

Amice Rappard,

Some things that have happened induce me to write you, more to make myself clear than because I enjoy it. As for the fact that I simply returned your previous letter, there were two reasons for that. In the first place, even if your remarks about the lithograph were right, even if I were unable to contradict them, you still had no right to condemn my whole work in the insulting way you did.

And in the second place, seeing that, not only on my part but also on my family's, you have received more friendship than you have given, you cannot demand as an obligation that we send you anything more than a printed notification on an occasion such as my father's death. Especially not that I should have done so, because already before that you had not replied to a previous letter of mine. Especially not that I should have done so, because on the occasion of my father's death you did give a sign of life in a letter addressed to my mother – but it was such a letter that, when it arrived, those at home wondered why you had not written to me! I did not crave a letter from you then, nor do I now. You know that I have not been on the best of terms with those at home for years. After my father's death I was obliged to correspond with the nearest relatives during the first days. But as soon as some members of the family arrived I withdrew entirely from all interference. So possible omissions are not to be imputed to me but to the family. And I can tell you besides that you are an exception, since I asked those at home whether they had sent you a notification and it appeared they had forgotten to.

Well, enough and more than enough of this. The reason I am writing you again is certainly not to answer your remarks on the subject – nor to repeat my remarks about what you said about painting. You have been able to reread your letter – if you still think it justified, if you really mean that “when you take the necessary pains you express yourself damned correctly,” well, then the best thing is simply to leave you to your delusions.

To come to the point – the reason I am writing you – though it was you who insulted me in the first place, and not I who insulted you – is simply that I have known you so long that I do not consider this a reason to break off all intercourse with you.

What I have to say to you I say as one painter to another – and this will be true as long as you and I are painting – whether we keep up our acquaintance or not....

Millet was mentioned. All right, my friend, I'll answer you.

You wrote, “And such a one dares invoke Millet and Breton.”

My answer to that is that I most seriously advise you not to fight with me. As for me – I go my own way – you see I don't want to pick a quarrel with anyone, so not with you either, even now. I should let you say whatever you liked; if you were to have more observations of the same kind, it would leave me stone cold, and that would be all. But for the moment I want to say this much, you have said more than once that I do not care for the form of the figure, it is beneath me to pay attention to it, and – my dear fellow – it is beneath you to say such an unwarranted thing. You have known me for years – just tell me, have you ever seen me work otherwise than after the model, never sparing expense, however heavy at times, though I am surely poor enough.

Not in your last letter, but repeatedly and ad nauseam in your previous letters you wrote about “technique,” which was the reason for the letter to which you did not reply. What I answered to that, and what I answer again is, There is the conventional meaning, which is being given more and more to the word technique, and the real meaning – science. Very well, Meissonier himself says, “La science nul ne l'a” (nobody has science).

In the first place, however, “la science” is not the same thing as “de la science,” and you can hardly deny it. But even this is not the core of the question.

For instance, they say of Haverman – and so do you – that he has so much technique. But not only Haverman – how many others have something that is on a level with the kind of knowledge that Haverman has of art? – among the French painters, e.g. Jacquet – and he is better. What I assert is simply this, that drawing a figure academically correctly – that an even, premeditated stroke of the brush – have little to do – at least less than is generally supposed – with the urgent necessities of the domain of the painting art nowadays.

If, instead of saying Haverman has much “technique,” you said H. has much “métier,” I could agree with you for once. Perhaps you will understand what I mean if I say that, when Haverman sits before a nice ladylike girl's head, he will make it more beautiful than almost anybody else, but put him before a peasant – and – he won't even start in, his art seeming to apply (as far as I know) principally to subjects that are just about exactly antipodean to Millet's or Lhermitte's – and that are on the contrary rather analogous to Cabanel's, who for all his, what I call, métier, has produced little that has proved lasting, or contributed to progress. And – I beseech you – don't confuse this with the style of painting of a Millet or Lhermitte.

What I said and will say again is – that all too often the word “technique” is used in a conventional sense, that all too often it is not used in good faith. People are praising the technique of all those Italians and Spaniards, and they are men who are more conventional, who have to a greater extent nothing but routine, than anybody else – and I am afraid that with such fellows as Haverman the métier so soon changes into a routine. And then what is it worth?

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What I want to ask you now is, What is the real reason you have broken with me?

The reason I am writing you again is just my love for Millet, for Breton and for all those who paint peasants and the common people, and I count you among them.

I do not say this because you were very useful to me as a friend – for, amice, you were distressingly little useful to me – and don't think ill of me if for the first and last time I tell you flatly – I don't know a drier friendship than yours. But first I am not doing it for this reason, and second, this too might have improved – but having created my own opportunities to find models, etc., I am not so little-minded as to keep silent about it. On the contrary – if any painter, no matter who, should come to this district, I should be glad to invite him to my house and show him the way...For the very reason that it is not always easy to find models who are willing to pose, and that it is not a matter of indifference to all of them to have a pied à terre somewhere. And therefore I tell you, if you want to come and paint here, you need not feel embarrassed because we have had a fight. And even though I am living in my studio on my own now, you can always stay with me.

But it may be that – you will say superciliously that you don't care for it – well, it would be all the same to me. I am *so* accustomed to insults – they leave me so perfectly cold – that a man like you will probably find it difficult to understand how utterly cold such a letter as yours, for instance, leaves me. And being indifferent to it, I feel as little resentment as a pole. But on the other hand – I have enough clarity of mind and serenity to answer as I do now. If you want to break with me, it's all right by me. If you want to go on painting here, you don't have to pay attention to these little bickerings in our correspondence.

What you did the last time you were here had and has my full sympathy; and, amice Rappard, it is because you worked so damned well that last time, and because I think you might desire the opportunity you have here to remain unchanged, that I am writing to you. Make up your mind; but I tell you this unreservedly – despite all my appreciation of your painting, I feel uneasy about the future from one point of view, I mean as to whether you will be able to keep it up; I am some times afraid that, because of influences which you cannot help being exposed to on account of your social position and station in life, you will not remain in the long run as good as you are at present – i.e. as a painter in your painting; all the rest is none of my concern.

I tell you therefore as one painter to another, If you want to look for pictures here, it will be quite the same as it was before. You can come and stay with me just the same as formerly, even though I am now on my own. Do you see? I thought you might have derived advantage from it and might still derive advantage from it; but I want to add, If you can find the same advantages elsewhere, all right, there will be no reason for me to mourn over it, and then adieu.

You wrote me nothing about your work, nor do I about mine.

Believe me, don't quarrel with me about Millet. Millet is a man I will not quarrel about, although I don't refuse to talk about him.

Greetings,

Vincent