

Letter 582
Arles, 29 March 1889

My dear Theo,

A few more lines before you leave; just now things are going well. The day before yesterday and yesterday I went out into the town to get things to work with. When I went home, I was able to ascertain that the real neighbours, those whom I knew, were not among the petitioners.

However it may be in other quarters, I saw that I still have friends among them.

In case of need M. Salles will undertake to find me within a few days an apartment in another part of town. I have sent for a few more books so as to have a few sound ideas in my head. I have reread Uncle Tom's Cabin, you know Beecher Stowe's book on slavery, Dickens's Christmas books and I have given Germinie Lacerteux to M. Salles.

And now I am returning to my portrait of "La Berceuse" for the fifth time [F 504, JH 1655]. And when you see it, you will agree with me that it is nothing but a chromolithograph from the cheap shops, and again that it has not even the merit of being photographically correct in its proportions or in anything else.

But after all, I want to make an image such as a sailor at sea would dream of when he thinks of a woman ashore.

They are very attentive to me at the hospital these days, and this as well as many other things upsets me and makes me rather confused.

Meanwhile I imagine that you would rather get married without all the ceremony and congratulations of a wedding, and I'm quite sure in advance that you will avoid them as much as possible.

If you see Koning or others and especially the Mauve cousins and Lecomte, don't forget to give them my very best regards.

These last three months do seem so strange to me. Sometimes moods of indescribable mental anguish, sometimes moments when the veil of time and the fatality of circumstances seemed to be torn apart for an instant.

Certainly you are right after all, damn well right – even allowing for hope, the thing to do is to accept the probably disastrous reality. I am hoping once again to throw myself wholly into my work, in which I've fallen behind.

Oh, I must not forget to tell you a thing I have very often thought of. Quite accidentally I found in an article in an old newspaper some words written on an ancient tomb in the country between here and Carpentras.

Here is this very, very, very old epitaph, say dating from the time of Faubert's Salammô.

"Thebe, daughter of Thelhui, priestess of Osiris, who never complained of anyone."

If you see Gauguin, you should tell him that. And I thought of a faded woman, you have the study of her at home, the woman who had such strange eyes whom I also met accidentally.

What does it mean, this "she never complained of anyone"? Imagine a perfect eternity, why not, but don't let us forget that even in those old days reality had this – "and she never complained of anyone."

Do you remember that one Sunday good old Thomas came to see us and said, "Ah but – are those the kind of women to make a man horny?"

It is not exactly a question of being horny, but from time to time in your life you feel thrilled through and through as if you were actually striking root in the soil.

Meanwhile you talk to me of "the real South," and I have said that after all it seemed to me it was rather for men with a more well-balanced mind than mine to go there. The "real South," isn't it rather there that you would find reasonableness, patience, serenity enough to make you like that good "Thebe, daughter of Thelhui, priestess of Osiris, who never complained of anyone."

Compared with this I feel utterly ungrateful.

That is the happiness, the serenity, I am invoking for you and your wife on the occasion of your marriage, so that you may have this "real South" within your soul.

If I want this letter to go today, I must finish it. A handshake, a pleasant journey, many kind regards to our mother and sister.

Ever yours, Vincent