

Letter 025

London, 18 April 1875

Dear Theo,

Enclosed is a little drawing. I made it last Sunday, the morning when my landlady's little daughter died; she was thirteen years old. It is a view of Streatham Common, a large grassy plain with oak trees and gorse. It had been raining overnight; the ground was soaked and the young spring grass was fresh and green.

As you see, it is sketched on the title page of Poems by Edmond Roche. There are some very fine ones among them, grave and sad; one begins and ends thus:

J'ai gravi triste et seul la dune triste et nue,
Où la mer fait gémir sa plainte continue,
La dune où vient mourir la vague aux larges plis,
Monotone sentier aux tortueux replis.

[I have, sad and alone, climbed the sad and barren dune
Where the sea moans its constant lament
The dune where the waves die in large folds
Monotonous path of torturous folds.]

And another, "Calais":

Que j'aime à te revoir, o ma ville natale,
Chère nymphe marine assise aux bords des eaux,
J'aime de ton beffroi la flèche qui s'élance,
Belle de hardiesse et belle d'élégance,
Et sa coupole à jour, qui laisse voir les cieux.

[How I love to see you again, my native town
Dear sea nymph sitting on the seashore
I love the shaft darting from your belfry
Beautiful in its valour and beautiful in its elegance
Its lacework cupola, through which one sees the sky.]

You will probably be curious to know the one that describes the etching by Corot, and therefore I am copying it too:

L'étang à Corot

Nous regardions l'étang d'une eau morne et plombée
Lentement sous la brise assembler pli sur pli...
...Si vous le voulez bien; n'êtes vous pas le maître
Qui l'avez recréé après le créateur?

[We looked at the pond with its sombre, leaden water
As it assembled in the breeze fold after fold...
...if you desire it, are you not the master
Who created it after the Creator?]

Ville d'Avray

Kindest regards and good luck to you. À Dieu.

Vincent