

Letter W02
Arles, c. 28 February 1888

Dear Sister,

I for my part might say just as well that I shall stop writing at the very moment you reply. The simplest thing is not to write if it causes too much trouble and the inclination is not always there.

But, however this may be, it is an excellent thing that you are beginning to acquaint yourself with all the mischief brewed by that villain Voltaire, and you will surely find that in *Candide* Voltaire already had the impertinence to laugh at the “highly serious life, which we ought only to use for, and devote to, the best ends.” And I need not tell you that this crime is something horrible in itself.

I cannot write very well about Mauve; I think of him every day, but that’s all.¹ It was a great shock to me; but personally, as a human being, he may have been quite different from what people said of him once in a while – that is, more deeply engrossed in life itself than in art perhaps; and I loved him as a human being. Now it is so hard for me to imagine that those who penetrate to the core of life, who for the rest judge themselves as if they were dealing with somebody else, and who treat others as unceremoniously as though they were taking themselves to task – I find it so hard to imagine that such can cease to exist.

Now I know that it is hardly to be supposed that the white potato and salad grubs which later change into cockchafers should be able to form tenable ideas about their supernatural existence in the hereafter. And that it would be premature of them to enter upon supernatural researches for enlightenment about this problem, seeing that the gardener or other persons interested in salad and vegetables would crush them underfoot, considering them harmful insects.

But for parallel reasons I have little confidence in the correctness of our human concepts of a future life.

We are as little able to judge of our own metamorphoses without bias and prematureness as the white salad grubs can of theirs, for the very cogent reason that the salad worms ought to eat salad roots in the very interest of their higher development.

In the same way I think that a painter ought to paint pictures; possibly something else may come after that. You see that I have penetrated some greater distance into the South – I have observed too often that neither my work nor my health is in very good condition during the winter. Besides, what they want in pictures nowadays is a contrast of colours, and these colours highly intensified and variegated, rather than subdued gray tones. So for one reason or another I thought I should do nobody harm if I went to the spot that attracted me.

Give my love to Mother, and for the time being there will not be much chance of my going back to Holland. Goodbye,
Vincent

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1. See letter 472 to Theo.