

Letter 580
Arles, c. 22 March 1889

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter which I have just received. All the more because in this case I would rather be in the wrong than in the right, certainly we are absolutely and entirely in agreement as to the general argument of your letter. That's how the thing looks to me too.

The news is that I think M. Salles is busy finding me an apartment in another part of town. I approve of this, for in this way I should not be obliged to move immediately – I should keep some sort of niche – and then I could certainly go for a trip to Marseilles or farther on to find something better. M. Salles is very kind and very loyal, and a pleasant contrast to others here. So there it is. That is all the news for the moment. If you were to write, try all the same to get them to give me the right to go out into the town. As far as I can judge, I am not properly speaking a madman. You will see that the canvases I have done in the intervals are steady and not inferior to the others. I miss the work more than it tires me.

Certainly I should be pleased to see Signac, if he has to pass through here after all. Then they must let me go out with him to show him my canvases.

Perhaps it would have been a good thing for me to accompany him where he was going, and if we had tried to find a new place together, but there, there isn't much likelihood of that now, so what's the use of his putting himself out on purpose to come and see me?

There is one very good thing in your letter, where you say that one must not let oneself have any illusions about life.

The thing is to put up with the real facts of your destiny, and then there you are. I am writing in haste to send off this letter, which will, however, perhaps only reach you on Sunday, when Signac will have already left. I can't help it. All I would ask is that people whom I do not even know by name (for they took good care to arrange that I should not know who sent the letter in question) do not meddle with me when I am busy painting, or eating, or sleeping, or taking a turn at the brothel, since I haven't a wife. Now they are meddling with everything. But in spite of everything, I wouldn't give a damn if it weren't for the grief that I am very unwillingly causing you, or rather that they are causing – and for the delay in my work.

If they should continue, these repeated and unexpected agitations may change a passing and momentary mental disturbance into a chronic disease.

Believe me, if nothing intervenes, I shall now be able to do the same and perhaps better work in the orchards than I did last year.

Now let us be as firm as possible and, in short, not let them tread too painfully on our toes. From the start I have been faced with very mischievous opposition here. All this stir will naturally be good for "impressionism," but you and I as individuals will suffer because of a pack of skunks and cowards.

There is some reason for keeping your indignation to yourself, isn't there? I have already seen in a paper here a really good article on decadent or impressionist literature.

But what are these articles in papers, etc., to you or me? As my good friend Roulin says, "It is to act as a pedestal for others." But at least you would like to know for whom or for what, wouldn't you, then you could have no objection. But to be on a pedestal for something you do not know, that is trying.

After all this for nothing, provided you go straight to your goal – a secure home for you is a great gain for me too – and that done, we can perhaps find another, more peaceful, way of settling things after your marriage. If sooner or later I should really go mad, I think I should not want to stay on here at the hospital, but just now I want to come and go freely.

The best thing for me would certainly be not to live alone, but I would rather live in a cell forever than sacrifice another life to mine. For this business of painting is a sorry poor job nowadays. If I were a Roman Catholic, I should have the resource of turning monk, but not being precisely that way, as you know, I haven't that resource. The management of the hospital is – how shall I say? – Jesuit, they are very, very able, very clever, very powerful, they are even impressionistic, they know how to make inquiries of an unheard of subtlety, but – but that amazes and confounds me – and yet...

In fact this is, in a way, the cause of my silence, so keep aloof from me in business, and meanwhile I am a man after all, so you know I will shift for myself in matters of conscience which concern myself alone.

I shake your hand in thought. Tell your fiancée and our mother and sister not to worry about me and to believe that I am on the high road to recovery.

Ever yours, Vincent