

Letter 104  
Amsterdam, 3 August 1877

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your last letter, which made me very happy, many thanks. So you have been to Mauve's and had a good time. Did you do any drawing while you were there? I was once at Weissenbruch's studio, a few days before I first left for London, and the memory of what I saw there, the studies and pictures, is still as vivid as that of the man himself. When you write again, tell me something about the exhibition which opened yesterday; how many picture subjects could the artists find here on the wharf?

The reverend Mr. Meyes was here a few days ago with two of his sons, and Uncle gave us permission to visit the yard and the workshops; the forges, etc., were in full swing. When we were there together that Sunday, everything was closed. I also visited the training ship, the Wassenaar, with Uncle Pompe and Uncle Jan; that was very interesting, too.

This week the house here was full of people: Uncle and Aunt Pompe and Jan, Uncle Cor, Vincent, and Bertha van Gogh from Haarlem. This last is a very nice little girl.

Last Sunday I was at the early-morning service of the Reverend Mr. Hasebroek, and later that morning in the Oudezijds Chapel which I told you about before. So each day I try my best to get on with my work, especially Latin and Greek. I have already done a great many exercises, composed of sentences that remind me of the old school days, for instance: "which very excellent philosopher has been condemned to death by the Athenians? The very noble and very wise Socrates. Our life greatly resembles a journey and is exposed to very many and very great dangers. The nature of Odysseus, and the grapes of the vineyard."

This morning I got up very early. It had been raining overnight, but very soon the sun broke through the clouds; the ground and the piles of wood and beams in the yard were drenched, and in the pools the sky's reflection was quite golden from the rising sun. At five o'clock I saw those hundreds of workmen scatter like little black figures.

I often visit Uncle Stricker in his study. He is very clever and possesses a great many fine books; he loves his work and his profession deeply.

Last Monday Father wrote me a very cheerful letter from Helvoirt. I also heard from home that you had a 40-guilder bill from Dr. Coster; that is a big sum, and paying it will remind you of the feeling of having a tooth pulled. If only I could help you a little, but you know that I possess neither gold nor silver. I often have to resort to all kinds of devices to get money for the collections in church – by changing stamps for pennies in a tobacco shop, for instance. But, my boy, by struggling we can keep on, and you know that it is written that the poor will be blessed in the Kingdom of God.

Whenever I see Uncle Vincent, I am struck anew by something indescribably charming and, I should say, something good and spiritual in him; I do not know what to call it. Father has it even more; Uncle Jan, in another way; and it is also in Uncle Cor. Even in a hundred people you would not always find one like them, so let us carefully treasure their memory and their image. Can it be what Fénelon described in *Télémaque*?

He to whom he had chanced to address himself was a stranger who had an impressive air, but at the same time a sad, depressed quality: now and then he seemed to be thinking of the past; he had something very resolute about him, or was deeply moved and agitated. At first he hardly listened to Telemachus's question, but at last he answered, "You are right, Ulysses has been received by King Alcinous as in a place where they fear God and offer hospitality; but he is no longer there, and your search for him would be in vain; he has started for Ithaca, if the angry gods will at last allow him to come back to his penates."

Telemachus looked at him fixedly; the longer he looked at him, the more moved and astonished he was. "That stranger," said he to Mentor, "has answered me like a man who hardly listens to what is said to him and who is full of bitterness. I pity those who are unhappy because I am, too, and my heart is drawn to him without my knowing why. He has received me badly enough – he has scarcely deigned to listen to me or to answer."

Then Mentor said to him, "Personally, I am not astonished, dear Telemachus, to see you so moved. The cause of your sorrow is unknown to you, but not to Mentor. It is nature speaking, making herself felt – it is she who softens your heart: the stranger who touched you so deeply is the great Ulysses. He is going straight to Ithaca; already he is quite near the port, and at last he again sees the place so fervently longed for.

"Your eyes have seen him, but without knowing him; soon you will see and know him, and he will know you, but now the gods cannot permit your knowing each other outside of Ithaca. His heart has been no less

moved than yours, but he is too wise to reveal himself to any mortal in a place where he is exposed to treachery. Ulysses your father is the wisest of all men; his heart is like a deep well – one cannot fathom its secrets. He loves truth and never abuses it, but he tells it only when it is necessary and wise; his lips are sealed to vain words at all times. How moved he was when speaking to you! How he has had to force himself not to reveal himself, what he has suffered in seeing you. That was what made him dejected and sad.”

And now, boy, a warm handshake in thought. My regards to Mauve and others you may meet, especially to the Roos family; have a good time, I certainly hope you find a way to pay that bill, à Dieu, and believe me,  
Your loving brother, Vincent