

Saint-Rémy, c. 20 December 1889

My dear sister,

I'm adding a word to you in great haste; it is exactly a year ago that I had that attack; I have no reason to complain too much, as things are going better with me at the moment, but it is to be feared that it will come back from time to time. And this leaves the head in a latent state of sensibility. I hope you will like the canvas for you and Mother which I am working on at present a little. It is a repetition of a picture for Theo, women gathering olives.

I have been working very hard and ceaselessly for two weeks. Do you know the poem I have written on the opposite page?

Whistler painted a picture of his mother which is like that. But we find this especially in our old Dutch pictures now and then. When I think of Mother it seems to me that she is very like that too.

Life is not always very gay here, and my companions in distress are very often bored, but there is much resignation and patience here. But many of them are doing nothing, and remain absorbed in thought all day long, and now and then I feel inclined to believe that they would be better off in an asylum where manual labour was obligatory.

See you soon, and I embrace you in thought.

Yours, Vincent

[written on the opposite page]

Who is the maid my spirit seeks  
Through cold reproof and slanders blight?  
Has she love's roses on her cheek  
Is hers an eye of calm delight?  
No, wan and sunk with midnight prayer  
And the pale looks of her I love,  
And if by times a light be there  
That light was kindled from above.  
I choose not her mine heart's elect  
Amongst those that seek their maker's shrine  
In gems and garlands proudly decked  
As if themselves were things divine.  
No, heaven but faintly warms the breast  
That beats beneath a brodered veil,  
And they who come in glittering dress  
To mourn their frailty--yet are frail.  
Not to the form of her I love,  
And love because her bloom is gone,  
But ne'er was beauty's bloom so bright,  
So touching as that form's decay,  
That in the altar's wavering light  
In holy lustre fades away.

1. Written in French.