

Impressionist Painters Berthe Morisot and Edouard Manet: More Than Meets The Eye!

She has been with me for 23 years. Perhaps longer for I obtained her when I was still married to my college sweetheart. For some reason, I went alone to Rhode Island School of Design's art museum on Benefit Street in Providence. It was a weekday afternoon, and the patrons were few. I like touring museums by myself because I breeze through the exhibits and then retrace my steps to see again what I am intrigued by. She caught my eye possibly because she was painted by the French Impressionist master, Edouard Manet, and there was a look about her that I found alluring. Also, I learned that she was his sister-in-law and I too besides having an attractive wife, I upon our nuptials in 1975 at age 22, inherited her three sisters as a family bonus. They were pretty and younger than Ann. I do not think when I bought the art print at the gift shop, I knew what I was purchasing. I rarely buy souvenirs, but I took away a rolled print which was modestly priced but the framing cost me quite a bit more. Ann, my wife, wasn't overly impressed with my choice but *Le Repose* was hung in our home in Wickford until our divorce in October 2002. My wife insisted that it was to stay mine and I took it to hang over my bed in the rooming house I rented one room over a barber shop in East Greenwich, RI. My small one room 'apartment' was furnished with one twin bed and the portrait hung above the head of it was out-of-place. Her elegance and grace juxtaposing the exposed pipes and radiator, painted plaster walls, drafty windows, slanted floors, and crooked door jams, used furniture and the dilapidation that provided character to my small abode. The room was next to the shared kitchen with one refrigerator where every resident had a bin and down the hall from one of the three shared bathrooms, only the one on second floor, had a shower. My room was in the back underneath an overhang and the large apartment building next to us was only several feet away, so both the back window and side window received only partial light. I meant to stay only several weeks but ended up living on Main Street with its colorful cast of downtrodden characters for just 5 weeks short of 6 years. She never left me, hovering above me while I slept like an angel or caroused like the devil after a night of drinking in one of the neighborhood bars. Personally, I did not realize she was an artist for at least a dozen years after acquiring my print of *Le Repos*. I searched art website's on-line and found the portrait of a young lady that appealed to me hoping to hang it inside my bathroom. I subsequently had it hand-painted by a Hong Kong concern that commissioned local artists to repaint the masters on special order from an interested patron. It was priced modestly and although it took several months of waiting, it arrived from Asia tightly rolled in a cardboard tube. I had it framed and because it is oil, I have hung it just outside the door to my bathroom to protect it from humidity. The youth was a family friend of the Morisots, and she is unconsciously but meticulously tying back her hair in a private moment as she preens and grooms herself as part of her daily toiletry.

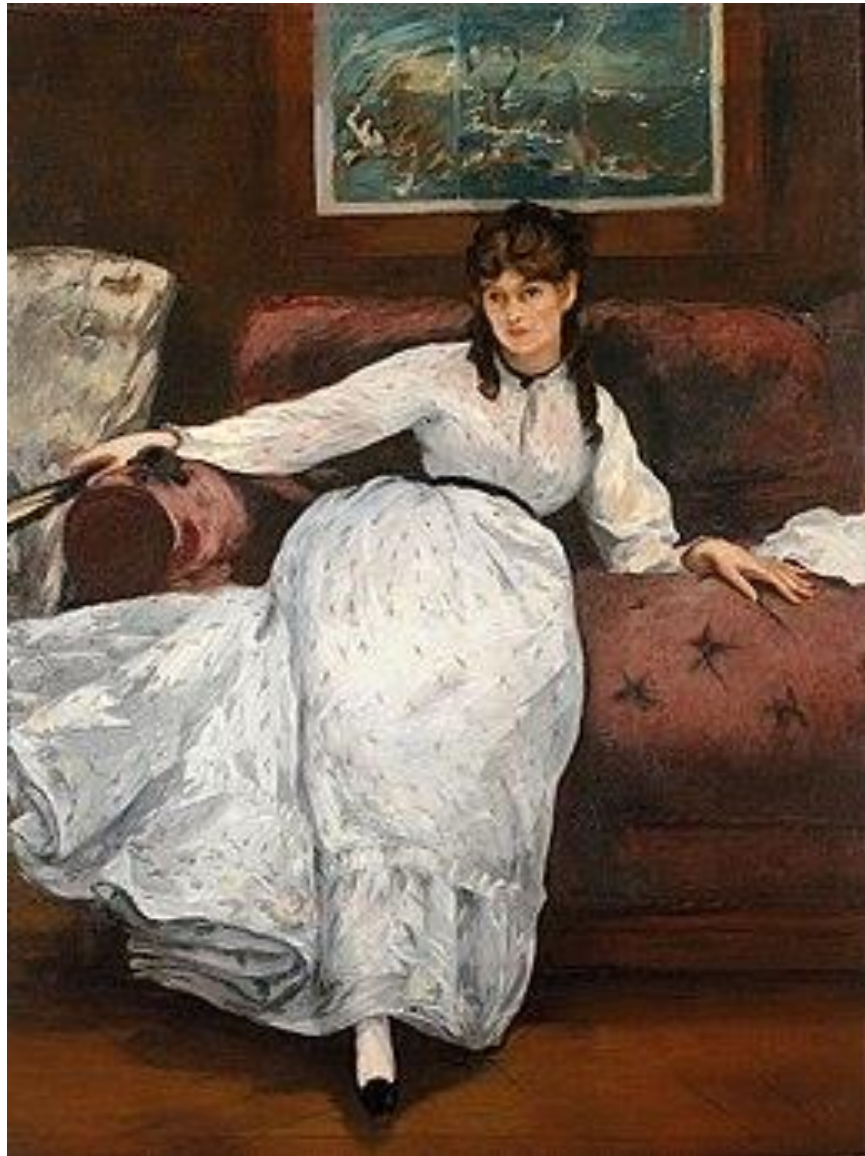
***The Bath* [1885-1886]—Original at the Clark Institute in Williamstown, -Massachusetts. Oil-on Canvas.**



In the 1860s when Edouard Manet began his artistic career, he was a 'young dandy' who was handsome, charming, imaginative, intelligent, generous, as well as good-hearted; he often displayed a caustic wit that was purposely ironic and at times cruel. Despite falling short of his parent's lofty expectations for him and they being disappointed in his life choice to pursue painting, despite his work being rejected by salons and sharply critiqued, he now is considered the leader of the French Impressionist art period. Ambitious, innovative, always well-dressed; he talked politics and art in the Parisian cafes, worked with models in art his studio, and gregariously met his close circle of friends from the intelligentsia at the Louvre Museum. He was notorious for his daring sexual paintings and his rebel spirit made him more appealing to some women. He was despised by the most prestigious critics and at times vilified by the public, but he was beloved by his friends, and he was a Parisian man that was described as 'still knowing how to talk to a woman'. His 'sensitivity and responsiveness' made many women fall in love with him. His lovely model was one of them. Berthe Morisot was born on January 14th, 1841--- into an influential, upper middle-class Parisian family. Berthe had two older sisters, Yves and Edma, and a younger brother, Tiburce. Manet And Morisot and the artists, writers and poets in their circle came from the French upper-class and were provided with the means to devote their lives to the pursuit of their art. Both of their fathers were prestigious attorneys. Manet's family was one of the most well-connected in Europe. His father was Auguste Manet, a high-ranking judge, and his mother was the daughter of a diplomat and was the goddaughter of the crown prince of Sweden. Manet was the eldest son and Morisot was the youngest daughter. She was nine years younger than him. Both lived through tumultuous times especially the Prussian siege of Paris in 1870. He was her mentor encouraging her as a 'gifted disciple' but at times he could be a stern taskmaster to a pupil that admired him. Between 1868 and 1874 when she was in her late twenties and early thirties, Edouard Manet became obsessed with her striking beauty and was fascinated with the allure that she inspired in him as well as other men. She had a powerful effect on men. She was surprised, however infrequently, when she went unnoticed by men. Manet expressed his love for her, and he outs her reciprocating feelings for him in a series of eleven elegant portraits before her marriage, and one where her new wedding ring is prominent. He kept five of them, gave her two as gifts, and she bought a third one after his passing. Manet captured her enigmatic essence in lithograph, watercolor, oil, and etching and treasured them because of his feelings for her-- he also realized that several of which were among his greatest works. His memorizing renderings of her, so nuanced in detailing her mood and sensitive temperament, at times exhibiting a wild but melancholy expression, often feature the penetrating strength and extraordinary concentration of her eyes. Her dark burning eyes, give her an aloof air of foreignness and separation, but their darting activity

momentarily stopped and caught on canvas while searching her surroundings, showed that her vitality was in her great eyes. He constantly altered her identity from portrait to portrait. Her skin, despite her dramatic Spanish-like features, was always white, her pale but luminous glow contrasted by her being attired often in opaque black. As if stricken by illness or grief, he painted her as pensive or melancholy; he painted her with unruly hair, with parted, full lips and in postures that reinforced her forceful but restrained character whether she was posed with her face hidden behind a veil or a handheld fan or swath in heavy furs. Emotionally charged, perhaps more sensual than his nude painting of Victorine Meurent, the portraits of Berthe Morisot exude the magnetic tension between a married young man and beautiful, single woman. Her riveting images aroused suspicions about her true relations with Manet. The portraits reveal the impossibility of their love for one another. With her as his model, Manet answers the poet Yeats's famous rhetorical question: "Does the imagination dwell the most, upon a woman won or a woman lost?" What is unobtainable or what is gone is most desired. But what can one say about lovers who jettison their most precious moments despite their love, demonstrating a reluctant willingness to 'let go' of their intimacy so that they could remain close?

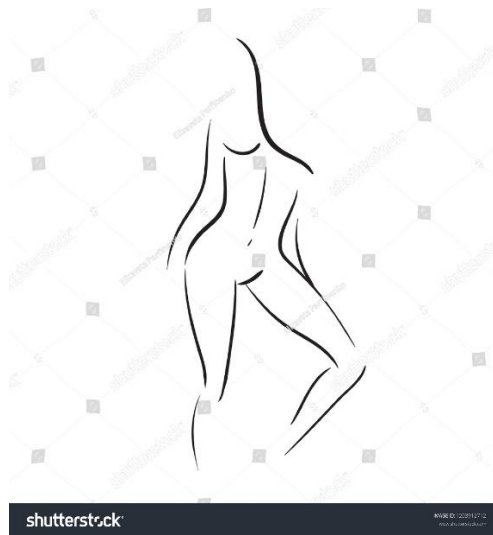
Repose [Le Repos] circa 1871: by Edouard Manet



Oil on Canvas: 59.1 inches X 44.9 inches; Rhode Island School of Design. Providence, Rhode Island.

Art critics often make claims that ring true, but their reasoning often falls short in explaining the artist technique in achieving the intended and desired effect. Manet claimed that this work was unique in that it was 'not at all in the character of a portrait.' He also accurately described it as a 'study in physical and psychological repose.' Critics point to the striking contrast in the white dress secured a black sash with the dark tones of the room and furniture and point out the additional contrast between her serenity with the hectic, swirling brushstrokes violently displayed in the Japanese triptych print above her head. On close inspection of the subject's calm demeanor, we see that she is resting but alert, her dark, deep eyes lost in an indirect gaze that project an air of sadness. She is relaxed, tender and engaging although lost in introspective reflection. None of this adequately explains how he achieved success in making the supple, slender figure innocently seductive. If contrast alone could make one sexy, then people dressed as African zebras would reign supreme in their sexual allure to us humans. In

showing what Manet did to accentuate her femininity and sensuality----one picture is worth one thousand words:



Underneath her billowy dress is this provoking posture. Manet did more to accentuate her sensuality by artfully repositioning the angle of her body. Berthe, years later told her daughter that “her left leg, half drawn back under the skirt, used to stiffen painfully, but Manet would not allow her to move, less the skirt be disarranged.” The billowing dress is asymmetric and juts out like a peninsula to her right, her right arm extended fully in that direction with clenched right fist securely holding a folded fan, and with the leg withdrawn, most of her weight is shifted to her left, to rest on the fulcrum made by her supporting elbow and her superfluous wrist with her the fingers of the left hand spread gracefully. Her extended left arm acts as a counterbalance like the leaded keel of a heavily masted sailing ship. The slender, naked, and slightly cocked but limp wrist is an accentuation of her femininity. A limp wrist is a submission signal that indicates to males that the female is willing to be dominated, at least during the sexual act. The wrist lightly rests on the star-shaped buttons that decorate a soft, pillory cushion rather reminiscent of a mound of human flesh. Perhaps her lightest touch on mere cloth substitutes for skin and our naked form; the pillow representing in overstuffed, padded, and molded fabric, the contours of a muscular chest, or rounded buttocks of the human body. Her femininity, her power of allurement, all comes to a focus on this most delicate and telling feature of a woman’s physiology.



In addition, her head is cocked to her right and oddly the framing of the print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi is aligned with it, not parallel to the sofa, or the architecture of the ceiling or floor, but with the angle of her neck. It is off kilter, and perhaps the fashionable Japanese print, with its wild strokes and frenzy of hue represents what Manet saw as his subject’s emotionality and inner turmoil.

No doubt in 19th century Paris, a widely held belief about women’s character that added to their vulnerability and the requirement that male supervision was a necessity. Mme. Morisot, her concerned

mother, warned her daughter that her own artistic ambition might be an impediment to a successful marriage arrangement. Though talented and outwardly self-assured, Berthe was torn between her art and a proper marriage. She pondered whether her chosen life to remain a spinster in pursuit of her craft, might turn out to be a terrible mistake. Morisot suffered from the social constraints imposed on French women at the time, and her mother chastised her in her determination to succeed in the Parisian art world at the expense of matrimony. "It is like her painting—she will get compliments from suitors since she was so eager to receive them, but she will be held at arm's length when it comes to a serious commitment." Mme. Morisot outlined the worst consequences of Berthe's decision: they, her parents would die, she would lose her good looks and she'd be left alone, in a dubious social position. "Everyone thinks it is better to marry, even making some concessions than to remain independent in a position that is not really one...in a few more years she will be more alone, she will have fewer ties than now; her youth will fade, and of the friends she supposes herself to have now, only a few will remain. How I wish the dear child had all this turmoil of feeling and phantasy behind her." Berthe also had doubts especially about failing as an artist, but despite her misgivings that were amplified by her mother's doubt, she in her early twenties produced works that enjoyed some success.

She painted with energy, Berthe always painted standing up, with the same nervous intensity as Manet, pacing back and forth before her canvas on the easel. She lingered in a penetrating, piercing stare on her subject while her ladylike hand poised anticipating her volition to precisely place the brushstroke where she wanted. She employed an accretive method in applying her pigment, often using several different materials applied over one another in thick layers: "starting with a light pencil sketch, to repeat or vary the theme in sanguine, to remodel the composition in pastel and, quite often to carry forward the theme in watercolor and occasionally to carry it to a final culmination in finished oil." The rich, prismatic colors with a thousand conflicting energies, were visually stunning. Her body of works are divided among domestic scenes and landscapes and today feminist overvalue her works whereas many others have undervalued her accomplishments. Often detractors state that her art lacks historical context, dramatic tension and narrative meaning----failing to draw in the viewer enough for them to ask what is happening or what it means. During the period that she lived, many who appreciated the serious works of renown artists including her first art tutors felt that a woman's artwork could only be a 'decorative pastime'. It is hard to erase even today that handed-down bias from the art critic's mindset.

It happens that our story about the Manet and Morisot relationship hinges on a similar nineteen-year-old girl to the family friend painted above by Morisot. Miss Suzanne Leenhoff, born in Deft, Holland, in 1829, was an excellent pianist and in 1851 and was hired by Edouard's father to tutor his three sons. Edouard had recently returned from a sailing adventure to Rio de Janeiro that his father had paid for in hopes of his son who was not enthused about studying law, would become a naval officer. Like all pursuits but art, Edouard displayed little aptitude having a tin-ear and was at 16 years old beyond the typical age for one to begin musical instruction. Suzanne was living in Paris with her two brothers and became pregnant. In Paris, in January 1852, she gave birth to a bastard son---who was named on his birth certificate as Leon *Koella*, although there is no evidence that the foreign-named father ever existed. This was an embarrassing event in polite Parisian society and at his church baptism in 1855, his mother Suzanne serves as his godmother and young Edouard becomes the godfather. Suzanne is a solid, phlegmatic young woman who is 'kind, simple and direct, and blessed with an unshakable serenity.' She goes along with a theatric scheme to portray her son as her young brother and baby Leon goes by her surname Leenhoff. Leon's paternity is a mystery but there is strong suspicion and

circumstantial evidence that Monsieur Auguste Manet was his sire. In a society that placed a premium on maintaining a proper face, many hypocritical peccadillos were tolerated if they were coated with a veneer of discreetness to cover up the underlying ugliness; young Suzanne was the mistress of Edouard's father, Auguste Manet. Most families would do anything to hide such truths. Wives remained silent to preserve domestic security for themselves and their children, servants colluded to maintain their places in the household and husbands and sons were allowed to frequent establishments where they met less than respectable and adventurous women. Both Auguste and his son Edouard, would suffer from syphilis. Two generations of syphilis that the family secretly hid. His esteemed father was a self-righteous hypocrite, who heard and judged paternity suits as part of his court duties to uphold the social mores, but his sin placed a burden on his son Edouard who felt humiliated by the truth that threatened his place in the polite societies of the Parisian salons. Edouard attempted to preserve the family's honor. In French law at the time, children born out of wedlock to a parent who was married already to another at the conception could never be legitimized. Auguste could never claim Leon as a legal son and full heir; but after his father's death in September 1862 Edouard married Suzanne in October 1863 and adopted his father's now eleven-year-old son and Edouard's biological half-brother. Edouard last will and testament is constructed to leave everything to his wife Suzanne with the provision that Leon Leenhoff inherit from her so that the young boy could be in line to share in the Manet wealth that Leon had been denied by law from Auguste's estate. Manet's mother moved into Edouard family household with Suzanne and Leon, and the oddly arranged menage generated high tensions for Edouard because the women jostled for his emotional influence. Leon never learned of his legal surname *Koella* until at age twenty in 1872 he was conscripted for military service. He had never ever thought to question his birth. Sketching of Auguste and Manet's own paintings including Leon show that they both had a broad nose with oversized nostrils whereas Edouard inherited a fine, narrow nose from his mother's side. In 1883, a few months after her son Edouard Manet's death, his aged but resentful mother tried to recover the dowry she had given the couple for their matrimony, claiming that her son had died childless, and she furthermore condemned Suzanne's character for entrapping her son Edouard to provide a father for Leon. Madame Manet attempt to recoup the funds after Edouard's death was proof of her vengeful bitterness toward Suzanne who had promiscuously slept with her departed but unfaithful husband and disrupted her own family's domestic security.

In July 1868, Edma and Berthe were in the Louvre copying a Rubens nude as part of their painting instruction under their teacher Monsieur Joseph-Benoit Guichard were introduced to the flamboyant Manet. He was already married to Suzanne, but nevertheless Berthe and Edouard grew closer. Berthe's letters and correspondences over fifteen years detail the value she placed on the increasing evolution of their intellectual and bonding friendship including anecdotes concerning their physical attraction and flirtation, their insecurities and jealousies and their blossoming love for one another. She was vain and resented when her mentors including Edouard and contemporary Edgar De Gas ignored her or paid attention to other women or complimented their art. She once confided to Edma that once when with De Gas in a gallery he ran into some female acquaintances. Berthe told her that she "was a little annoyed when a man whom I consider to be very intelligent deserted me to pay compliments to two silly women." Manet, when he was reproached by her for being distracted or leaving her company would exclaim his devotion to her but could never play the part of a child's nurse to mollify her. When he took on Mademoiselle Eva Gonzales, the young 22-year-old daughter of a popular author, as his only formal student, Berthe was so vexed she often complained in letters to Edma about her very presence in the studio. Eva was not a newcomer to painting having studied with others previously and was a

formidable rival. Berthe was sensitive to his criticism and felt that Eva was being praised by him at her expense: "Manet lectures me and holds up that eternal Mademoiselle Gonzales as an example; she has poise, perseverance, she is able to carry an undertaking to a successful issue, whereas I am not capable of anything." His feelings for Eva Gonzalez were strong but his attention and particularly his praise to her was hurtful to Morisot. He felt Gonzalez was more of a fighter in competing in the Parisian art world where Morisot was reticent and too reserved. If Manet minimize or ignored Berthe, she brooded whereas if he noticed her, she beamed with enthusiasm. But if his mood soured, his despair was contagious for she valued his opinion. Most of the 19-century female artists had either artist fathers themselves or older dominant male mentors; the women were at times subjected to their teachers' overbearance and arrogance. This was true for Berthe Morisot and American expatriate Mary Cassatt, whom Manet and Degas respectively helped to advance their careers in France. Berthe though had an accurate intuition about Manet's underlying, base feelings for her beauty, and at times joyfully told her sister Edma that he admired her appearance or was being nice to her because he wanted her to sit for more portraits. "Once more he thinks me not too unattractive, and he wants to take me back as a model." Proud of shapely, slim figure, she could be caustic of Suzanne, his plump wife. She commented on how Manet when doing a portraiture of his spouse, was 'laboring to make of that monster something slender and interesting.' Manet once told Berthe's mother that his wife had a pretty face, but he could not endure her figure. Such gossip added fuel to Berthe's jealousy that was the driving source for her body shaming of Suzanne.

In July 1870, Napoleon III ushered in a disaster for France by declaring war on Prussia after a dispute concerning the succession to the Spanish monarchy. After defeats in Alsace and Metz, the French forces, who were no match for the Prussian army, decisively lost the battle of Sedan and Napoleon III surrendered his army of 83,000 men. The Parisians, patriotic and fiercely independent, vilified the French government that many of them distrusted and instead of acquiescing to assure the peace continued to oppose the German invaders. The Germans bombarded Paris, and laid siege to the city, starving its citizens during the bitter winter months of 1871. Most Parisians who had sufficient means fled the embattled city. Manet's mother, Leon and Suzanne traveled to the French Pyrenees, but Edouard who had joined the National Guard in November 1870 was obliged to stay behind to defend Paris. At first, he had only light duties, and painted on his portable easel but by early December he was carrying military dispatches under fire especially when the French tried to break through the Prussian lines with sorties that failed. Edouard, who had in his youth refused to eat epicurean Spanish cuisine, now was forced to eat meat from cats, dogs, rats, donkeys, and dead horses. After five months of deprivation, the capital city surrendered on January 28, 1871. Napoleon III hastily fled to England. The defeated French were forced to pay heavy war reparations and lost Alsace and Lorraine to the Germans. The Germans who had never actually entered Paris proper, waited and watched as a civil war broke out among the French; Parisians were so opposed to the peace treaty conditions negotiated by the provisional government that the two sides battled. On May 21, 1871, French soldiers loyal to the new government quelled the resistance by attacking working-class Parisians, executing civilians, wantonly killing many in a murderous spree that lasted a full week up to 20,000 people including many women and children. Corpses cluttered the Parisian streets and luckily Manet had previously vacated the city to join his family in southern France. In June, Manet returned to Paris after the reign of slaughter was over, where he some neighborhoods within the burnt-out city in ruins. By August, he was overwhelmed by the strain, became depressed and suffered a 'nervous breakdown'. Berthe Morisot's relationship with Edouard deepened during the siege when the Morisot family rejected his pleas for them to vacate

Paris. Berthe and her family were too stout-hearted in resisting leaving and underestimated their ability to suffer through the wartime hardships. The Morisots became depressed when Tiburce was captured, and like Edouard she also suffered a 'nervous breakdown' in the Spring of 1871. Their similar sufferings tempered their petty tendency to hurt one another, reinforced their emotional bond, their personal relationship intensified, and they drew closer to each other by the year's end. The hardship of war recast their passion.

Authors often try to portray their subjects as somehow above their humanity, and with Berthe Morisot they protect her reputation by claiming that Mme. Morisot would chaperone her when she visited Manet's studio. But they had ample time together alone, and while they studied and worked, the emotional intensity of their relationship, the flirtation, their high-strung vulnerabilities, their insecurities, the manic swings from adoration to wounding criticism and hurt feelings, the jealousies, the frustration that she was a spinster and he unavailable---all contributed to their need for an outlet, and cumulatively provided a springboard for a physical connection. They became discreet lovers. Though far from monogamous, Manet loved his Dutch wife but strayed, always in search of an attractive model to grace his studio or a romantic encounter. Suzanne tolerated his dalliances, perhaps as payback for the birth of her son and that he had married her, his own father's young mistress. For Berthe, his love, their laying together, although the source of guilt, acted as an emotional anchor securing what they meant to one another. She had previously relayed to her newlywed sister Edma as reassurance about her choice for matrimony by emphasizing her own loneliness and need for support: "Do not revile your fate. Remember that it is sad to be alone; despite anything that may be said or done, a woman has an immense need of affection. For her to draw into herself is to attempt the impossible." Her love for Manet was the most passionate experience of her life.

The recent HBO hit series, *'The Undoing'* based on the 2014 novel *'You Should Have Known'* is a murder mystery that reflects the psychological repercussions that develop in such a tryst as evidenced by the explosive tragic outcome that perniciously develops due to the strain of such a relationship on Dr. Jonathan Fraser and freelance sculptor and painter Elena Alves. Despite the intensity of their love, both being married and having families made the arrangement untenable. Manet and Morisot diffused the impasse in a novel way, involving sacrifice and compromise. They made concessions to resolve their emotional impasse and add permanence to their relationship. Like Edouard had married Suzanne as an inheritance from his wayward father, he encouraged Berthe to marry his younger brother. It would protect her reputation and unite the two families. They discussed it in depth and after a time she agreed. At age 33 years old she knew that if she couldn't have the love of her life, marrying Eugene might be the next best thing. Eugene looked like his brother, painted art too, but although kind, modest and understanding, he was only a pale representation of his talented brother. Berthe told her brother Tiburce that her dreams of marrying Edouard were unrealistic, writing to him: "I have found an honest and excellent man, who I think loves me sincerely. I am facing the realities of life after living for quite a long time in chimeras that did not give me much happiness." A month after their wedding in December 1874, a quiet affair due to the recent loss of her father, she was candid with her sister in that she did not love her husband. Eugene was easily perturbed by trivial things, and the high-strung couple, grated on each other from the start. Where Edouard loved painting her hair unkempt, Eugene would fuss when her coiffure was not perfect. The married couple inherited considerable wealth and lived in a house that they had built in the Parisian outskirts of Passy. Upper-class women by customary etiquette could not frequent the cafes, clubs and bars that was the heart of bohemian life, but her elegant home gave her a

stage for entertainment as well as a platform to display not only her own paintings but those of Edouard. Their principal guests were the painters Degas, Renoir, Pissarro, Claude Monet, and the poet Stephane Mallarmé. The latter worshipped her and praised her skill as a hostess that seemed to smooth out the rough edges of even her most difficult guests, even the cantankerous Degas, making her home an authentic center of civilized salon life in Paris. Renoir who was never enthusiastic about female painters nonetheless said of Berthe: "Another woman with all that would have found some way to be intolerable." Of Edouard, upon her wedding, he and her burned their letters to one another to hide their feelings and to signal that their physical intimacy was ending. Their close friendship continued, and she was devoted to him until his death. The magic was their continued love for one another. The forgoing of touch and intimacy was the cost of the decided upon arrangement.

She had trouble getting pregnant, probably a miscarriage, and confessed to Edma, who had two children, that fate was depriving her of the joys of being a mother. Her husband also desired children, and surprisingly unlike Edouard, Eugene valued her femininity especially her small talk and fashion more than her intelligence and her artistic talent. When apart, he would confess that he was very lonely without her. She never loved him, but over the years she became accepting of his frailties and inured to his insecurity, moodiness, anxiety, his sanctimony, and tantrums. In November 1878, the long-hoped-for daughter was born, Julie. An anxious Berthe was obsessive about her infant's delicate health, but the girl prospered. Julie, grew into a lovely child, devoted to her mother who she remembered later in her life as an artist and a tender parent. She as a child was exceptionally pretty and would pose as a patient model as her mother did portraits of her from her infancy into her teenage adolescence. *The Cradle, Julie with Her Nurse [1880], Eugene Manet and His Daughter at Bougival [1881] and Eugene Manet and His Daughter in the Garden [1883], Julie Manet and Her Greyhound Laertes [1893]* are examples of the artist's absorption in the daily activities of her daughter and family. Later, as Julie matured, her mother's hair turned from black to prematurely white as if Manet's use of sharp contrast in her portraits of Berthe had materialized in actual life. Her life imitating his vision in the art created by their combined efforts.

In March 1883, Edouard Manet lay ill and after an overdose of ergot by his physician his last days became a torment. Shocked by his death, Berthe wrote poignant letters to her brother about the years they had shared together and his qualities that made him beloved to her:

"...If you add these almost physical emotions my old bonds of friendship with Edouard, an entire past of youth and work suddenly ending, you will understand that I am crushed...His richly endowed nature compelled everyone's friendship; he also had intellectual charm, a warmth, something indefinable...I shall never forget the days of my friendship and intimacy with him, when I sat for him and when the charm of his mind kept me alert during those long hours."

In another letter, she emphasized his 'boundless vitality':

"...he was such an attractive personality, his mind was so young and alert, that it seemed that more than others he was beyond the power of death."

After Edouard's death, Morisot worked to enhance his posthumous reputation; she organized with Suzanne, Claude Monet, and Manet's brothers an exhibition of his works in January 1884. Their efforts were fruitful, but she noted that his growing standing as a classic painter was bittersweet from a public and art critics that had long slandered him. "...It will be the revenge for so many rebuffs, but a revenge that the poor boy obtains only in his grave."

In April 1892, Berthe lost her husband Eugene and like with Edouard once again had to witness his agonizing suffering. She mourned him, but also was inundated with waves of guilt and remorse. She had grown to love her husband but his passing while sad only reawakened her trauma involving her love for Edouard. She wept for three long nights about the choices she felt she had made trying to cope with the love she had for her brother-in-law.

“I should like to live my life over again, to record it, to admit my weaknesses; no, this is useless; **I have sinned, I have suffered, I have atoned for it.** I could write only a bad novel by relating what has been related a thousand times.”

Auguste Manet had sinned by impregnating the youth Suzanne and his son Edouard atoned for it; Berthe sinned by her tryst with Edouard, a married man, and she atoned for it by marrying his brother. Their daughter Julie was her deliverance, and it is ironic that the mother who was always fearful of her daughter's health developed pneumonia from an infection caught from her child. Her 16-year-old daughter wrote on the last day of her mother's life:

“In leaving me my poor mother suffered so much and saw her end coming. She did not want me to go into her room and be left with such a sad memory. Her illness was short but painful, and with frightful pains in the throat she couldn't breathe. Oh, I never, never, thought anything could be so awful...Oh how pretty she still was, looking as she always did, and how good she was. At three o'clock I spoke to Mama for the last time...”

The day prior to her passing, Berthe penned a farewell to Julie, and it is poignant in that it mourns her daughter's loss of herself and the effect on Julie of losing her devoted mother:

“My little Julie, I love you as I die; I shall still love you even when I am dead; I beg you not cry, this parting was inevitable. I hoped to live until you were married. Work and be good as you have always been; you have not caused me one sorrow in your little life---- Do not cry; I love you more than I can tell you...”

Berthe expired on March 2, 1896. Julie had her mother buried in the Passy cemetery next to her father and her Uncle Edouard. On the one-year anniversary of her death, her daughter and Degas, Renoir, Pissarro, and Monet offered her works in a memorial exhibition just as Berthe Morisot had done for Edouard Manet. Renoir was appointed Julie's guardian although the girl following her mother's wishes lived in the nearby household of her Gobillard cousins. Just as Edouard had advocated that Berthe marry his brother, Degas advised Julie to marry the promising son of an accomplished friend and classmate. On May 3, 1899, he attended the double wedding of cousins, when Jeannie Gobillard married the poet Paul Valery and Julie Manet married Ernest Rouart.

By R. Anthony Saritelli

Ides of March----- 03/15/2022

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