

Dear Theo,

I could not phrase my last letter differently than I did. But I want you to know that it always strikes me as being a difference between you and me imposed by fate, rather than one for which we ourselves are to blame.

You tell me that within a short time there will be an exhibition of the work of Delacroix. All right. You will certainly see there a picture "La Barricade," which I know only from biographies of Delacroix. I believe it was painted in 1848. [The reference is to Delacroix's Liberty at the Barricades, which in fact commemorated the rising of July 28th, 1830 and was shown at the Salon of 1831.] You also know a lithograph by De Lemud, I believe; if it is not by him, then by Daumier, also representing the barricade of 1848. I wish you could just imagine that you and I had lived in that year 1848, or some such period, for at the time of the coup d'état by Napoleon there was again something of the kind. I will not make any insinuations – that has never been my object – I try to make it clear to you to what degree the difference that has sprung up between us is connected with the general drift of society, and, as such, is something quite different from premeditated reproaches. So take that period of 1848.

Who were opposed to each other then, that can be taken as types of all the rest? Guizot, minister of Louis Philippe, on one side, Michelet and Quinet with the students on the other.

I begin with Guizot and Louis Philippe, were they bad or tyrannical? Not exactly; in my opinion, they were people, like for instance Father and Grandfather, like old Goupil. In short, people with a very venerable appearance, deep – serious – but if one looks at them a little more closely and sharply, they have something gloomy, dull, stale, so much that it makes one sick. Is this saying too much???

Except for a difference of position, they have the same mind, the same character. Am I mistaken in this?

Now Quinet or Michelet, for instance, or Victor Hugo (later), was the difference between them and their opponents very great? Yes, but seen superficially one would not have said so. I myself have formerly admired at one and the same time a book by Guizot and a book by Michelet. But in my case, as I got deeper into it, I found difference and contrast, which is stronger still.

In short, that the one comes to a dead end and disappears vaguely, and the other, on the contrary, has something infinite. Since then much has happened. But my opinion is, if you and I had lived then, you would have been on the Guizot side, and I on the side of Michelet. And both of us remaining set in our outlooks, with a certain melancholy, we might have stood as direct enemies opposite each other, for instance on such a barricade, you before it as a soldier of the government, I behind it, as revolutionist or rebel.

Now, in 1884, the digits happen to be the same only just reversed, we are standing again opposite each other, though there are no barricades now. But minds that cannot agree are certainly still to be found.

"Le moulin n'y est plus, mais le vent y est encore." [The mill has gone, but the wind remains.]

And in my opinion we are in different camps opposite each other, that cannot be helped. And whether we like it or not, you must go on, I must go on. But as we are brothers, let us avoid killing each other for instance (in the figurative sense). But we cannot help each other as much as two people who are standing side by side in the same camp. No, if we come in each other's vicinity, we would be within each other's range. My sneers are bullets, not aimed at you who are my brother, but in general at the party to which you once and for all belong. Neither do I consider your sneers expressly aimed at me, but you fire at the barricade and think to gain merit by it, and I happen to be there.

Think this over if you like, for I do not believe you can say much against it; I can only say that I believe things are so... I hope you will understand that I am speaking figuratively. Neither you nor I meddle with politics, but we live in the world, in society, and involuntarily ranks of people group themselves. Can the clouds help whether they belong to one thundershower or to another? whether they carry positive or negative electricity? Now it is also true that men are not clouds. As an individual, one is a part of all humanity. That humanity is divided into parties. How far is it one's own free will, how far is it the fatality of circumstances, that makes one belong to one party or to its opposite?

Well, then it was "'48, now it is '84," "le moulin n'y est plus, mais le vent y est encore." But try to know for yourself where you really belong, as I try to know that for myself. Goodbye,

Vincent

It was mere chance that recently I happened to be asked to do a drawing or a painted study for 20 guilders. I acceded to this request, but seeing that I suspected (a suspicion which, on investigation, proved to be well founded) that Margot Begemann was behind it all, and that indirectly she wanted to make me a present of the money, I most resolutely refused to accept payment, but not to do the drawing, which I sent. It is no easy matter, when one is sorely pressed for money, to refuse it. But it would have been a pons asinorum, and underhand expedient – so – instead of such underhand expedients – is there nothing better to do? I am convinced of it. For your sake as well as mine, and for the sake of many

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others, I wish that we had Mourets in the art trade, who would know how to create a new and larger buying public. Perhaps you will say: Isn't Tersteeg, for instance, a Mouret? Maybe he is after all. But however this may be, there are still other careers to be built up, simply because the public which is buying now can be multiplied by ten, and that every day this is becoming more necessary.

If only a number of Mourets would come forward, who would buy and sell in a way different from the old routine, it would be excellent – then there would be more and more work to do. But if no Mourets came forward, then the trade may undergo a complete change because the painters themselves might put it on a new basis by starting permanent exhibitions without the old intermediary. I so much wish you knew and felt how young you are still, if only you would act and be daring like a young man.

If you are no artist in painting then try to be an artist as a dealer like Mouret. As for myself – though at present I am on ne peut plus hard up – yet I feel that within a few years I shall blithely dare to undertake running up much bigger bills for colours and other things. I want to have a lot of work to do – believe me – and I don't intend to be bored – do a great deal or drop dead.