

Letter 264  
The Hague, 5 February 1883

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and for the money.

When I read and reread your letters about your patient, I am reminded of many things. And I should like to write and ask you much more about it, but as I know the person only from your letters, it is all too vague and undefined, and more than once I have torn up a letter because of this, but believe me, I think of it all the time, and I can very well understand, and perfectly agree with you, that except for the melancholy idea of her suffering, such an encounter is a thing for which you feel grateful, and consider it uncommon good fortune. That je ne sais quoi coming from the heath, or whatever it is that reminds you of her native country, that old coast of Brittany, is something which I think will become stronger rather than weaker the longer you are with her. Your expression, "Later on will she be like the dog with the shepherd or something better?" is rather characteristic. Don't you think it probable that one time will differ greatly from another? There are so many different phases or metamorphoses in any one love, just because of the faithfulness to that one love – so that it changes all the time.

That operation will be a hard time – if I were you I shouldn't say too much to her about finding a situation later, as the future is so undecided because of her foot<sup>1</sup> – better leave it undecided. For I should be afraid that, for instance, in a crisis of pain she might quite wrongly get the notion fixed in her head, "I must do this or that," which often happens to sick women. It might make her obstinate, contrary to the feelings of her own heart, which would pain you because you would only have mentioned the idea of a situation out of delicacy, to make her feel that her future was free and independent; and she might assume that you felt more indifferent about her than is really the case. Perhaps I express myself too vaguely, but women do not always understand delicacy, any more than they do humour; and though one must certainly act with delicacy, it often gives rise to misunderstandings (though, in my opinion, one isn't responsible for them) which, in short, make life more difficult.

I do not know whether Heyerdahl, for instance, would find anything picturesque in the daily activities of the woman whom I live with. But Daumier certainly would.

I thought of Heyerdahl's saying, "Je n'aime pas qu'une figure soit trop corrompue" [I don't like a figure to be too misshapen], when I was drawing – not the woman, but an old man with a bandaged eye – and I found it not true. There are some ruins of physiognomies which are full of expression, as, for instance, "Malle [Mad] Babbe" by Frans Hals or some heads by Rembrandt.

As to Heyerdahl, I do not doubt that his intentions were all right when he made this statement, otherwise I don't think it would hold water.

In the last letter I wrote you I asked casually about Lhermitte's work. In the articles about the Black and White he is nearly always singled out as "the Millet and Jules Breton of Black and White." There was, for instance, a description of a drawing of old women on the cliffs, and about his technique they said there was none more daring, bold, or strong than he, even astonishingly so, and other drawings couldn't be compared to his, and that his touch was broader than the broadest. They also compared him with Legros, but only with the most extraordinary, most exceptional drawings or etchings by Legros, which are also very strong and broad, for instance, "The Pew."

Boy, I still feel poorly, and I've had a rather plain warning that I must be careful – my eyes felt so tired sometimes, but I wouldn't pay any attention to it. Now, last night, especially, there was a rather strong secretion of the tear glands, and the lashes stuck together, and my eyes are giving me trouble and my sight is poor.

Ever since the middle of December I have been drudging incessantly, especially on those heads. This last week I have been out-of-doors a good deal to refresh myself. I have taken baths, washed my head often with cold water, etc., etc. But one feels so miserable at such a time; I have a large pile of studies, but they don't interest me then, and I find them all bad.

Rappard wrote me again this week; he said he was recovering, but slowly, still feels weak but is beginning to walk a little bit now and then. But he wrote very clearly and plainly about many things concerning the work.

There is a spring feeling in the air already, and it will not be long before the lark sings over the meadows again.

Do you think you will be able to get here this spring???

I am rather afraid not. I am eager to talk this winter's studies over with you, and also with Rappard; he will come here sometime, when he is quite recovered.

I will take a few weeks' rest, and be out-of-doors as much as possible to refresh my thoughts. I want to use my studies for watercolours, for instance, but at present it's no use.

Right now my eyes and my face look as if I had been on a spree, which, of course, has not been the case – on the contrary – but who knows, maybe someone I meet on the street who hasn't seen me for a while will remark that I am obviously on the road to dissipation. Those things are sometimes so absurd that I can't help laughing.

In the evening at sunset there are effects of dark clouds with silver linings that are splendid, for instance, when one is walking in Bezuidenhout or along the edge of the wood. You will remember that from long ago. It is also beautiful outside my studio window, or in the meadows; one feels the spring from afar, and now and then there is something balmy in the air.

Adieu, boy, thanks again for your letter, and best wishes for your patient. I hope that I shall soon find again a drawing or a study that interests me – it is so unpleasant when one must take a rest. One cannot rest for the very reason that one must. Adieu. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

1. The patient had to be operated on for a tumour on the foot.