

My dear Bernard,

Forgive me for writing in haste, I'm afraid my letter will be illegible, but I did want to reply at once.

Do you realize that we have been very stupid, Gauguin, you and I, in not going to the same place? But when Gauguin left, I still wasn't sure if I could get away, and when you left, that awful money business, and the bad reports I sent you about the cost of living here, stopped you from coming.

It wouldn't have been such a stupid thing to do if we had all gone to Arles together, for with three of us here, we could have done our own housekeeping. And now that I have found my bearings a bit more, I am beginning to discover the advantages. For my part, I'm getting on better here than I did in the north. I even work right in the middle of the day, in the full sun, with no shade at all, out in the wheat fields, and lo and behold, I am as happy as a cicada. My God, if only I had known this country at 25 instead of coming here at 35! At that time I was fascinated by grey, or rather lack of colour. I kept dreaming of Millet, and then I also had such acquaintances among the Dutch painters as Mauve, Israëls, etc.

Here is a sketch of a sower: a large piece of land with clods of ploughed earth, for the most part a definite purple. A field of ripe wheat, in yellow ochre with a little carmine [F 422, JH 1470].

The sky chrome yellow, almost as bright as the sun itself, which is chrome yellow 1 with a little white, while the rest of the sky is chrome yellow 1 and 2 mixed. Thus very yellow.

The Sower's smock is blue and his trousers white.

Size 25 canvas, square.

There are many touches of yellow in the soil, neutral tones produced by mixing purple with the yellow, but I couldn't care less what the colours are in reality. I'd sooner do those naïve pictures out of old almanacs, old farmers' almanacs where hail, snow, rain or fine weather are depicted in a wholly primitive manner, like the one Anquetin used so successfully in his *Moisson*.¹ To be honest with you, I have absolutely no objection to the countryside, since I grew up in it – I am still enchanted by snatches of the past, have a hankering after the eternal, of which the sower and the sheaf of corn are the symbols. But when shall I ever get round to doing the starry sky, that picture which is always in my mind?

Alas, alas, it is just as the excellent fellow Cyprien says in J. K. Huysman's "En ménage": the most beautiful paintings are those which you dream about when you lie in bed smoking a pipe, but which you never paint. Yet you have to make a start, no matter how incompetent you feel in the face of inexpressible perfection, of the overwhelming beauty of nature.

How I should like to see the study you have done of the brothel!

I am always reproaching myself for not having done any figures here yet.

Herewith another landscape. Setting sun? Rising moon?

A summer evening, anyway.

Town purple, celestial body yellow, sky green-blue. The wheat has all the hues of old gold, copper, green-gold or red-gold, yellow-gold, yellow-bronze, red-green. Size 30 canvas, square [F 465, JH 1473].

I painted it at the height of the mistral. My easel was fixed in the ground with iron pegs, a method I recommend to you. You push the legs of the easel deep into the ground, then drive iron pegs fifty centimetres long into the ground beside them. [See above sketch.] You tie the whole lot together with rope. This way you can work in the wind.

This is what I wanted to say about black and white. Take the Sower. The picture is divided in two; one half is yellow, the upper part, the lower part is purple. Well, the white trousers help rest the eye and distract it just as the excessive contrast of yellow and purple starts to jar. There you are, that's what I wanted to say.

I know a second lieutenant in the Zouaves here; his name is Milliet. I give him drawing lessons – with my perspective frame – and he is beginning to do some drawings and, honestly, I've seen far worse. He is keen to learn, has been in Tonkin, etc... He is leaving for Africa in October. If you were to join the Zouaves, he would take you along and guarantee you a fairly large measure of freedom to paint, at least if you were willing to help him with his artistic plans. Might this be of any use to you? If so, let me know as soon as possible.

One reason for working is that the canvases are worth money. Since you doubt that, you may call this reason fairly prosaic. But it is true. One reason for not working is that canvases and paint simply swallow up our money while they are waiting to be sold.

Drawings, on the other hand, don't cost a lot.

Gauguin too is bored at Pont-Aven, complains just like you of his isolation. If only you could go and see him! But I haven't any idea whether he means to stay, and I'm inclined to think he's planning to go to Paris. He told me he thought you would come to Pont-Aven. My God, if only all three of us were here! You will say that it's too out of the way. All right, but think of the winter, for here you can work all year round. The reason why I love this country is that I have less to fear from the cold, which, because it stops my blood circulating properly, makes it impossible for me to think or even do anything at all.

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You will see that for yourself when you are a soldier. Then your melancholy will be gone, which could easily be the result of your having too little or the wrong blood, which I don't really think is the case.

It's the fault of that damned foul wine in Paris and those foul greasy steaks.

My God, I had reached the point where my blood was no longer circulating at all, literally no longer at all. But after four weeks it has started to circulate again. However, my dear friend, at the same time I have had, just like you, a fit of melancholy, from which I would have suffered as much as you, had I not welcomed it with great pleasure as a sign that I was recovering – which is indeed what happened.

So, don't go back to Paris but stay in the countryside, for you will need your strength to come through the trial of serving in Africa. Well then, the more blood you produce beforehand, good blood, the better it will be, for over there in the heat you may not be able to do it quite so easily.

Painting and fucking a lot don't go together, it softens the brain. Which is a bloody nuisance.

The symbol of St. Luke, the patron saint of painters, is, as you know, an ox. So you just be patient as an ox if you want to work in the artistic field. Still, bulls are lucky not to have to work at that foul business of painting. But what I wanted to say is this: after the period of melancholy is over you will be stronger than before, you will recover your health, and you will find the scenery round you so beautiful that you will want to do nothing but paint.

I think that your poetry will change in the same way as your painting. After a few eccentric things, you have succeeded in doing some with Egyptian calm and a great simplicity.

“Que l'heure est donc brève
Qu'on passe en aimant,
C'est moins qu'un instant,
Un peu plus qu'un rêve.
Le temps nous enlève
Notre enchantement.”

[How short, then, the hour
One spends in loving,
It is less than an instant,
Little more than a dream.
Time strips us of
Our enchantment.]

That's not by Baudelaire, I don't know who wrote it. They're the words of a song found in Daudet's Nabab – that's where I took it from – but doesn't it express the idea just like a shrug of the shoulders from a real lady? The other day I read Loti's Madame Chrysanthème, it includes interesting details about Japan.

My brother is holding a Claude Monet exhibition at the moment which I should very much like to see. Guy de Maupassant among others came to have a look, and said that he'll be coming often to the Boulevard Montmartre in the future.

I must go and paint, so I'll stop; I'll probably write again soon. A thousand apologies for my not putting enough stamps on that letter, even though I stuck them on at the post office, nor is this the first time that it has happened here that, being in doubt and enquiring at the counter, I have been given the wrong information about the postage. You have no idea of the indifference, the unconcern of the people here. Anyway, you'll soon be seeing all that with your own eyes, in Africa. Thanks for your letter, I hope to write again soon, at a moment when I'm in less of a rush.

With a handshake,

Vincent

1. Louis Anquetin, Harvest, 1887.