

Letter 280
The Hague, c. 21 and 22 April 1883

Dear Theo,

Thanks for the letter and for the enclosure.

I read your letter with great interest. I am glad that you are aware from what quarter the difficulties will probably arise, that – without doing it on purpose – women like, for instance, S. (however good they may be in other ways) are not very careful about what they say, etc. when you refer to the tie between your patient and her own mother, that's a thing about which I cannot wish you joy. However, it is nothing unusual.

But it is a sad thought indeed, that a thing like the relation between mother and daughter can have a dark side, so that a man who loves light and seeks it can be fatally thwarted.

A mother's influence and conversation with friends, more than anything else, sometimes bring a kind of backsliding in women which prevents a reform in thought and action – sometimes so urgently necessary. I'm glad you are not fully aware of what may be in store for you from that quarter, but I'm not glad you weren't spared this – if the woman were unhampered by her relations, you might expect fewer difficulties for the future, I think.

And the trouble is that it's impossible to predict exactly in what form the difficulties may crop up, and when taking certain precautionary measures, one can't help thinking, Yes, but it's quite possible that I shall have to manoeuvre in precisely the opposite way.

In a certain preface Zola makes the following remark: “Ces femmes ne sont cependant pas mauvaises, l'impossibilité d'une vie droite dans les commérages et les médisances des faubourgs, est la cause de leurs fautes et de leurs chûtes.” [Yet these woman are not bad, the impossibility of (living) a straight life in the midst of the gossip and calumny of the suburbs is the cause of their faults and their fall.]

If the woman is cultivated enough to understand your thoughts and views and consequently take part in your inner life, this would mean a strong tie which could neutralize many difficulties.

Entering into relations with her family, I'm afraid, would bring the drawback of falling into officialism (people sometimes very indiscreetly take it like that) whereas one intended only privacy and nothing official. Not everybody's intention is to act silently, and some older and wiser members of the family often get so clamorous that one regrets having spoken to them. The more so, because they cannot stop intriguing and, oh well – they are probably wolves.

I wish we were not so far away from each other. Yesterday I wrote you in detail about some difficulties which will perhaps present themselves to you soon, but the feeling that there are times when I myself do not know how to face them kept me from sending the letter; besides, I am quite confident that true love cannot die, at least not if one acts with judgement at the same time. But I should like to scratch this out again because it isn't correct, for love can certainly die – but there is a strength of revival in love.

Ce que l'homme tue Dieu le ressuscite [What man kills God resuscitates].

Van der Weele has come to see me again. Perhaps he will bring me into contact with Piet van der Velden, whom I think you will know from his figures of peasants and fishermen.

Once I met Van der Velden, and he made a very good impression – he reminded me of Eliot's character of Felix Holt, the radical. There is something broad and rough in him which appeals to me very much – something of the roughness of torchon. A man who apparently doesn't seek culture in outward things, but who is inwardly much, very much further than most.

Well, he is a real artist, and I wish I knew him, for I have confidence in him, and I know for sure that I should learn from him. It's not impossible that I shall meet him someday even if it isn't through Van der Weele.

Rappard would have come to see me last Monday, but then he wrote his sister had fallen ill, and he couldn't come. Perhaps he will come this week.

A present there isn't a single drawing in which I do not work with brush and printer's ink.

To tell you the truth, my purse is rather empty; it certainly isn't your fault, yet it isn't mine, either – no matter how I contrive, I can't save more, and I need more money than I have to execute some plans. If I started on those things, I should have to give them up in the middle. But it is a melancholy thing to have to say, “I could make such and such a thing if it weren't for the expense.” Then an unsatisfied energy remains, which one should wish to use instead of stifle. But I don't want to complain – I am grateful that I can make progress – though not so vigorously as I should wish. But the English say, “Time is money,” and sometimes I can't help thinking it is hard to see the time pass during which things might have been done if I had had the means.

You will understand what I mean: I should wish to be able to spend more, both on models and on painting materials. Though I do not sell a single one of my studies, I think they are worth the money I spend on them. The studio has become so much better and convenient, but I only have enough steam for “half speed,” and should like to go “full speed.”

I repeat, I do not say this to complain, nor to force you to greater sacrifices – you are really burdened beyond your strength too. But I say it for the sake of a better understanding, and to relieve my mind. For you will understand that I am often full of heavy cares. Well, we must make the best of it, and the things we can't move by force must be undermined by patience.

This week I drew a few reclining figures; some time I shall need figures of corpses or of sick people, men as well as women.

Recently I passed Israël's house – I have never been inside – the front door was open, as the servant was scrubbing the hall. I saw things hanging in the hall, and do you know what they were? the large Herkomer, “Last Muster, Sunday at Chelsea,” and the photograph of that picture by Roll, “Grève de Charbonniers,” which you perhaps remember I wrote you about at the time [see Letter 238]. I didn't know that there existed a photograph of the “Last Muster.” I possess the large wood engraving of the two principal figures, and the first rough sketch made long before the picture.

Well, adieu, boy, my best wishes for your patient, success in your work.

Yours sincerely, Vincent