showing to show~~ all the details of all the subjects with equal attention. But Manet realized

**Comment [J8]:** In our research, we could only find this quote on a history of art blog. We were unable to find it within the book it is said to come from by the documentation. Also, we don’t think this quote is actually from Manet, but a man named Gombrich, given the book it came from as well as comments made on the blog. A history of art blog is not a reliable source, but the true origin of this quote might need to be looked into.

that, in reality, the eye does not see things that way. In fact, the eye tends to focus on only a small region, and the rest of its view tends to be blurred and unclear.



Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères*

Manet's painting techniques, which abandoned the principle of mellow shading in favor of strong and harsh contrasts, caused an outcry among traditional artists. In 1863, the academic painters refused to show his work ~~at~~ in an exhibition at the Paris Salon. Following an uproar carried by the community and artists, the authorities showed all the condemned works in a special show ~~that~~ they called the "Salon of the Rejected?" ("Salon des Refusés").

**Comment [B19]:** We changed the treatment and placing of the paragraphs in this section so the painting is displayed on the same page it is discussed in order to increase ease of access and readability.

**Comment [B110]:** We added this to clarify what the uproar was and who it came from.

Among the painters who joined Manet was Claude Monet (1840–1926). Monet urged his friends to abandon the studio once and for all and to never ~~to~~ paint a single stroke except ~~for~~ in front of the “motif.”<sup>23</sup> He had a little boat fitted-out~~outfitted~~ as a studio to allow him to explore the moods and effects of river scenery. Manet painted himself Monet in this attitude.;



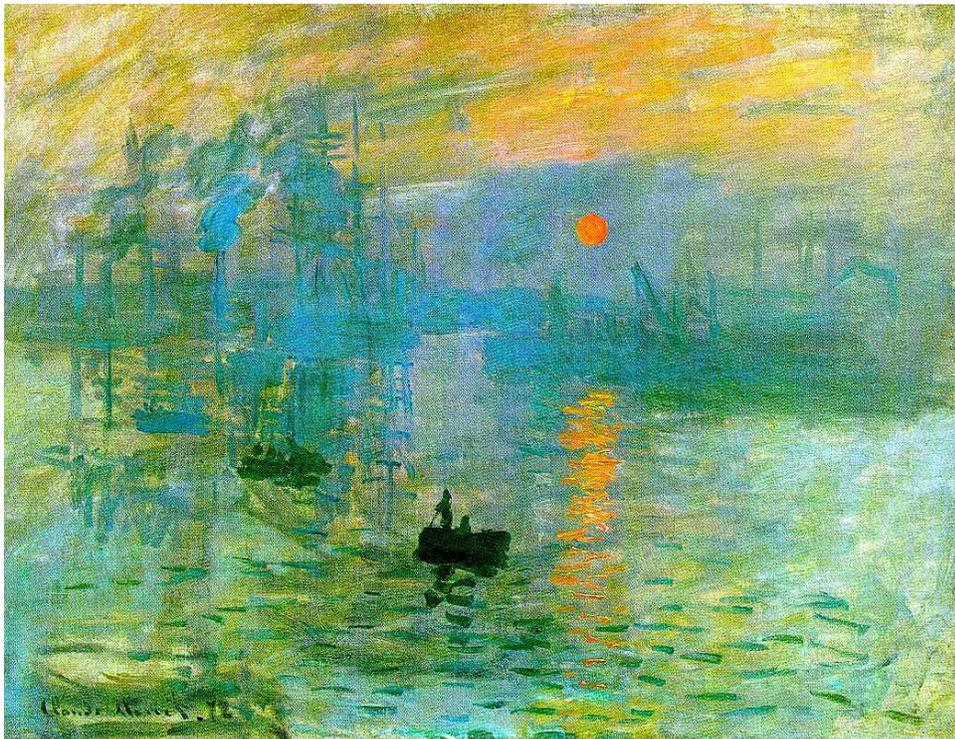
Manet, *Monet Working in His Boat*

Furthering Manet's movement, Monet's Monet demands felt that a painting should be finished on the spot, which not only changed not only the painters' work environment, but also changed the ideals of painting. In order to catch a fleeting moment, the painter had no time to mix and match colors, but rather instead had to paint them in rapid strokes, abandoning detail in favor of a general effect. While this apparently sloppy approach enraged the critics, it enabled Monet to see things with a new set of eyes. It was this new style that was called Impressionism, after one of Monet's paintings: *Impression, Sunrise (Impression, soleil levant)*.

**Comment [J11]:** The title of this painting has a comma instead of a colon.

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**Comment [J12]:** As per your request, we have changed all of the titles of works in this discussion so that they all have the English translation first followed by the original foreign title in parenthesis.



Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*



Monet became famous for his landscapes, but others of his associates applied the same principles to other different subjects. Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) captured the gay life of the Parisians of his day, still mostly interested in the medley of colors and the effect light has as it dapples the faces and dress of the swirling crowd.

**Comment [J13]:** This paragraph has been moved so the image and the explanation of the image appear on the same page.

Monet became famous for his landscapes, but others of his associates applied the same principles to different subjects. Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) captured the gay life of the Parisians of his day, still mostly interested in the medley of colors and the effect light has as it dapples the faces and dress of a swirling crowd.



Renoir, *Dance at the Moulin de Galette*

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Here, only the heads of some of the people in the foreground are shown with any detail, but even then they are depicted in an unconventional manner. The eyes and forehead of the sitting lady are in ~~the~~ shadow, while the sunlight plays on her mouth and chin. Beyond, the figures ~~are in the painting become~~ increasingly dissolved in light ~~and air~~.

The joy of looking at an ~~I~~mpressionist painting is to step back a few paces and watch the brushstrokes fall into place and come to life ~~before our eyes~~. Impressionism is the art of giving the eye only the minimum of what it needs to fill in the blanks. The picture it creates is not so much on the canvas, but in the mind.

**Comment [BI14]:** We removed some of the wording to increase understanding of the principle. We were not really sure what it means to dissolve in air, and dissolving in light conveys the idea well on its own.



Camille Pissaro (1830–1903), *The Boulevard des Italiens, Morning, Sunlight*

In the end, it took little to convince the public that Impressionism was a valuable technique, and the works of Impressionistic artists became some of the most admired paintings in history. The critics who derided them were shown to be shortsighted, and art criticism as a profession suffered a stunning blow. Moreover, the success of this group of the experimentalists encouraged even more dramatic experimentation, and modernism, the idea that a work of art's primary purpose was to do something new, was incalculably strengthened. The struggle of the Impressionists became one of the most treasured legends in the history of the art, and future innovators could always point to the failure of the public to understand their work. Soon, this very misunderstanding became a stock-in-trade for artists everywhere, even to the point where that artists and critics alike began to believe that the wider an artwork's appeal, the less valid it was.

### Symbolism

A parallel to Impressionism was the symbolist movement in poetry. Like Impressionism, symbolism sought to transfer thoughts and feelings from the mind of the poet directly to the mind of the reader. Symbolists sought to use words not as concrete ideas, but rather as symbols that summoned up various emotional connections. These emotions were often rather disconnected. Thus, disconnected symbols reigned, and logic and descriptive narrative took a back seat or were ignored completely. Paul Verlaine (1844–1896) is regarded as one of the pre-eminent Symbolist poets. Many of his poems speak of *ennui*, a kind of depressed boredom that sets in once all passions have been sated and all desires met. This

**Comment [BI15]:** We felt this paragraph was very detail-heavy to the point that it became distracting. We have removed the details we felt were irrelevant to the discussion on the progression of impressionism.

feeling is characteristic of the post-Romantic age period. After all the sound and fury of Wagner and his disciples, many artists were left feeling a bit empty. In *Il pleure dans mon cœur* (“There is Weeping in My Heart”) (“*Il pleure dans mon cœur*”), Verlaine uses rain as a symbol for this kind of pointless melancholy:

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Il pleure dans mon cœur Comme il pleut sur la ville. Quelle est cette langueur Qui pénètre mon cœur?	There is weeping in my heart Like the rain falling on the town. What is this languor That pervades my heart?
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O bruit doux de la pluie, Par terre et sur les toits! Pour un cœur qui s'ennuie, O le chant de la pluie!	Oh the patter of the rain On the ground and the roofs! For a heart growing bored, Oh the song of the rain!
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Il pleure sans raison Dans ce cœur qui s'écoeure. Quoi! nulle trahison? Ce deuil est sans raison.	There is weeping without cause In this disheartened heart. What! No betrayal? There's no reason for this grief.
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C'est bien la pire peine, De ne savoir pourquoi, Sans amour et sans haine, Mon cœur a tant de peine.	Truly the worst pain Is not knowing why, Without love or hatred, my heart feels so much pain.
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Likewise, music too had its parallel to Impressionism with the music of Claude Debussy, although Debussy never applied the term to himself; and preferred to think of himself as a Symbolist. Nevertheless, his music, with its whole tone and pentatonic scales, its ninth and eleventh chords, its parallel fifths and octaves, and its colorful orchestration, created a hazy, dreamy sound that paralleled the tiny brushstrokes and gray shading of visual Impressionism. Its ambiguity towards tonality is much the same impulse as the Impressionists' blurring of line and color. *Prelude à l'après-midi d'un faun* (“Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun”) (“*Prelude à l'après-midi d'un faune*”) is one of Debussy's most Impressionistic works. It is an orchestral work based on “*The Afternoon of a Faun*” (“*L'après-midi d'un faune*”), a literary text—a poem by Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), another important symbolist poet:

Comment [BI16]: We weren't sure if students would understand what this section of musical theory means unless they are musically inclined. We felt “colorful orchestration” would be enough to give the students the idea.

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Comment [J17]: This poem is referred to by its title in the discussion questions, so the title should be used in the text to help students locate the poem being referenced.

These nymphs, I would perpetuate them.  
So bright  
Their crimson flesh that hovers there, light  
In the air drowsy with dense slumbers.  
Did I love a dream?  
My doubt, mass of ancient night, ends extreme  
In many a subtle branch, that remaining the true  
Woods themselves, proves, alas, that I too  
Offered myself, alone, as triumph, the false ideal of roses.

Debussy captures both the languor of a lazy, hazy summer afternoon; and the sensuous feelings experienced by the faun during his dream. Note the exotic scales in the flute, the rich chords in the harp, and the shimmering effects in the orchestra.

[LISTEN TO DEBUSSY'S "~~PRELUDE À L'APRES-MIDI D'UN FAUNE~~ TO THE AFTERNOON OF A FAUN"]

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## TEACH ONE ANOTHER

### Discussion questions:

1. In what ways did France's defeat at the hands of the Germans change ~~her~~ France's attitude toward art and culture?
2. What other social, artistic, and technological changes influenced the course of French art in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> nineteenth century?
3. Describe Manet's attitude toward traditional art. How do his techniques differ from the conventional artists of his day?
4. What does Monet mean by painting from the "~~motive~~motif"? How does this attitude change painting?
5. How does rain characterize the *ennui* of "~~There is Weeping in My Heart~~pleure dans mon Cœur"? What other symbols add to the prevailing mood of the poem?
6. What are some of the symbols in the lines from "~~The~~ Afternoon of a Faun" by Mallarmé? What mood results from the use of these symbols? What techniques does Debussy use to capture this same mood in his purely musical work?
7. Impressionism introduced ~~several~~ new approaches to art that led to a dramatic shift in ~~the nature of~~ painting techniques. Initially, ~~the~~ art critics ~~of the age~~ did not approve; ~~understand what the Impressionists were trying to accomplish. In a short time,~~ however, in a short time, most people came to understand the impressionist and sympathize with the aims of the Impressionists. In fact, Impressionism is one of the most popular forms of art today. This was an important step in the rise of Mmodernism, the idea that ~~the~~ art's purpose is to devise something new and surprising. How do you feel about the idea of Mmodernism? What are its benefits to art? Does it have any limitations? What are they?

**Comment [BI18]:** We felt all these questions were pertinent to the chapter except question seven, which we shortened to make it clearer.

## PONDER AND PROVE

Prepare and submit the following creative assignment:

Write a couple of lines of symbolist poetry to describe the mood you are in right now.

- 1 E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, Fifteenth Edition (London, Phaidon Press, 1995), p. 514.
- 2 Gombrich, p. 517.

**Comment [WG19]:** Microsoft Word has a glitch which prevents footnotes from being deleted in the "Final: Show Markup" view. They have been deleted in the final.