

Letter R51a  
Utrecht, 24 May 1885

[Letter from Van Rappard to Vincent]

Amice!

I was greatly pleased to receive a sign of life from you, though the sign was not quite the one I should have liked.

The news of your father's death was so unexpected that I was very eager to get some further information – which has not been forthcoming, however. As far as I can remember, the reason I did not see the news in the first place in the *Nieuws van den Dag*<sup>1</sup> was my careless way of reading newspapers – I always skip the ads. At all events I know that very, very shortly after receiving the formal notification I called on a friend who had already read it in the newspaper!

Did you think that I was so little interested in your father or what happens in your home that an ordinary act of politeness would be enough to announce something as poignant as this?

Then you are very much mistaken.

In connection with what you sent me this time, I want to refer to your last letter, in which you spoke of the art of expressing oneself well in words. I want to point out to you that, however badly I may do so orally, I can do it well in writing, if I take sufficient pains. What I wrote you about your manner of working expresses exactly what I mean – although I did not exactly take great pains to do that, the only result is a somewhat less than beautiful style! I hoped that I was mistaken in my opinion of your manner of working, and I hope so still; but for this very reason I was deeply sorry to see such a complete confirmation of my opinion in what you sent me that I myself was terrified by it.<sup>2</sup>

You will agree with me that such work is not meant seriously. Fortunately you can do better than that, but why then did you see and treat everything so superficially? Why didn't you study the movements? Now they are only posing. How far from true that coquettish little hand of the woman in the background is – and what connection is there between the coffee kettle, the table and that hand that is lying on top of the handle? What on earth is that kettle doing? – it isn't standing, it isn't being lifted up – so what then? And why isn't that man to the right allowed to have a knee, a belly and lungs? Or are they located in his back? And why must his arm be a yard too short? And why must he do without one half of his nose? And why must that woman on the left have some sort of little tobacco-pipe stem with a little cube at the end for a nose?

And after that, while working in such a manner, you dare invoke the names of Millet and Breton? Come on! in my opinion art is too sublime a thing to be treated so nonchalantly.

Adieu, always believe me

Your friend, A. G. A. v. Rappard

1. "Daily News", an Amsterdam newspaper of the time with a large circulation.
2. Vincent had sent him the lithograph of his "Potato Eaters," the picture he had been working on for many months, and which had "taken a whole winter of painting studies of heads and hands." (see letter 404 to Theo). The sketch is spoken of for the first time in letter 398 written in April 1885, the first stage of the picture in letter 399. After the latter the lithograph was made. The final composition is mentioned in letters 401, 402, 403, 404, 405 and 407.