

My dear Bernard,

I just received your last letter. You are quite right to see that those Negresses were heart-rending. You are quite right not to think such a thing innocent.

I have just read a book – not a beautiful one and not well written for that matter – about the Marquesas Islands, but sad enough when it tells of the extermination of a whole native tribe – cannibal in the sense that once a month, let us say, an individual got eaten – what does it matter!

The whites, very Christian and all that...in order to put a stop to this barbarity (?), really not very cruel...could find no better means than the extermination of the tribe of cannibal natives as well as the tribe against which the latter fought (in order to provide themselves from time to time with the necessary palatable prisoners of war). After which they annexed the two isles, which then became unutterably lugubrious!!

Those tattooed races, Negroes, Indians, all of them, all, all are disappearing or degenerating. And the horrible white man with his bottle of alcohol, his money and his syphilis – when shall we see the end of him? The horrible white man with his hypocrisy, his greediness and his sterility.

And those savages were so gentle and so loving!

You are damned right to think of Gauguin. That is high poetry, those Negresses, and everything his hands make has a gentle, pitiful, astonishing character. People don't understand him yet, and it pains him so much that he does not sell anything, just like other true poets.

My dear comrade, I should have written you before, only I had a lot of things to attend to. I have sent a first batch of studies to my brother, that's number one. And I have been having trouble with my health, that's number two. And number three is that I have rented a house, painted yellow outside, whitewashed within, in the full sun (four rooms).

On top of all that I am working on new studies. And in the evening I was often too beat to write. That's why my answer has been delayed.

Listen, that sonnet about the women of the boulevard has some good in it, but it isn't the real thing, the end is banal. A "sublime woman"...I don't know what you mean by that, neither do you when it comes right down to it. Furthermore:

Dans le clan des vieux et des jeunes maraude
Ceux qu'elle ammenera coucher le soir, très tard

[Ensnaring among the tribe of the old and young ones
Those whom she will take to bed with her that night, very late.]

Something like this is not characteristic at all, for the women of our boulevard – the little one – usually sleep alone by night, for they have five or six hauls during the day or in the evening. and très tard there is that honorable carnivore, their maquereau [pimp], who comes and takes them home, but he does not sleep with them (or rarely). The worn-out stupefied woman usually goes to bed alone and sleeps a leaden sleep.

But if you alter two or three lines, it will be all right.

What have you painted recently? As for me, I have done a still life of a blue-enameled iron coffeepot, a royal-blue cup and saucer, a milk jug with pale cobalt and white checks, a cup with orange and blue patterns on a white ground, a blue majolica jug decorated with green, brown and pink flowers and leaves. The whole on a blue tablecloth, against a yellow background, and among this crockery two oranges and three lemons. So it is a variation of blues, livened up by a series of yellows that go as far as orange.[F410, JH1426]

Then I have another still life, lemons in a basket against a yellow background.[F384, JH1425] Further a view of Arles. Of the town itself one sees only some red roofs and a tower, the rest is hidden by the green foliage of fig trees, far away in the background, and a narrow strip of blue sky above it. The town is surrounded by immense meadows all abloom with countless buttercups – a sea of yellow – in the foreground these meadows are divided by a ditch full of violet irises [F409, JH1416]. They were mowing the grass while I was painting, so it is only a study and not the finished picture that I had intended to do. But what a subject, hein! That sea of yellow with a hand of violet irises, and in the background that coquettish little town of the pretty women! Then two studies of roadsides – later – done with the mistral raging [F408, JH 1417; F567, JH 1419]. If you were not expecting my prompt reply I should make you a sketch. Keep your courage up, good luck. A handshake. I am exhausted tonight. I shall write you again in the next few days, more at my ease.

Vincent

P.S. The portrait of a woman in your last letter but one is very pretty. My address: 2, Place Lamartine, Arles.