

My dear brother,

This time I shall try to write you in French; in the first place I know you like it better, and then . . . if two people express themselves in the same language, they will understand each other better in the end, I think. Only, as for me, I am not in the habit of writing in French, and I am afraid I am going to make mistakes which will seem very ridiculous to you – but I shall do the best I can. After some time I hope to be able to express myself – but at the moment, if the strangers I meet do not speak English, the conversation is far from animated, I assure you.

I am now going to tell you a great piece of news, on which we have concentrated a good deal of our attention lately – it is that next winter, toward February probably, we hope to have a baby, a pretty little boy – whom we are going to call Vincent, if you will consent to be his godfather. Of course I know we must not count on it too much, and that it may well be a little girl, but Theo and I cannot help imagining that the baby will be a boy. When I told them at Amsterdam and Breda, they all replied, “Aren’t you pleased, what happiness, etc., etc.” – and yet, to tell the honest truth, I was not pleased at all when I found out about it; on the contrary, I was very unhappy, and Theo had a lot of trouble consoling me. It’s not that I don’t like babies – take my little brother, who is now twelve years old; I held him in my arms when he was hardly two hours old, and I think that there is nothing prettier in the world than a baby – but this is something of a selfish pleasure. When I think how neither Theo nor I are in very good health, I am greatly afraid that we are going to have a weak child, and to my way of thinking the greatest treasure that parents can give to their child is a strong constitution. But in this respect the doctor has reassured me a good deal, and then taking good food and taking good care of oneself may do a lot; the baby will have nothing to complain of in this respect.

Do you remember the portrait of the Roulin baby you sent to Theo? Everybody admires it greatly and people have already asked me many times, “Why have you put this portrait into such an out-of-the-way corner?” The reason is that from my place at the table I can just see the big blue eyes and the pretty little hands and the round cheeks of the baby, and I like to imagine that ours will be equally strong, and equally healthy, and equally beautiful – and that his uncle will come one day to paint his portrait!

In one of your last letters you asked Theo whether he was still dining at restaurants. Oh dear no – never – what would be the good of being married if one could not dine at home? He always comes home at twelve o’clock to lunch and at half-past seven for dinner. Often in the evening somebody drops in, Isaäcson or Hart Nibbrig. Tersteeg dined with us twice, and De Haan has come to see us too--and when he was there Mr. Pissarro and his son came too. In general we are very tired at night, and we go to bed early, but notwithstanding this I think Theo is looking far from well, but that Sacrétan sale caused him a lot of fatigue, and besides, the heat is so overwhelming! Don’t talk to me of Paris in such weather as this, and Theo says that in August it is even worse!

I read with great pleasure what you wrote to Theo about reading Shakespeare.¹ Isn’t it beautiful? – and so few people know him. “It is too difficult” [they say] – but that is not true – I for my part understand him much better than Zola. But when I think that such beautiful things were written nearly three hundred years ago, I think the world has not made much progress since then. I once saw *The Merchant of Venice* at the theater when I was in London, and the impression it made on me was a great deal stronger still than when I only read it. I have also seen *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, but that was in Dutch – and then it loses much of its beauty.

Now I am going to say goodbye – please write us your opinion about our little boy, for a boy it must be.

Your sister, Jo

1. See Vincent’s letters 597 and 599.