Van Gogh Museum Journal 2003

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Director's foreword

The Van Gogh Museum mounts around six exhibitions every year, covering a wide range of subjects from the history of 19th and early 20th-century art. Many of these are international collaborations with partner museums, often involving loans from across the world. Yet, even for an institution accustomed to mounting large, temporary exhibitions, the show devoted to Van Gogh and Gauguin (The Art Institute of Chicago, 22 September 2001-13 January 2002, Van Gogh Museum, 9 February-2 June 2002) was of an order that fell far beyond the boundaries of our normal experience. In part this was because of the sheer scale of the enterprise and the various logistical challenges presented by this particular undertaking. It was also because the response from the public was almost overwhelming. Over a period of five months, some 739,000 visitors came to see Van Gogh and Gauguin in Amsterdam, making it the busiest art exhibition anywhere in the world in that year. But in the end it was the visual and emotional impact of this encounter between two great yet opposing talents that created an extraordinary show. From the beginnings of their first awareness of each other's art in the 1880s, through the brief but frenetic period when they were together in Arles in 1888, and then on to the end of their careers, the interaction between the two painters was revealed and analysed. Through series and combinations of some of their finest works, it was possible to follow each turn in this compelling relationship, a human and artistic story that was to have far-reaching consequences not just for the men involved, but also for the entire course of modern art.

The works of art have now been returned to their various owners but we have a lasting reminder of this project in the superb catalogue by Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers. In this volume of the Van Gogh Museum Journal we provide yet another record of the research related to the exhibition. In March 2002 the Van Gogh Museum hosted an international symposium devoted to Van Gogh and Gauguin (described below by Chris Stolwijk). Seven of the papers given at the time are published here. Whilst we cannot reproduce the crackle of debate and lively discussion generated by the event, the articles provide a view of some of the many and varied issues that are raised by the individual careers of Van Gogh and Gauguin, as well as by their artistic friendship and rivalry.

As in previous years, this Journal also includes articles under the rubric ‘Van Gogh studies.’ Of particular interest is the discovery of a previously unknown letter written by Vincent to the dealer H.G Tersteeg in August 1877, a document that is a rare and precious survivor from what must have been an extensive correspondence. Also in line with previous editions, we present a survey of the acquisitions made by the Van Gogh Museum in the past year. We are especially delighted to document the addition of one of Gustave Caillebotte's most intriguing paintings to the museum's collection. In a letter to the museum, the late Kirk Varnedoe described Caillebotte's View from a balcony quite simply as ‘an incredibly beautiful and important work,’ and we are happy to agree with this assessment.

I would like to thank all the authors for their contributions. I would like to thank especially the Managing editor, Rachel Esner, our Head of Research, Chris Stolwijk, Fieke Pabst, the museum's documentalist, and our Head of publications Suzanne Bogman for all their efforts in bringing together this volume of the Van Gogh Museum Journal.
[Van Gogh-Gauguin Symposium]

Introduction
Chris Stolwijk

For many people, the life and work of Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin continues to hold an enormous fascination. This became more than evident when the exhibition Van Gogh-Gauguin: the Studio of the South attracted huge crowds. Following years of intensive preparation and close cooperation with The Art Institute of Chicago, the show ran in Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum from 9 February to 2 June 2002. The exhibition examined around 120 works by these artists, and reconstructed the complex rivalry that existed between two of the most influential painters of the last decades of the 19th century. In the accompanying catalogue, Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zeegers describe in minute detail the early history of this relationship, the artists' mutual admiration, the brief but significant months when they worked together in the ‘Studio of the South,’ and the subsequent period when they each went their own way.

The art-historical research carried out in preparation for the exhibition and the catalogue forms part of a long tradition. With an eye to establishing the current state of research on these two artists, and also to opening up new fields of study, the Van Gogh Museum organised an international symposium entitled Van Gogh-Gauguin, which was held from 7-9 March 2002. Douglas W. Druick gave the introductory keynote address. He recalled in detail the many approaches taken in the past by scholars working on Van Gogh and Gauguin. Despite their great diversity, he considers that ‘different views of the Van Gogh-Gauguin relationship can in a sense be superimposed, seen through each other to produce a more complex, three-dimensional picture of the ways in which individual and idiosyncratic particulars inflect broader artistic and cultural shaping forces, and vice-versa.’ Another feature of the symposium was the opportunity it offered the public to exchange ideas with the exhibition curators; during the session Displaying Van Gogh and Gauguin people could express their views on the design and presentation of the show at the two venues, Chicago and Amsterdam. However, the majority of time was devoted to the sessions dealing with four key areas, which the organisers considered to be primary in current research.

Conservation occupied a prominent position. The contributions discussing the alteration of colour relationships in Van Gogh's paintings (Ann Hoeningswald), the technical research into a number of Gauguin's works in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Charlotte Hale), the wealth of new technical information recent research has revealed concerning Van Gogh's Antwerp and Paris paintings (Ella Hendriks), and new light on Van Gogh's use of tracings (Kristin Lister) showed once again most convincingly that technical research can, and will continue to, provide us with invaluable information and insights. Clearly, the field benefits considerably from a close cooperation between restorers, conservators and academics.

Over the past years questions of authenticity have strongly coloured the art-historical debate around Van Gogh, and to a lesser extent, Gauguin. In their lectures during the session on Authenticity, Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński and Louis van
Tilborgh posed several such often-pressing questions in an historical perspective, and intimated the difficulties arising for both the researcher and the public when ascribing works to either Gauguin or Van Gogh - or rejecting them. Some time was also spent on a public debate about the authenticity of the *Sunflowers* (F 457 JH 1666).

The lectures that formed part of the series *Current views on Van Gogh and Gauguin* were also multifaceted, both in terms of content and approach. Using a wealth of press reviews and art literature, Isabelle Cahn outlined the reception of Gauguin's work in France in the years 1905-49. At the time of his death, the artist was as good as forgotten, only to be completely rehabilitated a few decades later.
With an approach combining art history and the history of ideas, Debora Silverman investigated the two artists' ‘religious modernism.’ In her view, while in Arles Van Gogh absorbed and as it were processed the brilliant colours and Roman Catholic culture of Provence, making use of his own craft labour and Protestant humanism to create a kind of ‘sacred realism.’ For Gauguin, on the other hand, brought up a Catholic, art was an abstraction, which was to set people free from everyday reality and offer a glimpse of the divine. Belinda Thomson, using a large quantity of source material, reconstructed the period that Gauguin and Robert Louis Stevenson spent in the South Pacific. Although it remains unclear whether Gauguin was familiar with Stevenson's work, the latter's realistic, modern vision of Pacific life, written from a Eurocentric perspective and rich in humour and irony, offers a vital and vibrant context within which to approach Gauguin's Tahitian work, which is packed with a cultivated mystique and obscured meanings. Fred Leeman based his lecture on a combination of art-historical comparisons, (new) archival information and first-person documents (letters, diaries, etc.) and presented a new interpretation of the influence of Emile Bernard's work on that of Van Gogh and Gauguin in 1888. According to Leeman, this influence was considerably more profound and far-reaching than has so far been assumed in the art-historical literature.

Both Van Gogh and Gauguin were prolific writers, although the former never intended that his letters be published. In fact, Van Gogh used his letters to explore and test out his ideas against those of others, including major painters and writers. In his lecture for the session The artist as a writer Wouter van der Veen suggested that Van Gogh had a literary mind, which to a large extent dominated his relationship with Gauguin. Van Gogh's (literary) imagination conceived the relationship as an artistic and harmonious one - but the reality was otherwise. Van Gogh wrote chiefly for his own account, while Gauguin, by contrast - as Elizabeth Childs explained in her lecture - had a definite audience in mind when he composed his various texts, an audience to whom he wished to present his art work in as favourable a light as possible.

There was a general consensus at the end of the symposium that the proceedings should be published. It was most unfortunate that some of the authors had previously committed their papers elsewhere, while others had no spare time. Silverman and Lister had already published their findings in the Van Gogh Museum Journal 2001.

The Editorial Board of the Van Gogh Museum Journal is delighted that six of the speakers were prepared to adapt their lectures for publication. The essays included in the present volume provide an excellent, clear picture of the multifaceted methods and themes characterising today's research into the life and work of Van Gogh and Gauguin. The successful and inspiring symposium Van Gogh-Gauguin thus receives a fitting conclusion and the desired sequel. The Board would like to thank the authors most warmly for their kind cooperation in this matter.
fig. 1
Cover of Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the search for sacred art*
Keynote address: current research on Van Gogh and Gauguin
Douglas W. Druick

The relationship between Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin - the time they spent together in the Yellow House in Arles, from late October to late December 1888 - has long been the stuff of myth and as such a familiar narrative: of embattled and battling genius, of tragic endings and posthumous justifications. Notable scholarly attempts to locate the history beneath these constructions include Mark Roskill's pioneering study, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and the impressionist circle*, published in 1970. This was a singular exception to the largely monographic approaches to the lives and art of these two profoundly different artists, which tend, in focusing on one, to assign the role of the other to the margins: in such accounts, Gauguin becomes significant as a thorn in Van Gogh's crown; Van Gogh as an incident in the early career of Gauguin, before he established himself as the painter of the South Pacific.

In the quarter-century since Roskill's study, many books, articles and exhibition catalogues have presented research on Van Gogh and Gauguin as well as other key figures, including Theo van Gogh, Paul Sérusier, Emile Schuffenecker and, notably, Emile Bernard. This broadened scope, along with an increasing variety of methodological approaches, opens up possibilities for new perspectives on the interaction between the two artists. Among the many who deserve credit for the remarkable flourishing of the literature are Jan Hulsker, Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, Griselda Pollock, Judy Sund, Carol Zemel, Cornelia Homburg, Martin Bailey, Richard Brettell, Beatrice von Bismarck, Françoise Cachin, Charles Stuckey, Claire Freches, Ziva Amishai-Maisels, Stephen Eisenmann, Susan Stein, Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, Tsukasa Kōdera, Richard Field, Merete Bodelson, Roland Dorn, as well as (of course) Ronald Pickvance and the other speakers featured at this event.

Evert van Uitert took up the Van Gogh-Gauguin relationship as subject for a series of articles, published in the late 1970s in *Simiolus*, considering the Arles chapter and the period leading up to it in terms of a 'creative competition.' Griselda Pollock illuminated and contextualised this interaction against the fragmentation of the late 19th-century art world in *Avant-garde gambits* of 1992, having previously considered it from a different perspective in her article ‘Artists mythologies and media genius.’

An expanding body of primary source material, including the written texts of both principals and those close to them, complements these contributions. Notable here are efforts of Hulsker, Pickvance and, latterly, Leo Jansen and Hans Luijten in ordering, clarifying and annotating the Van Gogh family correspondence. Victor Merlhès has produced a number of indispensable editions of Gauguin's writings,

including studies devoted to the Gauguin-Van Gogh correspondence that extend and refine the pioneering work of Douglas Cooper. Important too in this context are Daniel Wildenstein’s catalogue raisonné

5 Published sources for the letters and writings of Van Gogh and Gauguin are cited in the selected bibliography of Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, exhib. cat. *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the Studio of the South*, Chicago (The Art Institute of Chicago) & Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) 2001-02, p. 401 For additional discussion, especially of the current Amsterdam project headed by Leo Jansen and Hans Luijten, see their article, ‘In pursuit of Vincent van Gogh: a new edition of the complete correspondence,’ *Editio* 13 (1999), pp. 190-204; and Anne Dumas, ‘The Van Gogh literature from 1990 to the present. a selective review,’ *Van Gogh Museum Journal* (2002), p. 44.
project on Gauguin; Walter Feilchenfeldt's work on Van Gogh provenance; and the exemplary catalogues of Van Gogh's paintings and drawings produced by Sjraar van Heugten, Louis van Tilborgh, and Marije Vellekoop of the Van Gogh Museum.  

Our understanding of each artist has been enriched by a number of recent exhibitions. These include the Gauguin and Van Gogh shows curated by Ronald Pickvance for Martigny; the investigation by Anne Distel, Susan Stein, and Andreas Blühm into Dr Gachet's role as a collector, seen in Paris, Amsterdam and New York; and the Boston-Philadelphia-Detroit study of Van Gogh's portraits, with essays by Dorn, George Shackelford, Joseph Rishel and others.  

2001 saw the Wadsworth Atheneum's exhibition treating Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven, with contributions by Merlhès, Welsh-Ovcharov and the late Robert Welsh. Notable as well was The Saint Louis Art Museum's *Vincent van Gogh and the painters of the Petit Boulevard*, organised by Cornelia Homburg with essays by John House, Liz Childs and Richard Thomson. Both exhibitions carried forward important earlier explorations of the contacts and exchanges between each of the two painters and the young artists of their circle. At the same time, the Gauguin literature was enriched by notable monographs, including Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński and Travers Newton's *Technique and meaning in the paintings of Paul Gauguin*, a groundbreaking study linking art history and conservation science, and Nancy Mowll Mathews's biography *Paul Gauguin: an erotic life*, which considers the shaping role of sexuality and aggression in his relationships and his art.  

At the same time, several books specifically about the Van Gogh-Gauguin relationship have appeared, beginning

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with Naomi Maurer's *The pursuit of spiritual wisdom*, relating the artists' conceptions of spirituality to symbolist currents and imagery.¹⁰ Debora Silverman took a very different approach in her award-winning *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the search for sacred art* (fig. 1), a closely argued study of the impact on their relationship of their divergent religious legacies and educational formations.¹¹ Reclaiming and characterising Van Gogh's protestant Dutchness and

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Gauguin's French Catholic heritage, Silverman aims to ‘bring religion back into the story’ of the artists' consciousness. This approach focuses more on differences than on dialogue, for she sees ‘Van Gogh's and Gauguin's worldviews and artistic practices’ as ‘incommensurate.’

The psychoanalytic lens replaces that of religion in Bradley Collins's still more recent book subtitled *Electric arguments and utopian dreams*, in which the author's expressed aim is to ‘introduce nuance and complexity into the polarised conception’ of the artists as diametrical opposites - to nuance received ideas about Van Gogh's and Gauguin's personalities.\footnote{12} *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the Studio of the South* (fig. 2) now takes its place alongside these parallel projects.\footnote{13} Because all were essentially conceived, written and published concurrently, the various authors were largely unable to take the many new ideas under consideration.

Similar dust-jacket designs (figs. 1 and 2) are only partially explained by marketing priorities; the subject itself dictates some obvious choices. But clearly we cannot judge these books by their covers. Each has posed different questions from different perspectives using a variety of source material. Different approaches have, in turn, yielded different answers, generating the question: to what degree are these answers compatible? In other words, are they irreconcilable? Or do they overlap and complement each other in ways that illuminate different facets of a complex relationship?

Ongoing interrogation keeps the discipline alive, as shown by the papers presented at this symposium. In my remarks, I will not presume to draw conclusions. Instead, I will sketch out how we at The Art Institute came to pose the questions we did in conceiving our project, outline the resources we deployed in testing our ideas and offer some thoughts about ways in which the answers we generated play with and against those offered by others.

Peter Zegers and I initially became interested in the Van Gogh-Gauguin relationship through our work on Gauguin following on the 1988 retrospective exhibition Chicago co-organised with Washington and Paris.\footnote{14} Specifically, we reconsidered Gauguin's response to the 1889 Exposition Universelle. Three years prior to this landmark world's fair, in 1886, the artist had rejected the idea of a job in colonial Tahiti, considering this isolation to be essentially inimical to his ambitions as painter. But by the time of the Exposition, he was actively constructing a project to pioneer a new art in the French colonies and described this project (for example in a letter to Van Gogh) as a ‘Studio of the Tropics,’ with himself in the annunciatory role of a John the Baptist for the art of the future.

Such heroic posturing has of course been aligned with symbolism, to which Gauguin would by 1890 be a recognised contributor. But this begs the question of *how* Gauguin imaginatively transformed Tahiti from a colonial backwater into a creative destination. Certainly factors such as his 1887 trip to Martinique, the colonial exhibitions of 1889 and the interests of friends like Schuffenecker and De Haan

\footnote{13} Druick and Zegers, op. cit. (note 5)
played into this. But we perceived clear signs suggesting that it was his relationship with Van Gogh and the discussions in Arles that had been catalytic in fostering Gauguin's nascent mythicising ambitions.

It seemed that just as Gauguin began to represent Breton peasants through the lens of Cambodian stylisations - as in the Jeanne d'Arc decoration for the inn of Marie Henry (private collection), which incorporates a gesture from Cambodian sculpture - so he embroidered his ambitions with the mythic language and concepts fostered
by his dialogue with Van Gogh. The Dutch artist appears symbolically in another decoration of Gauguin's known as the *Caribbean woman* (fig. 3): the sunflowers, emblematic of Van Gogh, are a theme that he had introduced into their exchanges in Paris and in Arles; the dark-skinned woman alludes to Gauguin's Martinique figure paintings, chief among them *Among the mangoes* (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum), which for both Van Gogh brothers were a benchmark in contemporary art. The panel effectively advertises the concept that Van Gogh actually outlined when he wrote to his sister in early 1888 that a modern painter should ‘do something like what one finds in Pierre Loti’s book *Le mariage de Loti*, in which the nature of Tahiti is described’ [593/W3]. This was the concept that while together in Arles, with Van Gogh taking the lead, he and Gauguin transformed into the Studio of the Tropics.

A reciprocal formative dynamic - the importance of Gauguin for Van Gogh - was suggested by Van Gogh's letters and paintings: his meeting with Gauguin and the unfolding of their relationship seemed to us critical to his imaginative transformation of the modest yellow house he rented in Arles into a destination: the embodiment of the ‘Studio of the South,’ the missionary headquarters he dreamed of for a brotherhood of painters who would share his belief in art as a source of consolation amidst the challenges of modern life.

Gauguin seemed to be a catalyst for the works Van Gogh painted during the summer of 1888 in anticipation of his arrival in Arles, including the famous *Sunflowers* (F 456 JH 1561; F454 JH 1562) and *Starry night over the Rhône* (F 474 JH 1592). After Gauguin's departure, Van Gogh continued their dialogue, though he notably employed altered formal means, as in the second *Starry night* (F 612 JH 1731) wherein he attempted a kind of artistic communion with the colleague he hoped one day to rejoin, by consciously working out their discussions around the issue of ‘style.’ The pairing in Chicago of these two profoundly different pictures of the star-filled sky, one painted before and the other after the nine weeks together in Arles, suggests the profound impact of the experience. Similarly, Gauguin's repetition, near the end of his life, of the motifs from his 1889 panel in his sunflower still lifes speaks to the way the Studio of the South exerted an imaginative hold on his Tahitian project. In short, it appeared to us that Van Gogh and Gauguin helped each other to shape their respective artistic identities - and ultimately their work - in ways that distinguish their relationship with each other from the relationships they had with other contemporaries.
Initiating the Amsterdam-Chicago collaboration in 1997, we approached Van Gogh and Gauguin as two profoundly different - and differently formed - artists, who though seemingly predetermined by worldview and temperament to misunderstand each other, nonetheless played off these differences in a process of establishing their own identities. In this enterprise, the nine weeks the two painters spent living and working together in Arles are critical. This concentrated period offered a unique opportunity to both consider cultural construction and attempt to grasp the actuality of creativity in terms of lived experience. I will now describe a few of the tasks we set ourselves in this effort.

Benefiting from the rich existing literature on the artistic production in Arles, we nonetheless had to confront the blanks that remained at the material core of the painters' shared history. Surprisingly, there has been no
consensus on precisely what Van Gogh and Gauguin painted while together and in what order. This has quite naturally impeded an understanding of how their relationship unfolded: what were the issues, when did they come into play, how were they played out in pictures? For each time the two artists set up their easels to work side by side constitutes one event in a series of such events. Depending on how these events are ordered, the picture of their evolving collaboration changes.

To address this, we undertook a technical investigation in the hope that new patterns of making, and ultimately meaning, would emerge. A team of conservators from both institutions - Cornelia Peres, Kristin Lister, Inge Fiedler and Ella Hendriks - embarked on a three-year project to examine pictures around the world, armed with insights yielded by recent investigations by other scholars and restorers. They employed a variety of means, including microscopic study, x-radiography, thread counts, fibre and paint-sample analysis. Of particular interest were the experimental pictures both men painted on the 20 metres of coarse jute they purchased shortly after Gauguin's arrival. Comparison of thread counts established the specific characteristics - the 'fingerprint,' as it were - that distinguishes the Arles jute from similar material employed at other times. In addition, it emerged that Van Gogh and Gauguin experimentally applied a series of three different ground preparations to the jute. These findings, along with analysis of their give-and-take in the use of other materials and compositional strategies, enabled us to more securely establish both the parameters and the chronology of their production together and served as one basis for inferring the dialogue.

The pattern of exchange between the two suggested a kind of syncopated creative dynamic: while at moments Van Gogh and Gauguin clearly resisted one another, at other times each took on the other's ideas in canvases which, compared to their previous paintings, are markedly - sometimes disconcertingly - experimental. One case in point is the Memory of the garden (fig. 4), the picture Van Gogh painted in response to Gauguin's ideas about working from the imagination. Based in part on the grounds and also upon the inferred exchange of ideas, we concluded that Van Gogh borrowed Gauguin's ideas about painting, but at the same time provided a composition to Gauguin, whose closely related Arlésiennes (Mistral) (fig. 5), painted

![fig. 4](image)

Vincent van Gogh, Memory of the garden (F 496 JH 1630), 1888, St Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum

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15 See the Appendix, ‘Tracing an interaction, supporting evidence, experimental grounds,’ in Druick and Zegers, op cit (note 5).
fig 5
Paul Gauguin, *Arlésiennes (Mistral)*, 1888, Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr and Mrs Lewis Larned Coborn Memorial Collection
weeks later, acknowledged and refashioned (and so implicitly critiqued) a work that Van Gogh saw as a failure.

Other key pictures can also be seen in a new light, notably the version of the *Sunflowers* that Van Gogh painted on what has been confirmed as the ‘Arles jute,’ now datable to the moment in early December when Gauguin was executing Van Gogh's portrait. The Seji Togo Memorial Sompo Museum of Art's *Sunflowers* (F 457 JH 1666) now find a technical, historical and stylistic context, the lack of which has heretofore occasioned considerable speculation.

Indeed the creative give-and-take between Van Gogh and Gauguin suggestively bears out the dynamic model that Pollock originated as the new ‘game plan’ of late-1880s vanguardism: reference, deference and difference - or in this case resistance. Technical findings add another dimension to this scenario, revealing how Van Gogh negotiated Gauguin's exhortations to free himself from the constraints of painting from nature and instead compose ‘de tête,’ or from the imagination and memory. The *Novel reader* (F 497 JH 1632) was Van Gogh's first major attempt to do so. But it now emerges that the picture he began and indeed largely finished a month later, *La berceuse* (fig. 6), was shaped by a similar intention: both, in Van Gogh's parlance, were ‘abstractions’ painted from the imagination. Yet the two canvases are nonetheless remarkably different in appearance.

The *Novel reader* is notably strange in the context of Van Gogh's oeuvre. With its abbreviated, caricatural drawing, the large canvas has the appearance of a quick, small sketch that has been greatly magnified. It speaks to Van Gogh's uneasiness in untethering himself from direct experience. But by the time, only weeks later, he embarked on *La berceuse*, he had discovered a way to reconcile his desire to respond to Gauguin's ideas with his own artistic preferences. As Kristin Lister outlines, Van Gogh employed tracing as a means of moving from the study - rooted in experience - to the ‘tableau,’ the fully realised pictorial statement produced in the absence of a model or motif.

The origins of *La berceuse* lie in the retrenchment of late November. Displeased with works painted ‘de tête’ like the *Novel reader or Memory and the garden*, Van
Gogh returned to a more comfortable enterprise: portraiture from the model. Madame Roulin came to sit, and Gauguin joined Van Gogh in painting her. And, as in earlier joint sessions, the carefully elaborated surface and aura of calm seen in Gauguin's painting (fig. 7) represented a critique of Van Gogh's rapid, gestural, insistently material execution (fig. 8).

But Van Gogh evidently hoped to develop the small-scale study into a more ambitious tableau of the kind Gauguin might approve. To this end, as Kristin Lister argues in her article in the last *Van Gogh Museum Journal*, Van Gogh made tracings of the Winterthur picture which, together with traced elements from other pictures, he used to develop - in the sitter's absence - the portrait of her he entitled *La berceuse*. The significance of this pictorial grafting is considerable in understanding Van

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Gogh's work, for portraiture was central to his view of his own practice. *La berceuse* was an amalgam, a picture not painted from life, as has traditionally been assumed, but constructed using various pre-existing elements. And this marks a greater departure from basic principles on Van Gogh's part - a greater responsiveness to Gauguin's ideas - than has previously been imagined.

Van Gogh used tracings not merely to generate another copy but to move from a life study to a more synthetic tableau, to free himself from the distractions of the model and to accompany Gauguin in the exploration of ‘style.’ Planes of flat colour, strong outlines, and simplified forms and modelling make this a notable attempt at pictorial synthesis, shaped in concert with Gauguin and responsive to the latter's portrait. Painted at a point when the future of their relationship was clearly in doubt, the deference to Gauguin's aesthetic principles in *La berceuse* would help explain why the picture became so connected with Gauguin in Van Gogh's mind.

But the Arles interaction alone did not fully explain the profound connection of *La berceuse* to Gauguin and their partnership. What led Van Gogh to fetishise the image to the extent of making one version after another, to produce an eventual five versions? Why, a year later when he became disillusioned with the direction Gauguin's work was taking, would Van Gogh specifically renounce the ‘abstraction’ he had been misled to practice in the work? We first went to the often-quoted contemporary letters, in which Van Gogh likened the image to the cheap colour prints of the Virgin that offered comfort to sailors during storms at sea. But far from an explanation, this curious comparison only demanded further excavation of the works themselves and of the written texts.
The letters, as has long been recognised, are not transparent documents. Marshalling them as ‘evidence’ is problematic. For example, as Dorn and others have noted, Van Gogh consistently ‘rationalised his activities as purely logical,’ both to reassure himself and to persuade his correspondents. Self-deceptions thus assume the guise of straightforward fact. In Gauguin's writings, posturing and bragging sometimes operate similarly. And the large body of his retrospective writings is further cloaked by time, distance and changing priorities.

But there are other, perhaps less obvious pitfalls to this body of materials. In Van Gogh's case, the sheer number of letters gives them an authority that can be blinding. So much is mentioned - about paintings, books, feelings - that there is a natural tendency to rule out what
does not appear. This, in effect, applies interpretive limitations to Van Gogh that exist for virtually no other artist. For example, Liz Childs's recent discussion of Van Gogh's self-mutilation in the context of practices of the Japanese brothel may potentially meet with resistance precisely owing to the lack of a direct letter reference, despite the presentation of other evidence.  

The letters also pose problems for a consideration of Van Gogh's formative years, before age 19, when his correspondence - as published - began. Our effort to recuperate Van Gogh's worldview involves acknowledging the metaphoric thinking central to the tradition of emblems so prevalent in his cultural heritage. This emblematic thinking is referenced only by implication in his later writings and reminiscences of his youth. Similarly implicit is the legacy of reformist Dutch theologian Allard Pierson, whose ‘anti-supernaturalist’ Protestantism figures centrally in Silverman's construction of the religious outlook that informed Van Gogh's art. It is not to be expected that the influences that shaped his youth should necessarily find direct echo in his later writings.

An omission of a different order has, in our view, thwarted a nuanced understanding of the Van Gogh-Gauguin relationship: while many letters survive, a significant number have been lost. This includes most of Theo's letters and, as we know from Merlhès's work, the bulk of the correspondence between the principals. Only six of some 30 letters from Van Gogh to Gauguin survive, and at least nine (of 25) letters from Gauguin are lost. As a result, Van Gogh's relationship with the young Emile Bernard has entered history as more vivid - in a sense more ‘real’ - since it is articulated in the 22 surviving letters Van Gogh wrote him in 1888-89. This is potentially deceptive, turning attention away from the actual collaborative experience of Van Gogh and Gauguin and instead fostering the assumption that their relationship acquires significance only insofar as it sheds light on the independent roles each played in art history as subsequently written. Without doubt the friendships that both artists enjoyed with Bernard were very significant, as Dorn, Jirat-Wasiutyński and others have argued. But while at certain junctures Van Gogh entertained inviting Bernard as well as others to join the Studio of the South, the extant correspondence leaves little doubt that from the very first, and to the very end, it was Gauguin's participation that Van Gogh fixed his hopes on; it was Gauguin he idealised and, in his letter thanking critic Albert Aurier for his attention, publicly deferred to. Bernard was a younger friend whom Van Gogh truly admired; Gauguin, his senior, he hero-worshiped. And to one whose idea of heroism came straight from Thomas Carlyle, this was a crucial distinction.

The nuances in this triangulated relationship are suggested in the self-portrait exchange of October 1888. Trading portraits, Van Gogh and Gauguin each assumed a dramatic persona: Van Gogh as an austere Japanese bonze, Gauguin as the outcast protagonist Jean Valjean from Hugo's Les misérables - one of the books, in fact, that Van Gogh virtually required his close friends to admire as he did. Gauguin had just finished reading it. Bernard, by contrast, did not participate in this mutual posturing: the dedicated self-portrait he sent to Van Gogh notably avoids heroics, conveying its sincerity through its childlike simplicity, as Jirat-Wasiutyński has observed. Bernard's painting was perhaps more pleasing to Van Gogh, but Gauguin's offered

a number of challenges that accelerated Van Gogh's resolve to bring him to Arles without further delay.

To understand the nature and substance of the attraction and dialogue between Van Gogh and Gauguin, we undertook a cross-grained reading of the extant written texts by both artists. Our aim was to understand the different histories each artist brought to their relationship and the ways in which these essential differences - guarantees of misunderstanding - were nonetheless experienced as stimulating and, ultimately, productive. This recuperative exercise informed the extension of our focus to what came before and transpired after Arles.

We approached the texts with the dual aims of teasing out the patterns of thinking that could illuminate the mutual interest, and of inferring the dialogue that might have taken place in the lost letters and the Yellow House. We began with sustained, close readings of the entire correspondence in the original Dutch and French, attentive to the repetition and variation of ideas and language and the circumstances in which they occurred. As scholars have noted, such clusters of associations are particularly relevant for understanding how the experiences of art, literature and life filtered Van Gogh's outlook on the world. This protracted exercise established the template for our rough sketch. However, we recognised that to elaborate, in counterpoint with the pictures, we would have to engage with
the full range of the correspondence. To this end we scanned in all the published
texts, ordered according to the most current dating, to create a databank that allowed
for searching in and across the bodies of the correspondence of Van Gogh, Gauguin
and their families and friends. This allowed us to interrogate intentions and identify
recurrent, altered, and new concerns and language. We see this resource, used in
conjunction with the pictures and recent technical data, as providing a new sort of
context in which to re-view the Van Gogh-Gauguin relationship.

In this way, for example, we found that Van Gogh's 1889 characterisation of the
failed Studio of the South as a shipwreck carried multiple meanings: long before
meeting the ex-sailor Gauguin, Van Gogh persistently used this conventional figure
and related maritime metaphors to express professional and personal ambitions,
hopes and fears. Thus, early on, he had represented his establishment of a studio in
The Hague in terms of launching a boat (he tried to fit it out like a barge; claimed to
love it as a sailor his ship; and simultaneously figured it as the long-sought harbour
or refuge). In an initial attempt to forge a kind of artistic brotherhood, Van Gogh had
invited his contemporary Anton van Rappard to join him in becoming a 'fisherman
on the sea that we call the Ocean of Reality' [188/R6]. Such habitual figuration
- continued in his 1889 accusation that Gauguin had abandoned ship when he left Arles
- invests Van Gogh's comparison of La berceuse to a sailor's ex-voto with additional
significance, illuminating the concerns that had played into its making and presaging
what would follow after the painting's execution.

Such newly revealed connections allowed for a more nuanced appreciation of the
impact on Van Gogh of the first meeting with Gauguin, helping to account for the
profound significance of the deep ‘poetry’ he discerned in the Martinique pictures,
which suggested to him that their maker might be what he himself hoped to be, an
heir to Jean-François Millet. Given his habitual ways of thinking, Van Gogh read
the ex-sailor as possibly the ideal companion for the creative voyage into uncharted
waters. In turn, Van Gogh's metaphorical reading held immense imaginative appeal
for Gauguin, who indeed suggestively incorporated the shipwreck theme in one of
the Volpini lithographs executed immediately after returning to Paris from Arles. At
the same time, Van Gogh expressed his continued attachment to what Gauguin
represented to him in his repetitions of compositions associated with Gauguin - the
Sunflowers, La berceuse and the Arlésienne based on the drawing Gauguin left behind
in Arles. These extend the relationship beyond the events of December and into the
last months of Van Gogh's life.

Our focus, broadened well beyond Arles in time and place, reflects our view that
the expectations invested in the Van Gogh-Gauguin relationship had their roots in
the past and that the experimentation continued into the future. Certainly Theo
recognised a parallel ‘search for style’ - synthetic mannerisms of which he disapproved
- in the work he received from Van Gogh in Saint-Rémy and Gauguin in Brittany
during the summer of 1889. But as the pairing we made in Chicago of Van Gogh's
Mountains (F 622 JH 1766) and Gauguin's Flageolet player on the cliff (Indianapolis
Museum of Art) suggests, in their parallel pursuits the two artists never produced
the kind of interchangeable styles that is notably found in the cubist works of Braque

18 For further discussion of Van Gogh's sea-voyage metaphors, see Druick and Zegers, op. cit.
(note 5), pp. 32-33, 109-10.
and Picasso around 1911. Instead theirs is a remarkable situation wherein deeply personal forms of art emerged from the idea of a shared enterprise.

Our results have several points of contact with recent scholarship. We shared Debora Silverman's hope, voiced in the introduction to The search for sacred art, that the reader would ‘come away ... with a different view of Van Gogh and Gauguin from the one they began with.’ Are the different views essentially irreconcilable, or in fact complementary?

Reading Bradley Collins's new book, for example, we were struck by the number of instances in which we had arrived at similar conclusions despite different emphases and interpretive strategies. Moreover, certain analyses, when considered together, may add up to a newly suggestive synthesis. For example, we did not address the phallic symbolism that Collins (most recently) reads in Van Gogh's two chair portraits (F 498 JH 1635 and F 499 JH 1636). But the contrast he describes between the still-life objects on the two chairs - big/small, erect/flaccid - potentially takes on a more resonant meaning in light of our finding that Van Gogh added the pipe and pouch to the
seat of his own chair only after Gauguin had left - when he would certainly have been experiencing feelings of loss and powerlessness. In other words, considering the image through the perspective of time inflects the intention suggested by a psychoanalytic reading.

We have investigated familiar paintings and writings with a view to eliciting new sources and contexts in which to consider the relationship. Using some of the same sources and bringing other new ones to bear, Silverman has arrived at a very different view of the relationship, stressing the inevitable incompatibilities between the two, the result of their disparate formations, specifically the different theological cultures that produced them, and that they carried over, metaphorically and materially, into their canvases.

Are the accounts presented in The search for sacred art and Van Gogh and Gauguin: the Studio of the South compatible? From our point of view, yes - but inevitably not congruent. Silverman's interrogation starkly illuminates the day-and-night differences to which the two 'chair portraits' indeed allude. But we would argue that these culturally determined polarities were in each case significantly modified by individual temperaments and varied life experience.

Thanks to Silverman's work, we must henceforth associate Gauguin's 'mental habits and attitudes toward the visual' with the three years he spent at the Orléans Catholic Junior seminary, where the religious education adhered to the principles of educational reformer Bishop Dupanloup. This seminary experience, however, was only one piece of the geographical, cultural and social patchwork quilt that was Gauguin's early formation: in Spanish Lima as well as Orléans and Paris, in different socio-economic circumstances, and at four different schools between the ages of six and 17, when he joined the merchant marine. The product, in short, of diverse educational and cultural experiences, Gauguin was accused by Pissarro of being a 'bricoleur,' one who took things here and there as he found them. A more positive characterisation would describe him as flexible, responsive, open to new ideas, adaptable and - to extend the point - predisposed to the sense of irony that comes with always being an outsider.
As for Van Gogh's formation, we subscribe to Silverman's persuasive marshalling of the specific ingredients of his ‘Dutchness,’ with its dominant strains of anti-individualism and anti-supernaturalism that located divinity in tangible reality. Certainly this fed into his self-image and his art. But we also see these characteristics tempered by what Collins has termed a polarisation, a sense of alienation from the northern culture of his father that led him to seek a more authentic ‘homeland,’ first in art and then in the Studio of the South. To be sure, Van Gogh's mature outlook on life, religion and art has much in common with that of Dutch religious reformists like Pierson. But just as clearly, Van Gogh arrived at this position circuitously: after a protracted and idiosyncratic quest, in which he let himself be guided (and his essential ‘Dutchness’ inflected) by authors who led him far afield: Renan, Michelet and - from early on and extensively we argue - the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle, and finally Wagner.

In this way, Van Gogh forged an independent identity that accommodated the characterological differences
of which he and his family were acutely aware. This in turn both permitted and problematised the conversation with Gauguin. A case in point is the discussion, played out after Arles, in which they cast their ambitions for painting in terms of the artist as spiritual leader, as John the Baptist or even Christ. As others have recognised, Van Gogh shared Gauguin's propensity to grandiosity, nurturing a longstanding, powerful identification with Christ, more specifically the suffering Christ in Gethsemane. This ‘exalted side of Van Gogh's polarised self-image,’ as Collins terms it, contradicted the core teachings of his youth and his own repeatedly avowed attachment to the ‘possible, logical and true.’ Other incidents make the same point, for example his identification, on the one hand, with humble craftspeople like weavers; and, on the other, his rationalisation of his belated start as he approached his 30th birthday with the recollection that Jesus had been an ordinary carpenter until roughly the same age.

Van Gogh could not readily shed ambition of this sort, and he frequently expressed uneasiness. Having attempted and failed to realise two Gethsemane paintings prior to Gauguin's arrival, Van Gogh's behaviour leading up to the explosive episode of 23 December involved acting out his identification with Christ, as Gauguin reported immediately afterward. In the Pietà painted in Saint-Rémy (fig. 9), Van Gogh sidled up to this identification in a way that expresses his ambivalence, avoiding the dangerous temptation of ‘abstraction’ by working after a composition by Delacroix, but suggesting his own features in the face of Christ.

Gauguin, by contrast, felt no such culturally inculcated qualms in externalising the fantasies of mythic heroism that he and Van Gogh discussed in Arles, as is amply demonstrated by his self-portrait as Christ in the garden of olives (fig. 10). If at one level the picture, as Silverman proposes, speaks to Gauguin's fluency with a dialectic of
inwardness and otherworldliness propounded at the seminary, on another level, the red hair signals Van Gogh and thus continues the Arles discussions about artistic identification and brotherhood. It is not simply the physical attribute of red hair that is significant, but rather how it had become coded in their discussions as a signifier of a brotherhood of outcasts.

Van Gogh's imagination had first been captured by the idea of a brotherhood of redheads years earlier, when he was trying to recruit Theo to abandon his job and join him in forming a literal brotherhood of painters. The concept had resurfaced in December 1888, when - the partnership with Gauguin now very much in doubt - the two together visited the museum in Montpellier. There, in Delacroix's portrait of the redheaded Alfred Bruyas, Van Gogh discerned a new brother in suffering, a martyr to the loss of a similar ideal - a Studio of the South. In commissioning a portrait of himself as Christ crowned with thorns (fig. 11), Bruyas enacted Van Gogh's own identification. Gauguin's Christ, whose gesture echoes that made by Bruyas in another portrait, by Delacroix (1853; Montpellier, Musée Fabre), angered Van Gogh not so much because it offended his avowed commitment to ‘the true,’ but because it touched on their competitiveness and

fig. 11
Antoine Verdier, Christ with a crown of thorns: portrait of Alfred Bruyas, 1852, Montpellier, Musée Fabre
on the grandiosity that, as Collins observes, Van Gogh disavowed through anger. It was at this moment he also renounced the ‘abstraction’ he now saw in *La berceuse*. All of these examples point to the reasons we privilege the Gauguin-Van Gogh relationship in our study, singling it out from other alliances that each formed with other members of the Parisian vanguard.

As part of the larger art-historical enterprise, recent scholarship on both Gauguin and Van Gogh has worked to recover them from the processes of modernist mythmaking that have turned each into a fabricated, heroic persona, as Pollock has acutely analysed. The anti-mythical drive gives social depth and historical meaning to art by placing it in dialogue with a lived and experienced social world. But it should not obscure an important consideration: Van Gogh could readily be assimilated to a major trope of western culture, the sacrifice of Jesus, and by extension could be presented in art-historical narrative as modern artist/secular Christ precisely because he scripted the lineaments of the identity himself, in a process that began long before he arrived in Paris.

The counter-mythic impetus ‘normalises’ Van Gogh by situating him in the larger creative context of the young French vanguard. And we agree with Homburg and others that the exchange of ideas and a sense of group identity with his Parisian contemporaries contributed to Van Gogh's construction of his artistic identity. But to conclude that ‘his ambitions were not very different from those of his contemporaries’ overdetermines the contextual argument. For there is every indication that Van Gogh's ambitions were profoundly different - shaped by different sources and differently formed.

Van Gogh was not just speaking metaphorically when he stated that art was a faith. He believed that painting could be a new gospel for the modern age. His conception of the artist, seeded by Dutch theological culture, was finally shaped by Carlyle's concept of the Hero - the genius who is able to cast eternal truths in new forms responsive to the needs of his age - and extended to encompass a confraternity including artists and prophets, with Christ at its head.

Such was the exalted ambition that Van Gogh brought with him to Paris, and that he intuited in Gauguin's work and person. In turn Gauguin, in the climate of nascent symbolist ideas and given his own needs, found it suggestive to be cast by Van Gogh as ‘The Wanderer,’ or as Gauguin himself quoted, ‘the man from afar who will go far.’ Although it is important to dismantle mythic narratives and interrogate their formation, the shaping force of such narratives in the Van Gogh-Gauguin relationship should be acknowledged.

In conclusion, we believe that different views of the Van Gogh-Gauguin relationship can in a sense be superimposed, seen through each other to produce a more complex, three-dimensional picture of the ways in which individual and idiosyncratic particulars inflect broader artistic and cultural shaping forces, and vice-versa.

We do not propose a heroic narrative, but rather a consideration that addresses heroics in the construction of identity. Our enterprise has involved studying Van Gogh and Gauguin as the context for each other's art and artistic personae, with the aim of charting the interplay of ideas - ideas that clearly extend far beyond the two
who articulated them, and that indeed continue to intrigue scholars more than a century later.
fig. 1
Paul Gauguin, *Arii Matamoe (La fin royale)*, 1890, private collection
An echoing silence: the critical reception of Gauguin in France, 1903-49

Isabelle Cahn

In 1891, Gauguin chose to exile himself far from his native land and to go and live in Tahiti in order to enjoy complete creative freedom, liberated from the artistic and social constraints that had hindered him. His official pretext was the study of the island and its inhabitants, a subject not yet dealt with in art. In the eyes of his contemporaries, his departure constituted ‘un petit scandale et une grosse erreur,’ for many still preferred the exoticism of the hill of Montmartre or the exploration of less savage lands. ‘Gauguin left as a rebel,’ Matisse analysed a few years later, after his own journey to Oceania. ‘That is what kept him going in the midst of that ambience which liquefies you, as they say down there. His combative nature, his crucified state preserved him from the general numbness. His wounded self-esteem kept him on the alert.’ In Paris, the artist was seen as a freethinker, a rebel who was already attracting suspicion, even hostility. In Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands, his battles against the government and the missionaries did him a good deal of harm and were also responsible for the isolation in which he lived for the last ten years of his life. This solitude found its echo in France, where his work was still little known but his myth continued to grow. ‘You are now this incredible, legendary artist, who sends his disconcerting, inimitable works from the depths of Oceania, definitive works of a great man who has, so to speak, disappeared from the world,’ Daniel de Monfreid wrote to him on 14 November 1902: ‘In short, you enjoy the immunity of the deceased greats, you have passed into the history of art.’

But this distant silence, far from being a sign of the respect due to a deceased giant, reflected the restrained hostility of his contemporaries, which swiftly erupted when the artist's death was announced. Until now, no study has focused on this silence on the part of France. Gauguin had dared to turn his back on the values of his time, to create his own model by making a clean sweep of agreed forms and government sensitivities. Believing in his own creation was Gauguin's only truth. He was wrong in the eyes of the public, and his country made him pay dearly for the right he alone had assumed: to ‘dare everything.’ What reactions did the news of his death provoke? What place did the painter occupy on the French art scene between 1903 and 1949? How was his work received? These are the questions we shall seek to answer here, in order to understand how the artist passed from oblivion to recognition, from myth or simple curiosity (as Rodin said) to complete rehabilitation. This re-reading of the critical reception of Gauguin's work in France up to mid-century cannot claim to be exhaustive, but proposes to open up a new perspective in the study of one of the 19th century's most spellbinding artists.

1 So Charles Morice in his introduction to the catalogue of the Exposition d'oeuvres récentes de Paul Gauguin at the Durand-Ruel gallery, November 1893, p 8

Van Gogh Museum Journal 2003
A forgotten artist, a scandalous man: reactions to Gauguin's death

It was not until the end of August 1903, i.e. three and a half months later, that the news of Gauguin's death arrived in France via Georges-Daniel de Monfreid, who immediately printed an announcement to publicise an event that had passed unnoticed. The art world had become accustomed to the artist's absence and all - or

3 France, private collection, unpublished diaries of Georges-Daniel de Monfreid, 23 August 1903
almost all - had forgotten him. An exception were his friends Charles Morice, Maurice Denis or indeed Armand Seguin, who had published an important study on him in L'Occident in the spring of 1903. A press agency spread the news of the artist's passing in the first week of September. Ten or so Parisian newspapers then confined themselves to announcing Gauguin's death in three or four lines. A first article that had appeared in Le Temps on 2 September, signed by Thiébault-Sisson, a personal enemy of Gauguin, inspired 13 other dailies, who took over his comments more or less word for word. This text, quoted and sometimes even simply copied in large extracts, spread a libellous account of the artist's life, portraying him as an anarchist, a man with no morals who had abandoned his family, a sexual obsessive, an alcoholic, morphine addict and leper: ‘Gauguin was a sort of anarchist whom a horror of convention and contempt for all rules led to an equally simplistic conception of art and life,’ the critic concluded. This peremptory judgement was to leave a deep impression on people's minds and was to tarnish the painter's image for a long time to come. Around 20 newspapers of all persuasions also printed an obituary notice influenced by another scathing Thiebault-Sisson article that had appeared in Le Petit Bleu on 2 September 1903, again stressing the artist's excesses and his great love of alcohol and ‘popinées.’ The press emphasised the misfortunes of Gauguin's life to prove the failure of his painting and to turn him, as they had Van Gogh, into a accursed artist.

Original contributions were rare and numbered only four, while around 30 dailies did not even mention the event for reasons that owed as much to their editorial orientation as to their editorial state. But the silence of Le Gaulois can only be explained by the indifference of Arthur Meyer, its director. For many critics, Gauguin's art had come to an end in 1891; in their eyes the Tahitian episode represented nothing more than a deviation.

At the moment of his death, Gauguin was therefore far from an unknown in his own country, but his bad reputation, amplified by libellous articles, did him lasting harm. Misunderstandings and suspicions long dogged the appreciation of his work, as Jean Leymarie noted more than 45 years later: ‘[...] the sudden break between the bourgeois life to which he had conformed in his youth, and the destiny as an artist which he subsequently assumed, with its heroic sacrifices and his ridiculous eccentricities, in revolt against the family, against society and more profoundly...

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6 Also on 2 September: L'Echo de Paris, L'Eclair, Le Figaro, La Libre Parole, Le Soleil; and on 3 September: Le Journal des Débats, La Croix, L'Intransigeant, La Liberté, La Vérité Française, La République Française, La Petite République.
8 Louis Vauxcelles in Gil Blas on 2 September; Gustave Kahn in L'Aurore on 2 September; Armand Bidou in Le Journal des Débats on 4 September; and Frédéric Amouretti in La Gazette de France on the same day.
against civilisation if not against himself, dissociates him and forever sullies him with ambiguity.’

Faced with these negative assessments, Gauguin's friends hastened to publish several articles to defend the work and the memory of an artist they had loved. The poet Charles Morice, with whom Gauguin had in fact been on frosty terms at the end of his life, proved his most active champion after his death. As early as 20 September, Morice protested against the silence of the public powers and the absence of Gauguin in the Musée du Luxembourg, which already contained work by his disciples from Pont-Aven and the Nabis. The following month he committed a second offence by publishing a vibrant plea on Gauguin's behalf: ‘Will justice be done him today,’ he asked, ‘or will

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9 Jean Leymarie, ‘Musée de l'Orangerie. Exposition Gauguin,’ *Musées de France* (June 1949), pp. 112-13: ‘[...] la brusque rupture entre la vie bourgeoise à laquelle il s'était conformé dans sa jeunesse, et le destin d'artiste qu'il assume par la suite, avec ses sacrifices héroïques et ses excentricités ridicules, en révolte contre la famille, contre la société et plus profondément contre la civilisation sinon contre lui-même, le dissocie et l'entache à jamais d'ambiguïté’

hatred and incomprehension, even in the face of death, refuse to lay down their arms? [...] I have been told that the man did harm to the artist. Well, the man is no longer here [...]."\(^{11}\) In his turn, Maurice Denis paid homage to the man who had liberated art from all the restrictions of realism,\(^{12}\) while Daniel de Monfreid was swift to publish an article in *La Dépêche*\(^{13}\) in order to counter the libellous words of Marius-Ary Leblond, a well-known colonial writer who had just published an article in the same gazette entitled ‘La vie anarchiste d'un artiste.’\(^{14}\)

On 30 September 1903, Charles Morice carried out a survey among the artists and intellectuals of the symbolist movement: ‘Will you be good enough to summarise, in no more than one page, what you think of Paul Gauguin: his talent, his doctrine, his work, his influence, his attitude?’ The results, published in the *Mercure de France*,\(^{15}\) revealed that Gauguin, who had been given such a rough ride by the press, was in reality an artist who was admired and respected by the creators of his generation. Several dubbed him a ‘master’ or ‘genius.’ His work, from which all concerns of imitation had been removed, possessed above all decorative qualities: ‘Gauguin is a decorative expression,’ proclaimed Eugène Carrière in his response to the survey, and such phrases were often repeated to classify Gauguin's art during the entire first half of the 20th century. If his art still appeared excessive in the most conservative eyes, Antoine de la Rochefoucauld prophesied that certain works ‘will soon feature in the Luxembourg, [...] while waiting for the day, ten years of so from now, when the Louvre honours itself by offering up its picture-rails [...] But what a revolution, what an upheaval to arrive at such a result.’\(^{16}\) Morice concluded that it was still too soon to measure the depth of the mark left by Gauguin on the art of his time. Everything had still to be done to secure his recognition and analyse his impact on the younger generations.

**Beginnings of recognition**

A few years before his death, Gauguin had been preoccupied with the idea of an exhibition that would be truly representative of his work, with canvases such as *Ia orana Maria, Nevermore* and, most important of all, *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* (fig. 9).\(^{17}\) He had hoped once again to take advantage

11 Charles Morice, ‘Paul Gauguin,’ *Mercure de France* (October 1903), p. 134. ‘Lui rendra-t-on justice aujourd'hui ou la haine et l'incompréhension, même devant la mort, refuseront-elles de désarmer? [...] On m'a dit que l'homme avait nui à l'artiste. Eh bien, l'homme n'est plus là [...]’
14 Marius-Ary Leblond, ‘La vie anarchiste d'un artiste,’ *La Dépêche*, 1 October 1903.
16 Ibid p 432: ‘[.] ne tarderont pas à figurer au Luxembourg, [...] en attendant que, d'ici une dizaine d'années le Louvre s'honore par l'offre de ses cimaises [...] Mais quelle révolution, quel chambardement pour arriver à un tel résultat.’
17 See the letters from Gauguin to Georges-Daniel de Monfreid of April 1900 and 25 August 1901, reprinted in *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Georges-Daniel de Monfreid*, Paris 1918, nos. LXII and LXXX, pp 280 and 342.
of the Exposition Universelle of 1900, when the eyes of the entire world would be turned towards Paris, just as he had done in 1889 with the exhibition at the Café Volpini. But this project did not materialise. By the time France learned of his death it was unfortunately too late to organise a major exhibition. Only a few works were hung in a small, poorly-lit room at the Salon d'Automne, which opened its doors on 31 October 1903. According to the catalogue, the display contained eight pictures, but other accounts indicate there were probably more. These same accounts enable us for the first time to identify some of these works with certainty: *Arii Matamoe (La fin royale)* (fig. 1), loaned by the collector Henry Lerolle; and *Bathers*, which belonged to Roger Marx, was also featured, hung in comparison with *L'or de leurs corps* from the collection of Olivier Sainsère. ‘These two canvases exchange eloquent retorts [...]’. With him [Gauguin], under the influence of his genius, he makes us admire the beauty of these and con-
sent to see in those the stigmata of decadence,’ wrote Charles Morice. But the age was still a long way from joining the critic in singing the praises of a Tahitian Eve. Still, the modest hanging provoked lively emotions among the visitors to the Salon d’Automne, who were struck by the pictures’ disturbing beauty.

The opening, a few days later, of a major exhibition at the Galerie Vollard, comprising 50 pictures and 23 drawings and monotypes, also confirmed the beginnings of a movement towards favourable recognition of the artist. On this occasion, at a time when Segalen's purchases had not yet made their way to France, the public was introduced for the first time to works from the Marquesas. Also featured were works from the first trip to Tahiti. Vollard, who had waited for Gauguin's death before speculating on his work, was beginning to do some good deals with foreign collectors, mainly Germans and Russians. In June 1905, he once again organised a large show of around 60 works - paintings, watercolours, ceramics and sculptures, which unfortunately did not produce any reaction on the part of the public authorities. ‘I dare not hope that M. Dujardin-Beaumetz [Under-secretary of State for Fine Arts] will deign to venture inside. And yet is it not high time that a work by Paul Gauguin entered the Luxembourg, where so many of those who followed in his wake hang in triumph?’ asked Louis Vauxcelles in *Gil Blas* on this occasion.

After a plan for an exhibition at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts failed to come to fruition, Charles Morice sensed an imminent danger that Gauguin's work would be dispersed and publicly demanded an exhibition of his entire production: paintings, sculptures, prints and ceramics. He even envisaged having the artist's ashes repatriated to Père Lachaise cemetery, in order to provide Gauguin with the funeral ceremony he had been denied. Maurice Denis, too, was indignant about French officials' silence: ‘[...] It is time that we recognised both the value of his work, and the important place it holds in the history of modern art. He is the French painter who has had the greatest influence since Manet. Gauguin was for the generation of 1890 what Manet was for the generation of 1870.’

22 The show ran from 4-28 November 1903.
23 According to Vollard's accounts, on 10 March 1904 he sold two Gauguins at 1,800 francs each to Karl Osthaus for the Museum Folkwang in Essen; on 10 November 1904 Schoukine acquired two pictures for 3,500 francs (*Maternité, La fuite*) -- each having been bought from the artist for 200 francs; on 16 December 1904, Vollard despatched *La nativité* to Tschudi in Berlin. See Paris, Bibliothèque et Archives des musées nationaux, Vollard Archives.
The Salon d'Automne retrospective, 1906

It was not until the autumn of 1906, in other words more than three years after Gauguin's death, that a large-scale retrospective of the artist's work was held at the Paris Salon d'Automne. Numerous collectors participated in the event: 24 supplied at total of 227 works, representing all periods of Gauguin's activity and each listed in the catalogue alongside the names of their owners. Gustave Fayet practically emptied the walls of his apartment in the rue de Bellechasse. Vollard also loaned many works to support his artist's ever-rising reputation: pictures bought for 200 francs during Gauguin's lifetime were now selling for several thousand.

The retrospective, presented to the public under good conditions, became the attraction of the Salon d'Automne and gave rise to a number of detailed analyses. The canvases from Brittany had acquired a good patina over time, and those from Tahiti, with their bold simplifications, fit into the decorative tradition that ran from Manet, il est le peintre français qui eut la plus grande influence. Ce que fut Manet pour la génération de 1870, Gauguin le fut pour celle de 1890."

28 The exhibition at the Grand Palais ran from 6 October-15 November 1906.
29 He loaned 25 pictures, 26 watercolours, two wooden sculptures, seven ceramics and ten lithographs.
30 His principal customer for the Gauguins at the time was the Prince de Wagram, who bought several Tahitian pictures on 11 June 1906: Un paysage en hauteur avec des paons au premier plan (W 484), 8,000 francs; Femmes assises au premier plan auréoles autour de la tête au fond scènes diverses (W 512), 8,000 francs; Femmes jouant de la flute et chien rouge (W 468 or 470), 7,000 francs, Femme se cachant le sexe, derrière l'esprit du mal (W 458), 4,000 francs, Paysage en largeur indigènes portant des bananes (W 431), 3,000 francs; Portrait de l'artiste, le Golgotha (W 534), 3,500 francs. And on 25 June 1906: Deux torses femmes dont une allaitant (W 624), 6,000 francs; Femme debout tenant un fruit (W 501), 8,000 francs; Fleurs avec deux personnages au fond (W 426), 8,000 francs. See Vollard Archives, cit. (note 23).
31 See, for example, Camille Mauclair, ‘Le Salon d'Automne,’ Art et Décoration (November 1906), pp. 146-51.
the artists of the Middle Ages to Puvis de Chavannes.\textsuperscript{32} Even the inflexible Camille Mauclair seemed won over by the paintings: ‘There is in this Tahitian Giotto [...] a sort of barbaric opulence that moves one, and above all a surprising ornamental ingeniousness.’\textsuperscript{33} Morice recalled on this occasion that the French state had refused to grant walls to Gauguin in his lifetime, thus depriving the public of sumptuous decorations that were ‘the very goal, the natural and special goal of his mission.’\textsuperscript{34}

The exhibition revived hopes for a rehabilitation of this controversial artist, who was still officially ostracised. He was already appearing alongside Cézanne and Van Gogh as a major player and a profound influence on contemporary art. But the public at large, who were accustomed to anecdotal works and for whom Gauguin was practically an unknown, still feared him and preferred to admire ‘d'excellents artistes hospitalisés au musée du Luxembourg.’\textsuperscript{35}

Opinion remained divided about the masterpieces from the Fayet collection on view - \textit{The yellow Christ}; \textit{Vision of the sermon} (fig. 2); a ceramic jardinière; \textit{Soyez mystérieuses}; \textit{Woman with a mango}; \textit{Two Tahitians}; and
Oviri, which Fayet had bought in 1905 (fig. 3) - as well as Nevermore from the Fritz Delius collection. Several major works were absent, however, such as Manaō tupapaū, Ia orana Maria from the Manzi collection, and, above all, Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?, which then belonged to the great Bordeaux amateur Gabriel Frizeau.

The Gauguin retrospective at the 1906 Salon d'Automne was also a sort of homage by younger artists to an older master. Pierre Girieud exhibited a ‘messianic’ work depicting the artist surrounded by his friends and disciples: Paco Durrio, Maurice Denis, Charles Morice, Maurice Sérusier, Daniel de Monfreid, etc. (fig. 4). The filiation from the Gauguin room to the so-called ‘Fauves’ room seems obvious to us today, but few recognised it at the time. One exception was the columnist from L’Art Décoratif, who pointed to the connection whilst putting the painters of the new generation on their guard. Beside these canvases, with their shrill colours, Gauguin's painting seemed almost calm: ‘le calme et la surdité des belles choses.’

Between fascination and rejection, 1907-48

During the years following the 1906 retrospective at the Salon d'Automne, galleries and dealers proved extremely committed to Gauguin, whose popularity was

36 The canvas, exhibited in 1903 at Vollard's, had been bought by Harry Graf Kessler; it reappeared in France only in 1925 at the exhibition Cinquante ans de peinture française, held in the Pavillon de Marsan, and did not feature in the centenary exhibition of 1949.


38 Francis Lepeseur, ‘Le Salon d'Automne,’ La Rénovation Esthétique (November 1906), p. 28.
continually rising.\textsuperscript{39} Around 1910, a medium-sized canvas cost between 10,000 and 18,000 francs. Between 1907 and 1911 his works were shown regularly at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery when there were thematic exhibitions,\textsuperscript{40} but Vollard remained his most active dealer.\textsuperscript{41} From 25 April to 14 May 1910 he staged an exhibition comprising 22 pic-

\textsuperscript{39} ‘Ne vous pressez pas pour abandonner votre grand Gauguin,’ wrote E. Gayac to G. Frizeau on the subject of \textit{Where do we come from?} on 21 February 1912. ‘Je comprends vos raisons. Daniel de Monfreid aussi pense qu’un jour viendra […]. Il ne pourra pas résister à une offre très importante. Pour moi si le Gauguin de Monfreid [\textit{The white horse}] vaut 60 000 f, le votre en vaut 200 000’; quoted in Marseilles (Hôtel des ventes), 14 December 1986, lot 96.

\textsuperscript{40} For example in \textit{Fleurs et natures mortes}, 14-30 November 1907 (three still lifes); \textit{Portraits d’hommes}, 16 December 1907-4 January 1908 (two self-portraits); \textit{Nus}, 17-28 May 1910 (two), \textit{La faune}, 19-30 December 1910 (four); and \textit{L’eau}, 26 June-15 July 1911 (three).

\textsuperscript{41} On 8 May 1907, Vollard bought some ‘old studies’ for 2,000 francs from Mette Gauguin. See the unpublished diaries of Georges-Daniel de Monfreid, cit. (note 3).
tures from every period, including The vision of the sermon (fig. 2) and a large Tahiti scene from 1898, Tahitian pastoral, which he called La frise; the latter was offered to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York for 35,000 francs at the start of 1918.42

By the end of the second decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the 1920s, the Tahitian period was not the only one to attract the attention of the public and connoisseurs: the works of the Brittany period re-emerged at an exhibition of the decorations for Marie Henry's inn at Le Pouldu, held at the Barbazanges gallery in 1919.43 This gave rise to a number of publications44 in which Gauguin was dubbed the founder of synthetism45 and symbolism.46

While France remained divided between fascination and rejection, foreign art-lovers were showing an active interest in Gauguin, who enjoyed a very different reputation in their countries. In 1926, the Association de l'Art français47 organised an important exhibition at Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo, consisting of 76 pictures, all of which, except for one,48 belonged to Scandinavian collections. Among the works shown were Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?, recently purchased by the Norwegian amateur J.B. Stang. Denmark, which claimed a share of Gauguin's genius, would dearly have loved to annex him to its national school. A similar ambition could also be sensed in the title of an exhibition held in Paris in December 1926 under the aegis of the grouping Paris-Amérique Latine, on the initiative of Paco Durrio: Hommage au génial artiste francopéruvien Gauguin.49 On this occasion, the association requested that a commemorative plaque be placed on the house where Gauguin was born, 56, rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette.50

42 Vollard Archives, cit. (note 23), letter from Vollard to Mr Burroughs, 22 January 1918: ‘Les tableaux de Gauguin sont devenus très rares et je crois que celui là est un des plus beaux.’.
43 Paul Gauguin, Exposition d'oeuvres inconnues, shown at the Barbazanges gallery from 10-30 October 1919. The exhibition presented 29 works by Gauguin and his friends.
44 See Charles Chassé, Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven, documents inédits, Paris 1921. The author had collected Marie Henry's memories with the help of her companion, Henri Motheré.
46 See Maurice Denis, ‘Au temps du symbolisme,’ Beaux-Arts (23 February 1934). Works by Gauguin were later presented in the exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of symbolism at the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1938.
47 The association was created to promote national works in Scandinavia through publications, exhibitions and, above all, purchases. As Paul Vitry wrote: ‘C'est un privilège singulièrement flatteur pour nous, qui prouve entre beaucoup d'autres témoignages, la sympathie dont la France est entourée en ces pays du Nord, mais qui aboutit à l'exode glorieux certes, et fructueux, parfois aussi un peu regrettable de nos productions modernes les plus marquantes'; see “L'Art français” en Scandinavie,” Beaux-Arts (15 May 1926), p. 155.
48 This was the Autoportrait à l'ami Daniel from the Monfreid collection.
49 The exhibition, presented at the Cercle de l'Amérique latine, 14 boulevard de la Madeleine, comprised 134 works by Gauguin: paintings, sculptures, graphic works and engravings. The preface to the catalogue was written by Georges-Daniel de Monfreid.
50 Paris, Archives nationales de France, letter from Francisco Durrio to the Minister for Public Instruction and the Fine Arts, 6 December 1926, F21 4311
This plaque, which was unveiled in December 1933, constituted the first official gesture towards an artist who had been born in Paris, but who was still far from being firmly established in his own country.

The activities of galleries and associations finally prompted French officials to emerge from their reserve. Several leading figures from the museum world were in the organising committee of the Paris-Amérique Latine exhibition, whose patron the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, Edouard Herriot, agreed to become. The time for official recognition seemed finally to have arrived, after almost 20 years of tenacious rancour on the part of the French state with regard to a man who had chosen to turn his back on the society of his time.
Gauguin in French museums

The first Gauguin painting entered a French museum in 1910. It was not a purchase but rather a bequest by the ceramicist Ernest Chaplet, who had died the previous year. The picture, a still life from Gauguin's impressionist period, Still life with oranges, was accepted by the consultative committee for museums on 7 April 1910. With this modest work, Gauguin entered the Musée du Luxembourg by the back door, and his canvas remained hanging there until 1929. Charles Morice commented ironically on the contrived and ridiculous resistance on the part of the painter's enemies: ‘Those whom he makes uncomfortable, sensing him grow, continue to resist him desperately, at least in his homeland. Soon we shall have to travel to Moscow to see Gauguin's Tahitian work.’ ‘Let us note,’ added the columnist in L'Art Décoratif in 1912, ‘that there is no Manet, no Toulouse-Lautrec (oh yes, one study!), no Gauguin (one minuscule still life, a bequest what's more), no Cézanne, no Van Gogh, and only one Renoir, in the Musée du Luxembourg, outside the Caillebotte collection.’ The creative artists who had made France's name abroad

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fig. 5
Paul Gauguin, Human miseries, 1888, Copenhagen, Ordrupgaard Samling

fig 6
Paul Gauguin, Women of Tahiti, 1891, Paris, Musée d'Orsay, bequest of the Vicomte de Cholet

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51 As early as 1901, Charles Morice had had the idea of having a group of art-lovers buy Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? and offering it to the Musée du Luxembourg. The plan came to nothing, however. See Lettres de Paul Gauguin, cit. (note 17), no. LXXIV, p. 320.


53 That year it was transferred to the Louvre and exhibited at the Jeu de Paume until 1955; the picture was then placed in storage at the Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie in Rennes.


55 Fernand Roches, ‘Le Salon d'Automne de 1912,’ L'Art Décoratif (November 1912), p. 289: ‘Constatons qu'il n'y a ni Manet, ni Toulouse-Lautrec (si, une étude!), ni Gauguin (une
were strangely absent from the Musée du Luxembourg, which, as Apollinaire remarked in 1914, ‘contains nothing of the essence of living art over recent years.’

On a few occasions, the state let slip a picture from the Arles period, for example Human miseries (fig. 5), which was offered as a gift in the spring of 1910 by Amédée Schuffenecker, or Study of a nude (Suzanne reclining), a canvas from the impressionist period that had been praised by Huysmans and was offered as a gift.
reserving usufruct by the painter Philipsen.  

From the 1920s on, thanks to bequests and gifts but also to the first purchases, French museums began incorporating works by Gauguin into their collections in a significant way. Among the most important, we may point to the 1923 bequest by the vicomte Guy de Cholet of *Women of Tahiti* (fig. 6), and the gift in his memory made by his sister, the comtesse Vitali, *Les Alyscamps*, which was hung in the Musée des Arts décoratifs in the Pavilion de Marsan at the Louvre until 1938.

In April 1913, the Lyon museum became the first French institution to actually acquire a Gauguin canvas, *Nave nave Mahana (Jours délicieux)*, followed ten years later by Grenoble, which bought the *Portrait of Madeleine Bernard* from Bernheim-Jeune.

Parisian museums did not begin purchasing until 1927, when Daniel de Monfreid sold *The white horse* (fig. 7) for the low price of 180,000 francs to the Louvre. The picture was finally accepted by the acquisition committee after a turbulent session in which Paul Jamot, assistant curator of paintings and drawings at the Louvre, and Robert Rey, assistant curator at the Luxembourg, were the only members to champion the work. Sensing the imminent danger of a refusal, Rey requested, against all normal procedures, a vote by name, thus ensuring that there would be no new Caillebotte affair. The most spectacular donation, in addition to Daniel de Monfreid's bequest of the *Noa noa* manuscript to the Louvre in 1925, was that of *La belle Angèle*, given by Vollard, who had bought it at the Degas sale. In February 1927, on the occasion of a speech by Robert Rey, the picture was loaned for one hour.

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58 The museums’ consultative committee indicated the donation of a Gauguin picture by Philipsen in its report of December 1909, but no administrative file exists in the Archives des musées de France.


50 The canvas was purchased at the Henri Rouart sale.

51 In June 1923, Monfreid had asked 200,000 francs for this picture, which Barbazanges and his associates had wanted to buy. On 23 December 1924, Dru was also disposed to acquire the work, but he finally abandoned the idea in March 1925. See the unpublished diaries of Georges-Daniel de Monfreid, cit. (note 3).


53 The manuscript entered the national collections in 1927, where it was exhibited in a special glass case at the Musée du Luxembourg. See Robert Rey, ‘Le manuscrit de “Noa noa” et *Le cheval blanc* de Gauguin aux Musées Nationaux,’ *Beaux-Arts* (15 February 1927), p. 55.
to the pupils of the Ecole du Louvre. As preparations were being made to bring the canvas back to its owner, Vollard announced that ‘since La belle Angèle had come to the Louvre, he was proposing that it should stay there.” 64 The
gift was all the more appreciated since, as Rey later remarked, ‘given Gauguin's current popularity, La belle Angèle represents an enormous sum of money.’ In this way, two masterpieces, one from the Breton period, the other from Tahiti, almost simultaneously entered the national collections, where Gauguin was as yet represented by only three canvases, two in the Musée du Luxembourg and one in the Musée des Arts décoratifs. These works, along with Noa noa, constituted the most sensational pieces in an exhibition of recent acquisitions held by the Louvre in March 1927 and praised in several enthusiastic articles.

The national collections continued to be enriched during the Second World War, thanks to the Paul Jamot bequest, which in 1939 brought two pictures into the Louvre, The harvest in Brittany and The Seine at the pont d'Iéna, as well as a still life, Pas manger li, to the Musée des Beaux-Arts at Reims. In 1944, the Louvre bought Et l'or de leurs corps, which had been in the collection of Madame Olivier Sainsère.

While Gauguin's painting was beginning to gain acceptance, a new interest in other forms of expression by this all-round artist was developing, although it took several more years before sculptures and objets d'art came into the national museums. Until 1952, all entered exclusively in the form of donations. A cane, a sculpted dagger and some ceramics joined the Louvre collections in 1938, donated by Jean Schmit, while the first sculptures, Saint Orang and Tahitian mask, became part of the national collections in late 1943, early 1944, thanks to a bequest by Lucien Vollard.

fig. 8

65 Paris, Archives des musées de France, letter from Robert Rey to Marquet de Vasselot, 8 February 1927: ‘à la cote actuelle de Gauguin, La belle Angèle représente une somme énorme.’
66 Manaō tupapaū, for example, had featured in the exhibition Cinquante ans de peinture française held in 1925 at the Pavillon de Marsan (Palais du Louvre). See note 36.
67 1938, Jean Schmit donation to the Louvre: anthropomorphic pot, base and cover for a fountain, dagger, sculpted cane, an album that had belonged to Gauguin, numerous drawings, the original manuscript of Le Sourire, and a tobacco pot; 1938, donation by David Weill to the Louvre: terracotta cylinder with highlighted bas-reliefs; 28 December 1943 and 6 January 1944, Lucien Vollard donation to the Musée de France d'outremer: four sandstone vases decorated with bas-reliefs, two carved wooden cups, a cane, a sculpted frame, Saint Orang and Tahitian mask.
Paul Gauguin, *Stele*, 1892 (?), present location unknown
Wood, pottery, engravings

In November 1910, Eugène Blot held the first exhibition of Gauguin's sculptures, woodcarvings and pottery from Tahiti. These three-dimensional objects, with their rough, incongruous forms and lack of classical references and charm, excited the public's curiosity. Gauguin had fashioned unexpected images, filled with mysticism (fig. 8). His art, which up to then had been judged as quintessentially decorative, was henceforth endowed with a religious and spiritual dimension by the columnists' pens. By refusing to copy nature, Gauguin had reintroduced the sacred into art and his works were not simple barbaric curiosities. This conception of Gauguin as a mystical artist was strengthened by the discovery in 1923 in Tahiti of the manuscript 'L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme,' ‘forgotten’ by the government since the artist's death.

In January and February 1928 the Musée du Luxembourg organised an exhibition on the theme ‘Gauguin sculpteur et graveur.’ Conceived in two parts, it comprised 19 wooden sculptures; a number of decorated objects such as calabashes, canes and daggers; seven wooden engraving plates transformed into bas-reliefs; and nine pieces of pottery, as well as a collection of engravings assembled by Marcel Guérin, the author of an excellent catalogue of Gauguin's engravings that had been published in 1927. The sculptures provoked astonished comments. Was this plagiarism, an art copied from the Maoris, or aeroliths that had fallen from another planet wondered Robert Rey. These rough effigies, hewn directly with a penknife from precious wood or a simple piece of beam, revealed a whole philosophy in sculpture. But the mixture of the divine and the trivial, the symbolic and the utilitarian disconcerted the visitors, and many saw in these works nothing but an imitation of Maori fetishes, executed with the artifice of a European.

The engravings, however, enjoyed a complete success. ‘The plates from the second Tahiti series are almost unknown,’ stated the exhibition catalogue. Very rare proofs, printed without a press by Gauguin himself, were on view. Three years later, a new exhibition of prints was held from 26 May to 14 June 1931 at La Pléiade, a gallery dedicated to the graphic arts. Gauguin was now regarded as the greatest wood engraver of the last 100 years.

This interest in Gauguin's sculpture and engravings corresponded to a re-reading of his work and his contribution to contemporary art. By the end of the 1920s, the

68 Apollinaire classed Gauguin's painting as ‘peinture liturgique ou les couleurs ont un sens symbolique qui double leur attrait décoratif’ and the painter himself ‘du plus religieux des peintres modernes’; see ‘Exposition Gauguin,’ La Vie Artistique (11 May 1910); reprinted in Chroniques d'art, cit. (note 56), p. 139. He expressed the same opinion in his chronicle of 25 November 1910 in La Vie Artistique, p. 167: ‘Cet artiste au sentiment religieux imprécis mais profond.’

69 In 1925, Charles Masson had modified the presentation of the collections at the museum, placing at the centre the Caillebotte collection, which until then had been confined to a small room. The space gained made it possible to organise retrospective exhibitions ‘soit d'artistes remarquables mais insuffisamment célèbres, tel Guigou, soit d'artistes célèbres mais insuffisamment observés, tel Toulouse-Lautrec’; see Robert Rey, ‘Les bois sculptés de Paul Gauguin,’ La Renaissance de l'Art Français (February 1928), p. 54.


71 Rey, op. cit. (note 69), pp. 57-64.
artist was regarded as the precursor of a return to exoticism, expressed in this period by the taste for African and pre-Columbian art, Russian ballet and surrealism. With time, Gauguin's ‘barbaric’ art had become classical, and the artist was henceforth regarded as a kind of ‘exotic Poussin, a Poussin who in ancient times would have preferred the savage.’

Parallel to this re-evaluation of his work, on the eve of the Second World War there was a resurgence of curiosity in Gauguin's romantic and exotic life, giving rise to a number of publications, with titles such as Gauguin peintre maudit, La vie ardente de Paul Gauguin, Paul Gauguin, mon père, and Gauguin, le solitaire du Pacifique. People became attached to his objects as though they were relics. Along with Van Gogh, Gauguin is certainly the most popular artist for a century. In this glory, his legendary life

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75 In November 1936 an exhibition held at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts under the auspices of the Société des amis de Paul Gauguin -- founded in 1935 in Paris to ‘céler le mouvement qui doit placer au plus haut son œuvre et sa gloire’ and presided over by Paul Jamot -- presented masterworks, unknown works, documents and objects that had belonged to the artist simultaneously.
counts as much as his magnificent work. [...] Is it not the strange paradox of our society which places its great men in such impossible living conditions that it imposes special destinies, the better to glorify them later?’ asked Raymond Cogniat. Without any link with this popular infatuation, Gauguin remained an isolated and misunderstood artist, while the masses remained captivated by his legend: ‘After the art dealers, society has set the stamp on the genius of Van Gogh and Gauguin. In its museums, it offers up their works for the crowds to admire. [They] will not seek in the pictures of Van Gogh and Gauguin the secret of what they are told today are artistic successes, but traces of the sufferings and struggles of two pariahs [...].' The legend that had overtaken the two painters continued to enthral but it did not do justice to their art, which remained the province of a small European elite.

One hundred years after his birth, Gauguin could still provoke plenty of criticism and this was probably why his centenary failed to be marked in 1948.

1948: a missed appointment

‘A centenarian too long forgotten,’ ran the headline in the daily L'Aube in July 1948. While the Carlsberg Glyptothek in Copenhagen succeeded in organising a large-scale retrospective comprising 120 works, France was distinguished by its silence. In place of Gauguin, that year the museums chose to celebrate the centenary of the Revolution of 1848 and the bicentenary of the painter Jacques-Louis David. ‘A rather sinister piece of news has in fact been making the rounds,’ Charles Estienne recounted: ‘there will be no great retrospective, equal in importance to Van Gogh's last year, and which would have shown everyone the astonishing contemporary relevance of Gauguin's message. [...] No matter: whatever the difficulties may be, everything must be attempted to spare France (official or not) such shame.’ Unfortunately the message was not heeded. Faced with this silence, some people wondered whether it could be that Gauguin still frightened people: ‘Has his revolt against a society which he did not believe tailored to human needs retained so much destructive force?’ The artist was still perceived as subversive and his personal protest had a tendency to make

76 See the special Arts number on the Gauguin centenary, published 8 July 1949: ‘Gauguin est certainement avec Van Gogh, l'artiste le plus populaire depuis un siècle. Dans cette gloire, sa vie légendaire compte autant que son oeuvre magnifique; [...] N'est-ce pas l'étrange paradoxe de notre société qui met ses grands hommes dans des conditions de vie si impossible, qu'elle leur impose des destins hors série pour les mieux glorifier ensuite?’

77 Maurice Nadeau, ‘La vie d'artiste,’ Le Combat, 18 April 1947: ‘Après les marchands de tableaux, la société a estampillé la génie de Van Gogh et de Gauguin. Dans ses musées, elle propose leurs oeuvres à l'admiration des foules. [Ils] ne vont pas chercher dans les tableaux de Van Gogh et de Gauguin le secret de ce qu'on leur dit être aujourd'hui, des réussites picturales, mais la trace des souffrances et des luttes de deux parias [...]’

78 Charles Estienne, ‘Centenaire de Gauguin,’ Le Combat, 9 June 1948: ‘Une nouvelle assez sinistre a couru en effet: il n'y aura pas de grande rétrospective, égale en importance à celle de Van Gogh l'an dernier, et qui eut montré à tous l'étonnante actualité du message de Gauguin. [...] N'importe: quelles que soient les difficultés matérielles, tout doit être tenté pour épargner à la France (officielle ou non) une telle honte.’

79 Pierre-André Baude, ‘Un centenaire trop oublié,’ L'Aube, 7 July 1948: ‘Sa révolte contre une société qu'il ne croyait pas faite à la mesure humaine a-t-elle gardé tant de force destructive?’
people forget his body of work. Only a few publications marked this anniversary and the book by Maurice Malingue, *Gauguin, le peintre et son oeuvre*, with its 250 illustrations, had to serve as the centenary publication.\(^8^0\)

The only display at a national level was an opera entitled *Gauguin*,\(^8^1\) a lyric drama in six *tableaux* with music by Federico Elizalde,\(^8^2\) whose world premiere was given on radio on 25 June 1948.\(^8^3\) The sole recording of this work, preserved today in the archives of the Institut national de l'audiovisuel, is unfortunately inaudible. For his native country, Gauguin was still hardly more than a hero from an opera or a novel. The essential facts of his life as an adventurer were more part of the public domain than his art, which was nonetheless much admired by a minority of artists and art-lovers.

One other modest event occurred to celebrate this anniversary. This was a film evening given by L'Association des Amis de l'Art in the painter's memory, showing extracts

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80 The book had first been published in 1943 and was reissued in 1948. Henri Perruchot's *Gauguin, sa vie ardente et misérable* was an attempt to reconstitute the artist's life, concentrating on its most dramatic aspects. During the summer of 1948, a facsimile edition of *Noa noa* came out in Stockholm and as one of Gauguin's biographers, Raymond Cogniat, remarked in *Les Arts* on 2 July 1948: 'Il nous reste à regretter, pour notre satisfaction de Français, que cela ne l'aït pas été par un éditeur de chez nous. Encore une fois nous n'avons pas su rendre à un de nos génies l'hommage qui lui était du et nous pouvons continuer à nous demander si nous méritons les gloires qui font notre prestige.'

81 The opera's subtitle was *Il n'y a plus d'homme*, a phrase spoken by Gauguin's neighbour and friend, Tioka, at the moment of the artist's death.

82 Elizalde was a composer of Spanish origin, born at Manila in 1907, and a friend and disciple of Manuel de Falla, who had begun to write a score on Gauguin. Elizalde spent part of his youth in Oceania and wrote his opera in Brittany, not far from Pont-Aven. The libretto was written by the Breton poet and art dealer Théophile Briand.

83 The opera, composed in 1943, was broadcast on the initiative of Gaston Poulet, the conductor.
from *Tabou*, directed by Murnau in 1930 (released 1931), and an anecdotal short film shot in Oceania by Renée Hamon, *Gauguin, le solitaire du Pacifique*, an ineffectual documentary 'which claimed to lead us in the footsteps of Gauguin and which did not succeed at any time in reconstructing for us the climate which was to give birth to Gauguin's most accomplished works.'

It was only a year after this ‘anniversaire manqué,’ during the summer of 1949, that France finally paid homage to the artist in the form of a major exhibition, organised by the Direction des musées de France at the Orangerie in the Tuileries, under the direction of Charles Sterling and Jean Leymarie.

### The centenary retrospective, 1949

Since the historical retrospective at the Salon d'Automne in 1906, three monographic exhibitions had taken place in Paris: one at the Galerie Dru in 1923, 20 years after the artist's death, another in 1931, at the Galerie du Portique, with around 40 canvases and ten sculptures; and a third, rather incomplete, at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts at the end of 1936. Minor exhibitions were also organised at the instigation of galleries and associations, with the exception of the exhibition of sculptures and engravings that was held at the Musée du Luxembourg in 1928.

It was as much for reasons of arbitration as lack of credit that the exhibition marking the centenary of Gauguin's birth saw the light of day only a year after the actual event. The guiding principle of the show at the Orangerie was to celebrate the centenary of the impressionists. In a letter to the director of the French museums, published in the foreword to the catalogue, René Huyghe, chief curator in the department of paintings and drawings at the Louvre, set out the difficulties encountered in the organisation of such an exhibition, difficulties which still remain relevant today: ‘Assembling a Gauguin collection which is at once significant and extensive is not easy in our time, when it is becoming more and more tricky to make up the minds of overworked lenders or to push aside accrued obstacles.’ Works of art had already left France for English-speaking countries, Scandinavia and Russia. Gauguin had prophesied this situation when he wrote in 1897 to Daniel de Monfreid: ‘And a time will come when people will think I am a myth or rather an invention of

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84 J.Z., ‘Du centenaire de Paul Gauguin aux espoirs du cinéma éducateur,’ Ecran (29 June 1948): ‘qui prétendait nous mener sur les traces de Gauguin et ne parvint à aucun moment à nous restituer le climat qui devait donner naissance aux oeuvres les plus achevées de Gauguin.’

85 The exhibition brought together around 100 works: 61 paintings, 18 pastels, watercolours, drawings and monotypes, four ceramics, 12 engravings, and several manuscripts, letters and documents (*Nou noa, Ancien culte mahorie, Le Sourire*). The catalogue was written by Jean Leymarie, with a study by René Huyghe.

86 Comprising 68 numbers, it lasted from 16 April-11 May.

87 The author of the exhibition catalogue was Raymond Cogniat who, at the same date, published a biography of Gauguin (see note 74), with a preface by Henri Focillon.

88 Let us note, in particular, the Gauguin exhibition at the Nunès et Fiquet gallery, 7-31 March 1917, comprising 39 numbers.
the press; people will say where are these pictures? The fact is that there are not 50 of them in collections in France."\(^9\)

The exhibition in 1949 revealed a paradoxical situation: that of an artist at once isolated and glorified. It also provided an opportunity to draw up a mixed balance sheet on the Gauguin situation in France.

**A singular artist**

At the time of the 1949 retrospective, Gauguin, who had previously been thought to represent a certain idea of classicism, was perceived as the incarnation of the romantic artist,\(^9\) a creative genius, totally involved in what he did and who had created his own world. He had remained misunderstood because of the subjectivity of his art and ‘despite the success with which he is surrounded,’

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89 *Lettres de Paul Gauguin*, cit. (note 17), no. XXXVI, p 189: ‘Et il arrivera un moment où on croira que je suis un mythe ou plutôt une invention de la presse; on dira où sont ces tableaux? Le fait est qu’il n’y en a pas 50 en collection en France.’

90 Maurice Denis had pointed to Gauguin’s classicism, his need for balance and order, and his assessment was repeated by Raymond Cogniat in ‘Les prétextes du génie,’ *Les Arts plastiques* [Brussels] (July-August 1949), pp. 309-12, and by Robert Rey in his various publications.
analysed Raymond Cogniat, ‘he remains, even in the present, an isolated character, as
does his work; despite the thousands of visitors, his body of work is also isolated,
without any deep attachments with the other aspects of contemporary art, for solitude
is one of the ransoms of genius.’

Bernard Dorival wondered about the role of the 1949 exhibition: ‘Will it contribute
towards returning to his place, a primary place which he shares with Cézanne and
Van Gogh, a master whom critics - not always disinterested ones (recognition is
burdensome to the Perrichons of painting) - had somewhat unjustly diminished, at
least in the minds of the painters?’

If it was still too soon, in 1949, to measure the full extent of Gauguin's contribution
to the aesthetic revolutions of the 20th century, still several journalists recalled his
role as an initiator on this occasion. He had dared to explore all the freedoms which
led to the most advanced research, in particular in the area of the liberation of colour;
‘he legitimised the bold innovations of fauvism and of abstract art.’ ‘He took - and
with what decisiveness - the first steps into the brand-new world of what people have
since called pure painting,’ added the journalist Paul Fierens. ‘And if he did not have
a clear vision of it, he had a revelation, an intuition for it.’ For Dorival, he was ‘the
alpha of contemporary painting. And one might say as much for sculpture and
ceramics, in which he produced astonishing works of art [...]’. The impact of his
works, which were much admired by artists at the beginning of the century - in
particular by Matisse, whose Joie de vivre has been compared with the Tahiti canvases
- diminished with the cubists from 1910 onwards, and as 1914 approached their
influence touched only a handful of creative artists. Their literary side, their symbolic
weightiness, attested by certain sententious inscriptions and a slightly facile exoticism,
did the artist no favours, just as his adventures had discredited him in the public's
eyes.

A committed artist

91 Cogniat, op. cit. (note 90), p. 312: ‘[...] malgré le succès dont on l'entoure il reste, même
dans son présent un personnage isolé, comme son oeuvre est encore dans notre présent, et
malgré des milliers de visiteurs, une oeuvre elle aussi isolée, sans attache profonde avec les
autres aspects de l'art contemporain, car la solitude est une des rançons du génie.’
92 Bernard Dorival, ‘Grandeur de Gauguin,’ Nouvelles Littéraires, 21 July 1949:
‘contribuera-t-elle à remettre à sa place, une première place qu'il partage avec Cézanne et
Van Gogh, un maître que des critiques - pas toujours désintéressées: la reconnaissance est
lourde aux Perrichons de la peinture - avaient quelque peu injustement abaissé, dans l'esprit
des peintres du moins?’
93 See, for example, P Fierens, ‘Chronique artistique, Gauguin,’ Les Nouvelles de l'Hérault, 7
March 1931: ‘Tout le fauvisme est en puissance dans cet art, voilà de prime abord ce qui
sauve aux yeux.’
94 Leymarie, op. cit. (note 9), p. 113: ‘Il avait légitimé les audaces du fauvisme et de la non
figuration.’
95 Fierens, op. cit. (note 93): ‘Il a fait -- avec quelle décision -- les premiers pas dans le pays
tout neuf de ce qu'on a appelé depuis la peinture pure. Et s'il n'en eut pas la vision claire, il
en eut la révélation, l'intuition.’
96 Dorival, op. cit. (note 92): ‘[Il était] l'alpha de la peinture contemporaine. Et l'on pourrait en
dire autant pour la sculpture et la céramique ou il a donné d'étonnants chefs-d'oeuvre [...]’
The ‘film’ of Gauguin's life and the bad literature he had inspired needed to be forgotten in order for the artist to be appreciated as the first classicist of modern painting. The same was true of the fact that this man, a few of whose works France boasted of possessing, had ended up ostracised by society.\textsuperscript{97}

If the fascination which Gauguin's complex genius exercised corresponded in the 1940s to a general resurgence of interest in the strangest figures in the history of art,\textsuperscript{98} people were scarcely beginning to decipher the significance of his message and become interested in his commitment. ‘Beyond Gauguin,’ wrote René Huyghe in the preface to the 1949 exhibition catalogue, ‘stands the problem of the current evolution of our civilisation.’ The artist had perceived the decline of the west and had raged against the dictatorship of Greco-Roman culture. Following in his footsteps, other artists wanted to go beyond the traditional frameworks of thought by taking an interest in the primitive arts, children's drawings, naive art, the art of the insane. Equally, the interest in the unconscious had opened up new perspectives.

By giving shape to his interior world, Gauguin had manifested the anguish of the modern soul and the question of its destiny, bringing us to the edge of our own enigma without weighing it down with expectations. ‘He was able to place this enigma before us,’ wrote René Huyghe again, ‘when he asked in vain for death through an attempted suicide, in a canvas in which three cries ring out; cries that also went unanswered’ (fig. 9)

But at the moment of official recognition a sad assessment had to be made. ‘Of all the great masters of

\textsuperscript{97} See Charles Estienne, ‘Gauguin et nous,’ \textit{Le Combat}, 13 July 1949: ‘Gauguin comme Van Gogh, est un cas limite, soit; mais ce cas nous rappelle opportunément que l'engagement de l'artiste ne consiste pas à servir et illustrer les destins tactiques et immédiats de la société, mais à tourner au besoin le dos à celle ci, pour s'engager en soi-même, et jusqu'à en crever [...]. Et au terme, l'homme seul retrouve ses semblables les hommes, comme c'est le cas aujourd'hui pour Gauguin.’

\textsuperscript{98} Leymarie, op. cit. (note 9), p. 113: ‘à une recrudescence générale d'intérêt pour les figures les plus étranges de l'histoire de l'art [...].’
the late 19th century Gauguin is in fact, with Seurat, the one whose masterpieces France was least able to hold on to, and one of the last to receive the official honours of the Orangerie.\footnote{Ibid., p. 109: ‘De tous les grands maîtres de la fin du XIXème siècle Gauguin est en effet, avec Seurat, celui dont la France a su le moins, retenir les chefs-d'œuvre et l'un des derniers à recevoir les honneurs officiels de l'Orangerie.’}

All the same, at the time of the exhibition Jean Leymarie succeeded in bringing back to France, at least temporarily, a few works of art from foreign collections: *The vision of the sermon* (fig. 2), which since 1925 had belonged to the National Gallery in Edinburgh; *The yellow Christ*, ‘a work which contains in force all of fauvism,’\footnote{Ibid: ‘une œuvre qui contient en puissance tout le fauvisme.’} kept at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo; *Calvary* from the Musées royaux des Beaux-arts de Belgique in Brussels; *Ia orana Maria*, ‘gateway to the Tahitian oeuvre,’\footnote{According to Arsène Alexandre, quoted by Leymarie in ibid., p. 109: ‘portique de l'œuvre tahitienne.’} which was then in a private collection in New York; *Ta mate te* from the Kunstmuseum in Basel; *Nevermore* from the Courtauld Institute in London; and, last but not least, *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* (fig. 9), acquired in 1936 by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.
fig. 1
Paul Gauguin, *Presumed portrait of Marie Lagadu*, 1888, present location unknown
Authentic Gauguins: avant-garde originality and the catalogue raisonné

Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński

The publication of the first part of a new catalogue raisonné of Gauguin's paintings by the Wildenstein Institute in autumn 2001 makes this a particularly appropriate moment to reconsider problems of authenticity in his work.1 Authenticity would seem, in the first instance, to be a preoccupation of the collector and the art market rather than the artist, because it guarantees the monetary value of the work of art in a modernist culture where originality and individual creativity, rather than tradition and skill, have been enshrined as ideals. In the west, originality and creativity in art have been celebrated since the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance; indeed, their valuation has reached obsessional proportions in the prices paid for such works as Vincent van Gogh's Sunflowers.2 Establishing a paradigm of western art history, Giorgio Vasari wrote the history of Renaissance art in terms of artists' lives and competing art centres, culminating with Michelangelo, whom he and the Florentines celebrated as a genius. Competition among individual artists was understood as a motivator from the beginning and has been the renewed focus of recent Renaissance art history. In the 19th century, state museums laid out the progressive narrative of the history of art in their displays, celebrating national schools and their continuation in contemporary art. The dealer-critic system used the artist's life as a vehicle for exhibiting and selling the art of living artists.3 In practice, these developments meant that western artists themselves have been preoccupied with originality and their place in the unfolding of art history.

Art-historical scholarship has served the interests of collectors, museums and markets since the early days of the discipline, developing connoisseurship skills and procedures to authenticate works and define oeuvres. In the 19th century, art history modelled itself on the newly objective historical sciences, which were, in turn, emulating the natural sciences. Art historians turned their accounts of artists' lives into documented biographies and perfected the catalogue raisonné to define their work.4 The totalising catalogue was developed as the tool for establishing and policing the authentic oeuvre of an artist in the mutually supportive context of the professionalization of the fields of art history and curatorship and the expanding art market. The artist's oeuvre thus defined is more than the sum of its parts. Despite the

2 London (Christie's), 30 March 1987, Van Gogh's Sunflowers. The property of Mrs. Helen Chester Beatty. The price paid was £24,750,000.
apparently objective categories and the dry enumeration of the works with their provenance, exhibition history and publication record, such a project is informed by a vital concept of the whole shaped by purpose and development. The French word ‘oeuvre’ carries these connotations. They may also be detected in the English terms ‘work’ or ‘body of work’ and the sometimes-applied Latin ‘corpus.’ The artist's oeuvre is the building block of modern, professional art history and its developmental narratives. Given all this, it is easy to see why it is so difficult to dislodge or add works once the life and work have achieved mythic status.  

financial stakes involved these days in the case of a Van Gogh or a Gauguin exacerbate the situation.

For the historian, however, inauthenticity, misattribution and falsification are potentially of great interest: they can teach us much about the artist's work, its influence and reception. In this respect, it would be very helpful if we returned to the practice of the earliest catalogue raisonnés and included rejected works in an appendix.6 The task of the oeuvre catalogue is to constitute through the body of works the individual creative artist. From that point of view, any inclusion in the catalogue of significant misattributions and any omission of important works reflect incompletely assimilated, contradictory conceptions of the oeuvre. This can, though, have the positive effect of shattering the monolith of the catalogue raisonné, with its exclusive focus on the artist-subject, once again opening the finality of the oeuvre to the debates of history. Misattributions and omissions are discontinuities in the Foucauldian sense, which can be used to disturb the narrative of the individual artist's development of a personal style traditionally constructed by art history, in favour of an examination of style and technique, as well as subject matter, as shared structures of a particular visual culture, a discursive formation in an archaeology of knowledge.7

It is a pity that the study of Gauguin's work has been so badly served by the Wildenstein Institute's production of a catalogue raisonné. The first, published in 1964, was so flawed that the projected second volume of works on paper was never published. Merete Bodelsen, in particular, pointed out a host of misdated works, forgeries and omissions, noting that too many decisions had been made based on photographic archives rather than fresh research and examination of the originals.8 Thirty-seven years later, Wildenstein have begun to publish a new catalogue raisonné after a protracted attempt to rewrite the old one, most importantly with the assistance of Douglas Cooper in the 1970s and 80s. The first part in two volumes, taking the work to 1888, appeared in October 2001, and is, in general, reliable. Accepting the criticism of Bodelsen and others, the catalogue corrects dating, now starting the artist's painting career accurately in 1873. It adds many paintings to the oeuvre, enlarging it by as much as 35% before 1879, when Gauguin joined the impressionist group, and by about 18% between 1879 and 1885, before his stays in Brittany. Problematic pieces have been eliminated, notably the paintings of Charles Laval, Gauguin's companion in Central America, which had swelled the Martinique corpus well beyond the ‘dozen’ reported by the artist himself. However, one misattribution, with a forged signature, persists to distort the artist's oeuvre and the art history of the avant-garde in a revealing way (see below). Despite substantial improvements, the Wildenstein Institute's approach remains archive and provenance oriented: all the Gauguin expertise is in-house, with the recent achievements of academic and technical art history largely unassimilated.9

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6 The dictionary of art, cit. (note 4), pp. 78-79, for the inclusion of doubtful works in early catalogues of the Van Eycks, Raphael and Rubens.
7 Michel Foucault, The archaeology of knowledge, trans. A. Sheridan, New York 1972, and the discussion of discontinuity and Foucault's related concepts in Gary Gutting, Michel Foucault's archaeology of scientific reason, Cambridge 1989, pp. 244-49. I thank Thea Burns for bringing Gutting to my attention.
9 See my review, op. cit. (note 1).
Today we have a more fully documented idea of Gauguin's career and interaction with contemporary artists and critics than was available in the 1960s. The precise moment of his engagement with Camille Pissarro and the impressionists can be fixed to the spring of 1879; his exchanges with Emile Bernard and Vincent van Gogh have been extensively researched in recent publications. The Wildenstein team uses these turning points, although not necessarily the scholarship, to structure its publication, which is, in effect, a monograph on the artist as well as a catalogue raisonné. This is an interesting development, reflecting the search for a wider audience for such publications. Significant enlargement of the early oeuvre invites us to rethink Gauguin as an ambitious artist before he
joined the impressionists in 1879. He now emerges convincingly as a full-time artist before Brittany, in 1884-85 in Rouen, where he had moved with his family once he had lost his office job, in search of cheaper living and patronage. This is relatively unexplored territory and marks a growing interest in the early Gauguin, as the other phases of his production have been fully analysed and collected. Even among his well known Breton paintings, there are many revelations in the Wildenstein catalogue: for 1888, for example, there are new inclusions such as Presumed portrait of Marie Lagadu (W 290; fig. 1) and Breton boy (W 295), and works newly available in good colour reproductions such as Study of a woman of Pont-Aven, perhaps Marie Louarn (W 293, formerly W 244). Gauguin's Breton pictures can now be seen in the context of the tremendous popularity of this subject at the Paris Salons of the 1880s and the numerous artists' colonies established in Brittany. Scholars have worked hard to distinguish the works of the different artists of the Pont-Aven group, whose other centre became Le Pouldu, as Gauguin sought a less popular site more amenable to his primitivising aims. The challenge for the next volumes of the Wildenstein catalogue will be to identify the authentic Gauguins among the school pieces. Technical information has been used successfully to distinguish their works, even though one would expect contemporary artists with a shared aesthetic to be using very similar materials. X-radiographs and cross-sections can help document an artist's characteristic way of working by revealing brushwork and build-up of paint layers.  

Paul Gauguin's art and writings suggest that for him originality and authenticity were first and foremost a result of the conception of the work of art, and only secondarily of its style and technique. Even after he had finished his years of apprenticeship learning from others as an amateur painter, he continued to appropriate techniques - from the impressionists, especially Cézanne, and most notoriously, Emile Bernard's cloisonism. In 1889-90, he encouraged the artists staying with him at Le Pouldu to paint still lifes and plein-air landscapes by inviting them to "make a Cézanne."  

Earlier, in a letter of 1881, he had jokingly urged Camille Pissarro to drug Cézanne and find out his secret 'formula.' Cézanne was not amused and suspected the upstart of wishing to steal 'his sensation.' Gauguin's use of readymade artistic techniques as formulas could turn to parody, as in the derisive Still life: 'Ripipoint' (W 376) painted in a neo-impressionist technique for display at the Glouannec Inn in Pont-Aven.  

11 Charles Chassé, Gauguin et le group de Pont-Aven, Paris 1921, p. 72, paraphrasing Paul Sérusier's recollections.
12 Paul Gauguin, Correspondance de Paul Gauguin, 1873-1888, ed. Victor Merlhès, Paris 1984, pp. 349-50, note 55 (letter no. 16 to Camille Pissarro, July 1881). This multi-volume publication has been interrupted and subsequent volumes have appeared with various publishers.
13 W 376, in Wildenstein and Cogniat, op. cit. (note 8), is inscribed 'à Marie souvenir' and came from the collection of Marie-Jeanne Glouannec (Gloannec in French). In Post-impressionism: from Van Gogh to Gauguin (New York 1962, p. 298), John Rewald, without citing any source, stated that Gauguin had 'hung in the dining room [of the Gloannec Inn] a pointillist landscape painted at Pont-Aven in 1886,' which he illustrates on p. 144. The work has not been included in the Wildenstein oeuvre catalogue.
of stealing their inventions. For his part, Gauguin accused impressionism of having become a new orthodoxy and claimed that in his work he had sought ‘to dare anything to liberate the new generation.’

Gauguin's painting was transformed between 1886 and 1888 by his close exchanges with Bernard and Van Gogh. There was much discussion in the winter of 1887-88 when Gauguin may have dedicated a small gouache study of a *bretonne* (private collection) ‘à l'ami Bernard.’ Gauguin worked with Bernard in Pont-Aven in the late summer and early autumn of 1888, where they produced such related major paintings as *Vision of the sermon* (W 245, Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland) and *Breton women in a meadow* (private collection) respectively. They even collaborated on the carved and painted decoration of an *armoire* in 1888. Nevertheless, Bernard broke with Gauguin in 1891 when it became clear that the latter was being hailed as leader of ‘symbolism in painting,’ without any place for Bernard - or Van Gogh for that matter - in the narrative. Late in life, Bernard complained that he

15 Exhib. cat. *L'aventure de Pont-Aven et Gauguin*, Paris (Musée du Luxembourg) 2003, no. 9; the gouache is a study after the extreme left figure in *Four Breton women*, 1886 (W 201, Munich, Neue Pinakothek).
16 Ibid., no. 36.
had found one of his own paintings on exhibition with a false Gauguin signature.\(^{18}\) Actually, this has not been much of a problem, perhaps because Bernard, who lived until 1941, policed exhibitions and the market. The issue was really one of priority in developing a new avant-garde style in 1889, labelled synthetism; any synthetist painting given to Gauguin that was really by Bernard reawakened his sense of having had his invention stolen. Until his death, Bernard campaigned to win recognition as originator of the new style; sadly, in the process, he falsified chronology in both texts and images, antedating and reworking many. Art historians have chosen to take sides in the issue of contested originality, rather than focusing on the light this quarrel sheds on the dominance of originality in the politics of the avant-garde and in the writing of modernist art history.

Gauguin's appropriative behaviour has been interpreted psychologically, as an instance of his untrustworthy character and lack of artistic originality; it might be more useful to consider it historically and aesthetically, as a response to the competitive avant-garde milieu of 1880s and 90s Paris, and as a search for a symbolist visual mode. Gauguin's approach was synthetic and the results often hybrid. A recognisably individual visual language was not the outcome of a consistent technique or style, as with the impressionists or neo-impressionists. Gauguin freely used a number of different styles and techniques. The imagery

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\(^{18}\) See Emile Bernard, *Souvenirs inédits sur l'artiste peintre Paul Gauguin et ses compagnons lors de leur séjour à Pont-Aven et au Pouldu*, Lorient 1941, p. 11, Henri Dorra, in ‘Emile Bernard and Paul Gauguin,’ *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 45 (April 1955), p. 234, identified the painting exhibited with a false Gauguin signature as *Landscape at St Brieuc* (repr. fig 13). Georges Boudaille, *Gauguin*, Paris 1963, pp. 60 and 81, included two Bernards as well as some Pont-Aven works (pp. 133 and 193) as Gauguins. Wladyslawa Jaworska, *Gauguin et l'école de Pont-Aven*, Neuchâtel 1971, pp. 17 and 36, also misattributed a number of works to Gauguin; but then those were early days.
of his paintings, based on a substantial collection of source motifs, was similarly heterogeneous and appropriative. Richard Field has argued that Gauguin thought primarily in terms of paint and colour, and that in order to ‘crystallise his ideas,’ he carefully composed his images, often repeating or borrowing readymade motifs. Thus his paintings pose particular problems of authenticity for the viewer, collector and scholar, and challenge modernist notions of originality as a formal quality bespeaking expression and experiment.

The 1880s and 90s were a moment of intense avant-garde competition for artistic leadership and market share in Paris, provoked by the emergence of the neo-impressionist group at the last impressionist exhibition in 1886. Gauguin's quarrel with the neo-impressionists has become a touchstone in evaluating his art. He broke with the group, which included his impressionist mentor Camille Pissarro, after Seurat had barred him from Signac's studio, unaware that the latter had given him access. It is quite likely that Seurat took this action because he suspected Gauguin of artistic espionage, of opportunistically seeking to examine Signac's neo-impressionist paintings. Seurat was inordinately secretive about technique. Gauguin, quick to take offence, thereafter never missed an opportunity to ridicule neo-impressionism, setting himself and his colleagues in opposition on the competitive Parisian avant-garde art scene. Yet, in the winter of 1885-86, he had referred to the new artists in a letter to his wife Mette Gad as a noteworthy addition to the impressionist group. Is it possible that Gauguin tried out the neo-impressionist technique before he quarrelled with the group? There is no textual evidence to suggest that he did so, and apart from the painted parody ‘Ripipoint,’ the one neo-impressionist painting that has been attributed to Gauguin is not actually by him - despite

![Image of Emile Schuffenecker's Still life with bottle and fruit, 1886, Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum](fig.3)

its inclusion, once again, in the Wildenstein catalogue raisonné.

Still life with horse's head (W 216, formerly W 183; fig. 2) is surely a painting by Emile Schuffenecker, as a comparison with his Still Life with bottle and fruit of 1886 suggests (fig. 3). The two share a chalky palette, insistent directional brushwork and a careful recessional arrangement of objects in a shallow space. The wallpaper is

20 Martha Ward, Pissarro, neo-impressionism and the spaces of the avant-garde, Chicago 1996, discusses these competitive strategies.
21 Paul Gauguin to Mette Gad, 29 December 1885; see Gauguin, op. cit. (note 12), p. 120. See also Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński and H. Travers Newton Jr, Technique and meaning in the paintings of Paul Gauguin, Cambridge & New York 2000, pp. 61-62.
very similar and we find the Japanese fan and photo album in another Schuffenecker still life (currently on the art)
market), which the Wildenstein catalogue reproduces. *Still life with horse's head* has been given a false signature, bottom right; the old one has probably been obscured bottom left. Wildenstein notes that ‘the signature would seem to be restored.’ That is a disturbing and irresponsible comment to find in an oeuvre catalogue; after raising suspicion, the authors do not pursue the issue! A simple request to the museum for some photography in infrared and ultraviolet light, and perhaps some scientific analysis if warranted, would help establish the status of the ‘Gauguin’ signature and more than likely reveal the original Schuffenecker one opposite it. I must admit, however, that when the painting was with an Amsterdam dealer in 1986, I tried to convince him to permit such a scientific examination without success.

Arguments for and against the attribution of the still life to Gauguin have been closely bound up with interpretations of the artist's character and intentions. *Still life with horse's head* has remained in the oeuvre supported by elaborate iconographic readings (e.g., a derivation from Whistler's ‘Ten o'clock lecture’) and the image of Gauguin as an opportunist, or in the Wildenstein catalogue's more diplomatic language, as making a ‘union prudente’ with the neo-impressionists. I would argue that Gauguin did not opportunistically adopt neo-impressionism and then cynically pick a fight with Pissarro and Seurat. Temperamentally, he must have found their scientific technique incompatible with his own artistic aspirations to express emotion and mystery, so clearly set out in the Rouen sketchbook of 1884-85.22 Reading the document quite differently from the Wildenstein team, I find that in a text attributed to a Turkish painter called Vehbi Zunbul Zade, which Gauguin circulated among the neo-impressionists and whose author he may well have been, he poked fun by implication at the meticulous approach of the neo-impressionists.

Seen in a broader perspective, *Still life with horse's head* reflects neo-impressionism's irruption on the Paris art scene at the time of the last impressionist exhibition in 1886 and the immediate and extensive influence it had on the avant-garde. The painting's insertion into Gauguin's oeuvre responds to a desire for a complete developmental narrative in the artist's career, which would have him progress from an assimilation of impressionism through a study of Cézanne and neo-impressionism to his own version of post-impressionism. The Wildenstein catalogue places an enlarged detail of *Still life with horse's head* as a frontispiece to the section on ‘Gauguin's return to Paris, 1885-86,’ emphasising the pointillist and divisionist technique and using it to mark another stage, albeit a brief one - January-June 1886 - in his development. As soon as they became aware of it in 1886, both Schuffenecker and Bernard experimented with neo-impressionist technique, as did Van Gogh. It has been suggested that Gauguin ignored Bernard when they first met in Brittany in the late summer of 1886 because he was working in a manner close to neo-impressionism. The Pont-Aven group around Gauguin, who heaped scorn on the rival circle and its technique, tolerated no such practice. In view of this history, *Still life with horse's head* would certainly not have been accepted as a Gauguin during the artist's lifetime (1848-1903). The still life, then owned by Hjalmar Gabrielson of Göteborg, Sweden, was first exhibited as a Gauguin in 1926, but does not reappear in the Gauguin literature until 1950, after Bernard, Denis and Sérusier had passed from the scene. When was it given a new signature and turned into a

Gauguin? It would help if we knew when the still life entered the Gabrielson collection and who sold it to him. There was a market for Gauguins in Scandinavia already at the beginning of the 20th century. The early date of its change to a Gauguin, the fact that it was not proposed as a painting by Seurat, Signac or another neo-impressionist, and its unique status as the only painting attributed to the artist which accepts neo-impressionism, all point to the still life's origin with an unscrupulous insider, an early, knowledgeable source.

As recent debates about Van Gogh forgeries and the research of Jill-Elyse Grossvogel have shown, there is a Schuffenecker problem affecting the art of Van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne. In the 1890s, Emile Schuffenecker acquired a sizable collection of their works. According to Grossvogel, he was forced to sell the collection to his brother Amedée in 1904, due to the financial burden of his divorce settlement. Emile made copies and variants of the works in the collection; a number of these have recently been published and exhibited as his work. When and why these were produced is unclear. Some may have been made innocently as exercises or souvenirs, as in the case of the pastel Copy of Van Gogh's 'Self-portrait.'

with bandaged ear’ (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum); others, such as the Van Gogh pastiche Workers in the field (Lillian Heidenberg Gallery), are more problematic. Were they made as an homage by an admiring artist, or as records when the collection was sold to his brother? Grossvogel suggests that some may have been deliberately reattributed and sold by Amedée, who had acquired them with his brother's collection and become a dealer. Was Emile involved with his brother in the dubious practices that would have turned such pieces into ‘originals’? Grossvogel notes that he admitted to retouching and completing Cézannes and I shall argue below that he also ‘improved’ a Gauguin by enlarging it. Emile Schuffenecker was certainly tainted by association with his brother's practices. Grossvogel suggests he had the classic forger’s motivations of artistic resentment as an unsuccessful artist and contempt for the speculative buyer. Attractive as such hypotheses may be, the paintings are our only documentary proof. Based on a substantial collection of originals, such forgeries will continue to be hard to detect through provenance or scientific analysis, which could reveal the inclusion of non-period materials, since these works share provenance and period materials with genuine works. Of course, not all of the dubious works from the Schuffenecker collections may be by Emile; other artists from the Pont-Aven group should be considered as possible authors.

Still life with horse's head is, I believe, a genuine Schuffenecker given a false signature. There are a number of Pont-Aven school paintings in the first version of the Wildenstein oeuvre catalogue from 1964, noted by Bodelsen, which aspired to become Gauguins by a similar subterfuge. However, there is another type of false Gauguin, typical of the history of forgeries and misattributions: the copy, the variant or the pastiche, some possibly made as learning exercises and later given false signatures and dates. Still life with Delacroix reproduction (W 257, formerly W 535; fig. 4), moved from 1895 to 1887 in the new oeuvre catalogue, does not seem any more convincing as a Gauguin when set in a Martiniquan context. The Wildenstein catalogue indicates that it may have come from the Schuffeneckers. There were many fine Gauguins in the Schuffeneckers' collection, but that provenance now raises as many questions as it answers. Gauguin admired Delacroix, as is clear from his letters and writings, an

24 See René Porro, Claude-Emile Schuffenecker 1851-1934, 2 vols., Combeau-Fontaine [1992], vol. 1, no. 47, and exhib. cat. Emile Schuffenecker 1851-1934, Pont-Aven (Musée de Pont-Aven) & Saint-Germain-des-Prés (Musée départemental Maurice Denis Le Prieuré) 1996, no. 25. Grossvogel, op. cit (note 23), p. 5, points out that the pastel copy was made when the Van Gogh self-portrait was sold to Gustave Fayet in 1902.
fig. 4
Artist unknown, *Still life with Delacroix reproduction*, Strasbourg, Musée des Beaux-Arts
interest that probably started as early as the 1870s. He copied *La mulâtresse (Aline)* (Montpellier, Musée Fabre) in 1883 and quoted Delacroix's figures, faces and gestures throughout his career, especially during his second Tahitian trip. In a couple of impressionist still lifes, Gauguin reproduced paintings and drawings by other artists from his own collection as part of the interior setting. In his symbolist works, the quoted material had to support his imagery; mostly, he preferred his own works because they fit the symbolism of his paintings better. Iconographically, the Delacroix drawing in the Strasbourg still life, which depicts the *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden* for a pendentive decoration in the senate library at the Palais du Luxembourg in Paris, is incompatible with Gauguin's symbolism, as will become clear at the end of this article. The Delacroix also turns up in the background of a *Self-portrait* (fig. 5), a painting rejected by the 1964 catalogue as a

**fig. 5**
Artist unknown, *Self-portrait with Delacroix drawing*, Detroit Institute of Arts

copy of *Self-portrait with idol* (W 415; fig. 6). Wildenstein have it right in that case.²⁵

Before Gauguin's *Human miseries* (W 304; figs. 7 and 8) was exhibited in Vienna in 1907, someone added a three-centimetre canvas strip of different weave from the original coarse jute to the left edge in an attempt to ‘improve’ Gauguin's composition. Unfortunately, this information is not available in the Wildenstein catalogue, although careful examination of the reproduction might raise suspicions. We now know that the Schuffeneckers enlarged the Seji Togo Memorial Sompo Museum of Art's *Sunflowers* and several other paintings. I suspect that it was Emile Schuffenecker who painted the strip and had it added to enlarge *Human miseries*. He was listed as the owner in the Vienna catalogue and his name is inscribed on the stretcher. Gauguin had shipped the painting from Arles to Theo van Gogh at Boussod's Montmartre gallery, in part because he believed the Delacroix depicted was actually a lithograph after a drawing by Alfred Robaut published in 1864-65 that Gauguin might have owned.

where Schuffenecker saw it in November 1888. It could not be exhibited because it was flaking badly, as he pointed out in a letter to Gauguin. The artist reattached the paint early in 1889 and shortly after Schuffenecker bought *Human miseries*. At a later date, probably just before it was sent for exhibition in Vienna, Schuffenecker had it lined, presumably to prevent further paint loss; he seems to have taken the opportunity to enlarge the painting to a standard size format, extending the figure of the Breton woman on the left. This is probably also the moment when two variants based on the *bretonnes* in the foreground, documented in the Witt Library photographic files, were made, in an effort to produce paintings compatible with Gauguin’s practice of reusing figures. In all cases, precise technical information about Gauguin’s paintings should have been requested from owners and included in the Wildenstein catalogue raisonné; it would help collectors and scholars make informed judgments about the paintings.²⁸

After the achievements of 1888, 1889 was another very productive year for Gauguin, in which he elaborated his new synthetist approach and consolidated his pictorial symbolism. This was also the year in which he became the highly visible leader of a group of artists all working in a similar manner. Separated from Bernard and Van Gogh, he did not benefit from as rich and stimulating an artistic dialogue; nevertheless, his interaction with Jacob Meijer de Haan and Paul Sérusier made his Breton stay of 1889 very fruitful. Gauguin used plein-air landscape and studio still life to teach his followers a new way of painting. He enjoyed being ‘the master’ and generally seems to have been accorded that role and even the title. In that sense, the term ‘Pont-Aven School’ seems warranted. In October 1888, he gave his most famous lesson to Paul Sérusier, who painted the small landscape that subsequently became known as *The talisman*; he showed this to his colleagues in Paris, catalysing the formation of the Nabis.

![Image](image_url)

**fig. 7**
Paul Gauguin, *Human miseries*, 1888, Copenhagen, Ordrupgaard Samlingen

fig. 8
Detail of x-ray of Paul Gauguin, *Human miseries*
The story has come down to us as narrated by Maurice Denis, who summed up the painting lesson in the notion of ‘equivalence’ as opposed to imitation, a concept he credited to Cézanne. A look through the catalogue for the pioneering 1966 Arts Council exhibition on Pont-Aven is most instructive. Although the entries are organised traditionally by artist, starting with the ‘master’ Gauguin and his chief associate Bernard, the illustrations are frequently grouped by genre and theme, making the interaction and learning immediately apparent. In 2002, the Wadsworth Atheneum’s wonderful exhibition Gauguin’s nirvana made just that point by hanging still lifes by Gauguin and Meijer de Haan side by side, and by setting their Pouldu landscapes next to those of Paul Séruier. Both exhibitions documented the intensive artistic exchange taking place around Gauguin in Brittany and underlined the challenges of distinguishing authentic Gauguins from the works of colleagues and students - the task faced by the next volumes of the Wildenstein oeuvre catalogue. In some cases, authorship and the relations of copy and original have only recently been elucidated. What is a problem for the author of the catalogue raisonné is, from the historian's point of view, however, an opportunity to understand the shared aesthetic and cultural ideas of the artists around Gauguin.

Painting still lifes was a way of learning the new synthetist approach that Gauguin promoted. He used Cézanne's paintings as a model and may have had with him in Brittany as an example Still life with compotier (Paris, private collection), which he had brought from Copenhagen as a precious remnant of his own art collection when he returned to Paris in 1885. Some of Gauguin's still lifes, such as Still life with apples, pear and ceramic jug, 1889 (W 405, Cambridge, Harvard University Art Museums) are set pieces, veritable exercises in the manner of Cézanne; others, such as Still life with three puppies, 1888 (W 293, New York, Museum of Modern Art), are imaginative inventions using personal imagery in which the Cézannesque coexists with other modes. The earliest example of such inventive use of Cézanne's ‘formula’ is Still life with profile of Laval, 1886 (W 207, Indianapolis Museum of Art), and they become numerous starting in autumn 1888. Welsh-Ovcharov has shown how closely Meijer de Haan studied Gauguin's approach in a number of Cézannesque still lifes from 1889, comparing, for example, Harvard's painting with De Haan's Still life with...
with apples and a vase of flowers, c. 1890 (private collection). In some cases, an artist actually copied a painting by Gauguin in order to learn. Long given to Gauguin, _Still life with onions_ of 1889 (W 380, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek) appears to be a learning copy by Meijer de Haan now that the original has turned up. Such a traditional teaching practice included the making of copies of landscapes as well.

The still lifes are, on the whole, closer in appearance to Cézanne’s work than the landscapes and figure paintings. Nevertheless, in these genres as well, his paintings served as a paradigm for studying and representing nature. In 1884-85, Gauguin characterised Cézanne as ‘a man of the south who spends whole days on the summits of mountains reading Virgil,’ and his landscapes as richly suggestive because of their grave colour and mysterious

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34 It was Welsh-Ovcharov who suggested that the Copenhagen version may actually be by Meijer de Haan; it was first owned by the painter Louis Roy. Both versions are illustrated in _L’aventure de Pont-Aven et Gauguin_, cit. (note 15), p. 170, ill. 64 and 65.
forms. When the Pont-Aven artists went out to paint *en plein air*, Gauguin's approach and his lesson seem to have been: observe and think about the motif, selecting and simplifying to arrive at the image, and then complete the painting all at one go. This might mean taking notes in a sketchbook, as Gauguin often did, perhaps painting the design in outline with dilute blue paint in the studio and then returning to produce the final painting from the motif without interruption. Several thinly painted works, such as *Berger et bergère dans le pré*, 1888 (W 250, Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts) and some unfinished canvases such as *View of Pont-Aven from Lézaven*, 1888 (W 370, private collection) show clearly how the artist proceeded. Equally, we can observe painters such as Sérusier and Meijer de Haan applying this synthetist mode in their landscapes, e.g. Sérusier's *The quarry* of 1890 (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada).

A number of landscapes document the artists' sharing of motifs and landscape sites, even if they rarely painted side-by-side at the same time, e.g. Gauguin's and Meijer de Haan's paintings of the valley of Kerzellec. In a few cases, as with the still lifes, Gauguin's landscapes were copied as a learning experience. Travers Newton and I were able to study a curious case in 1987. There are two versions of *Entre les lys*. The one formerly in the Staechlin Collection (W 366) is clearly signed and dated 1889; the other (private collection) is not. They are identical in every respect except colour; the unsigned work, executed in a richer and thicker paint layer, has quite extensive passages of violet and pink in the foreground that are lacking in the signed version. In 1987, Paolo Cadorin argued that the signed painting included the fugitive pink dye eosin as a lake pigment, which had faded, whereas the stable pigments used by the copyist, unaware of Gauguin's precise choice, did not. It is, in fact, possible to reconstruct the following scenario: the Danish artist Gad Frederik Clement, whose family owned the painting until it was bought by the collector who asked us to examine it, had come to Paris in 1890 to study art. His friend Fritz Bendix was the first owner of Gauguin's signed *Entre les lys*, which had been acquired for him at the artist's 1891 auction and, presumably around that time, Clement made a copy of it in order to become familiar with Gauguin's technique. The painting that turned out to be a copy preserves important information about the original appearance of the Gauguin.

A similar problem with a fugitive pigment in a gouache by Gauguin led, initially, to the opposite conclusion being drawn, because the changes in the work of art were

35 Paul Gauguin to Emile Schuffenecker, 14 January 1885; see Gauguin, op. cit. (note 14), p. 45.
36 See Jirat-Wasiutyński and Newton, op. cit. (note 21), pp. 63-68, for examples.
37 Welsh-Ovcharov, op. cit. (note 31), pp. 44-45, and earlier Pickvance in Gauguin and the Pont-Aven school, cit. (note 30), plate 19. Sérusier (fig. 66) painted the same motif as Gauguin (fig. 64), from a different point of view; but the Laval gouache (fig. 65) is clearly a studio copy after Gauguin's *Gate*, 1889 (W 353, Zürich, Kunsthaus). The unfinished *Beach at Pourgastel* (W 363, Springfield Art Museum) is not, in fact, by Gauguin, but perhaps - given the motif - by Maxime Maufra.
not taken into consideration. *Young Breton girl by the sea* (private collection), clearly signed ‘P Gauguin’ and dated ‘1889’, was initially rejected by Daniel Wildenstein because it did not look strong enough to be by the artist; after publication of a technical study, it has been accepted and will appear in the forthcoming volume of works on paper. 39 Scientific examination and technical photography by Thea Burns confirmed that the paper support of *Young Breton girl by the sea* has darkened, and that the *bretonne* was much more forcefully modelled and the landscape more brightly coloured before the fugitive red pigment faded. Some of the original, unfaded colour is preserved and can be seen where the rebate of the frame protected it.

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from light. The gouache relates closely to a painting from Le Pouldu (W 340, Tokyo, National Museum of Western Art) and the full-size study drawing for it (W 341, private collection). This no doubt increased suspicions, despite the very genuine looking signature and date. It was Gauguin's frequent practice to reuse studies and full-size cartoons to make independent works, as in the case of the well-known paintings of nude bathers from 1889.\footnote{Bathers (Life and death) (W 335), Breton Eve (W 333), Woman in the waves (Ondine) (W 336) and their relations to studies and variants are discussed in Jirat-Wasiutyński and Newton, op. cit. (note 21), pp. 138-50}

Fading is not an indication of a genuine Gauguin, of course. However, such technical study reminds us that we are not seeing any painting in its original condition, as the artist completed it, and that the artist had no sure way of gauging the changes to come - as Anne Hoenigswald has pointed out in Van Gogh's case.\footnote{Ann Hoenigswald, ‘Time will tone them down only too much’; the alteration of colour relationships in Van Gogh's painting,” paper presented at the symposium Van Gogh-Gauguin, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 8 March 2002.} This is particularly true for the many fugitive lakes and new 19th-century pigments. It is therefore crucial that judgements about authenticity be informed by scientific examination and technical understanding, combined with visual experience and historical study. Viewing a painting is an act of interpretation; understanding it historically necessitates an act
of reconstruction as part of that interpretation. It is not feasible to do scientific examination on every Gauguin. However, so many have been examined that it is possible to be an informed observer and ask the right questions. It is a great pity that oeuvre catalogues do not systematically ask for this information and use it as a fundamental source of data for evaluating and understanding works of art.

I shall conclude with an example that does not involve scientific data, but in which the imagery is decisive. *Paradise lost* (fig. 9) is clearly related to the work of Gauguin and his followers in Brittany in its synthetist mode and religious subject matter, but the specific technique and imagery seem hard to reconcile with his authorship. Although they imitate Gauguin's technique, the crude outlines, heavy brushwork, the thick paint and dull colour are remote from Gauguin's works of 1889-90. The poses and gestures of the figures mimic the newly developed body language of his images based on Southeast-Asian Buddhist sculpture; but in the Yale painting, they lack the forcefulness and clarity of those gestures and poses. The painting is a direct response to Gauguin's decorations in the dining room of Marie Henry's inn at Le Pouldu. In the centre of the Yale painting, identified by the hidden imagery of eagle and serpent, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil divides the scene in half. On the left, Eve addresses some creatures that look like an owl and a lion; this might be a reference to prelapsarian dominion over the animal kingdom. In her stance, Eve could be the figure from Gauguin's painted door panel *Caribbean woman* (W 330, private collection) turned around to face into the image. The different arm gestures may reflect the figure in *Exotic Eve* (fig. 10), as does the

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43 Comparable use of animal symbolism occurs in the wood relief *Eve and the serpent*, reproduced in Christopher Gray, *Sculpture and ceramics of Paul Gauguin*, Baltimore 1963, no. 71; that relief and two others (nos 63 and 74) differ in their tighter carving technique and elaborate imagery from the better known *Soyez amoureuse* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts) and *Soyez mystérieuses* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). *Les cigales et les fourmies*, no 72, is a weak sculpture closely based on Gauguin's zincograph of the same title, which came from the Schuffeneckers. It is not by Gauguin.
fig. 10
Paul Gauguin, *Exotic Eve*, 1890, private collection
lush, magical foreground setting with palm tree and flowering and fruiting bushes. The right half of the painting shows the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The angel, up to his chest in cloud at the top right, is a cousin of Gauguin's sword-toting angel in the mural *Breton girl spinning* (W 329; fig. 11). Both cloud-borne angel and the poses of Adam and Eve are reminiscent of the so-called Italian primitives of the 14th and 15th centuries, who were admired in this circle of artists.

The Yale painting clearly reflects the artistic milieu of Le Pouldu and the debates about art and religion that went on there in its subject matter. Though it was included in the 1964 Wildenstein oeuvre catalogue, I do not believe the painting is by Gauguin - in large part because of that very imagery. The treatment of the subject in *Paradise lost* is quite at odds with Gauguin's radical revision of the imagery of the Fall. He questioned the moral lesson that Christianity drew from the biblical story by visualising the consequences of the Fall in the anguished nudes of 1889 such as *Woman in the waves (Ondine)* (W336, Cleveland Museum of Art). In *Exotic Eve* (fig. 10), he rejected traditional western morality for an exotic vision of paradise in which acceptance of sexuality is the centre of an untroubled realm of plenty.44 The Yale painting now known as *Paradise lost* (fig. 9) is described in Marie Henry's account as reported by Henri Motheré; it is mistakenly given the title *Earthly paradise*,

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which its imagery of temptation and expulsion certainly does not support. It is the painting known today as *Exotic Eve* that represents an earthly paradise. Even if we no longer attribute it to Gauguin, *Paradise lost* is still of great interest to the historian. Whoever may have painted it, it shares its use of esoteric religious imagery with the circle of art-

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45 See Charles Chassé, *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, Paris 1921, pp. 43 and 48, and idem., *Gauguin et son temps*, Paris 1955, p. 74. These accounts are based on interviews and correspondence with Henri Motheré, reporting Marie Henry's reminiscences, with the 1955 version being essentially a reprise of the 1921 publication. In the 1921 edition (p. 43), Chassé records that *Earthly paradise* (*Paradis terrestre*) had been found by Marie Henry, describing it in such a way that there is no doubt he is discussing the Yale *Paradise lost*, which shows an expulsion scene. This description of the painting is missing in the 1955 version, but both place *Paradis terrestre* outside the dining room above the door to it (respectively, pp. 48 and 74). The two titles refer to different iconographies, the traditional Fall with expulsion from paradise, and a prelapsarian, or even non-biblical, paradise of fruitfulness. I have identified the latter with the *Exotic Eve* of 1890 and explained the imagery elsewhere (see note 44). *Exotic Eve* is not mentioned by Motheré in Chassé's two publications; it is first recorded in the 1920s.
ists working with Gauguin at Marie Henry's inn in Le Pouldu.

Misattributions and forgeries affect all of Gauguin's oeuvre, from his amateur beginnings through the impressionist and Breton periods to the South Sea sojourns. Most readily collected, therefore most valued and most likely to be forged, have been the Tahitian and then the Breton paintings. There are no doubt questionable Tahitian paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures; however, it is the Breton period that has been the largest and earliest source of dubious paintings by Gauguin. His role as leader and teacher at Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu led to the production of many closely related paintings and even 'school pieces' and copies, many of which have aspired to be Gauguins at various times. In this respect, Gauguin's oeuvre raises issues of attribution and authenticity closer to those associated with a Raphael or a Rembrandt, who ran studio workshops, than with a modern impressionist artist, a situation that reflects Gauguin's aims after impressionism and should be seen in the context of the 'neo-traditionist' reaction to modernism. After 1886 Gauguin's images were often based on careful preparatory drawings, which he kept in portfolios and reused throughout his career; thus, figures and poses recur in his oeuvre. Such procedures have made it relatively easy to produce a pastiche and challenging to recognise a school piece. However, a web of references to such poses and motifs does not guarantee the authenticity of a work; as we have seen, Gauguin's intense, sonorous colour is distinctive. The paintings are visualisations of his ideas and feelings; imagery and meaning are just as central to recognising authentic Gauguins as are execution, palette, figures and motifs.

46 Maurice Rheims, ‘La côte des Gauguin,’ in Gauguin, cit. (note 19), pp. 211-35, for an overview of the sale prices into the 1950s.
48 For Gauguin's preparatory drawings and creative procedures, see Jirat-Wasiutyński and Newton, op. cit. (note 21), passim, and the bibliography cited there.
fig. 1
Stevenson family group on the veranda at Vailima, 1892, Edinburgh, Writers Museum
A Frenchman and a Scot in the South Seas: Paul Gauguin and Robert Louis Stevenson

Belinda Thomson

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) was born in Edinburgh and died near Apia in Western Samoa. Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) was born in Paris and died in Hiva-Oa in the Marquesas Islands. Both men, when at the height of their creative powers, took the enormous risk of travelling half way round the world, exiling themselves from their homelands and setting themselves up in the South Seas. Both set out in search of restorative conditions, new exotic inspiration and a healthier place to live. Both banked on the receptivity of their established audiences to the novelty of the work they would be able to deliver from such remote shores. The trips to Oceania were an investment for the sake of their work as well as their health. Their presence in the South Seas overlapped, but the Scottish writer and the French artist never met. Between them Stevenson and Gauguin have transcended the limitations of their countries of origin to become international cultural icons. Their lives and works have spawned innumerable books and exhibitions, and had a major impact on the tourist industry.

There are some striking similarities and differences in their Polynesian experience, which the latter section of this paper explores. But first, it seeks to establish whether there were any possible tangible connections between them.

I am by no means the first to connect the names of Stevenson and Gauguin. In 1920 Félix Fénéon, the avantgarde critic, noted the coincidence of both men having spent time on the Marquesas Islands. In Post-impressionism, first published in 1956, John Rewald opens his chapter on Gauguin in Tahiti with a quotation from Stevenson's In the South Seas in which the writer describes arriving in the Marquesas in 1888. He, too, notes the coincidence without speculating further. Similarly struck by the coincidence, in 1979 the French writer Bernard Gorsky wrote a book with the haunting title Trois tombes au soleil, in which he devoted separate chapters to Stevenson, Gauguin and yachtsman Alain Gerbault. And in 1980 Gavan Daws included both subjects in his book A dream of islands: voyages of self-discovery in the South Seas. More thought-provokingly, in 1989 Françoise Cachin queried the possibility of a connection in her essay on Gauguin and Mallarmé, a paper given at the colloquium Rencontres Gauguin à Tahiti: ‘One would like to know whether Mallarmé spoke to

+ This paper was first given at Oxford Brookes University, which hosted the 2001 conference of the Association of Art Historians, in a session entitled Geographies of art: exploring landscapes, crossing borders.

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Gauguin of another writer that this anglophile admired a great deal, and who had himself in reality gone to the South Seas - I mean, of course, R.L. Stevenson. There is no document to prove that he did, but nothing to stop us imagining.¹⁵

**Journeying to the South Seas**

Stevenson left for his South Seas journeys some three years before Gauguin. In 1888 he chartered a gracious schooner, the *Casco*, from San Francisco, risking two thirds of the sum he had inherited on the death of his father the previous year. Ultimately he was banking on the trip being financed by Sam McClure, editor of the *New

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In the State Room of the *Casco*, with Fanny, Robert Louis Stevenson, King Kalakaua, Mrs Thomas Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, 1889, Edinburgh, Writers Museum

*York World*, who commissioned him to write regular letters describing the experiences of his voyage and to make a photographic record, which would be syndicated around the world. Although he had originally intended to go back to his homeland, by 1890, having made three such voyages around many of the Pacific Island groups, Stevenson had resolved to return neither to Scotland nor to America, where he had latterly been living, but to settle on Western Samoa. He found the climate of the tropics beneficial to his extremely delicate health. Thus, with his American wife Fanny and stepfamily, Stevenson set up home on quite a lavish scale in what became Vailima (fig. 1). The writer was quick to adopt the brightly coloured local pareo, or ‘kilt,’ as he called it.

Their initial journeys had already taken the Stevenson family party to the Marquesas Islands, which, setting out from San Francisco, was their first landfall. They next spent nine weeks on Tahiti, between October and December 1888, staying at Tautira, a spot on the north coast of Tahiti’s southern peninsula. They were befriended and looked after by the family of local chieftain Ori a Ori, whose mother, Princess Moe, was a fund of information on local folklore. Similarly, on visiting Honolulu they met King Kalakaua, with whom they were photographed on board (fig. 2). The photograph must date from just before the writer’s recently widowed mother, who had travelled with them for the first year, returned to Scotland.

Next stages on the voyage were the Gilbert Islands (now known as Kiribati), Samoa, New Caledonia, Australia and New Zealand. The journeys and island visits bore fruit in books and tales including *The beach of Falesa*, *The wrecker* (both 1892) and *The pearl-fisher or The ebb-tide* (published in instalments in two separate journals, 1893-94). But prior to this, the non-fiction letters recording aspects of life and the customs of Polynesia that eventually made up *In the South Seas*, started to appear weekly, while Stevenson was still writing them, which put him under considerable pressure. Somewhat monotonous in tone compared to his fiction, they were published from early 1891 onwards in journals in Australia, New Zealand and on both sides of the Atlantic. A new journal, *Black and White: A Weekly Illustrated Record and Review* won the rights in London. To illustrate the letters, Stevenson sent various materials, including some of his own photographs and those of professional photographers, which were to be used as the basis for wood engravings (figs. 3 and 4). *Arcadian life at Butaritari - Mr and Mrs R.L. Stevenson with Nantoki and Natakariti* appeared in the first instalment of ‘The South Seas: a record of three

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cruises’ in the *Black and White* of 6 February 1891; the *Marquesan warrior* also appeared on 11 July 1891.\(^7\)

The desire to *install* himself in the ‘Studio of the Tropics,’ rather than just making an exploratory visit as he had done in 1887 to Martinique, took hold of Gauguin in late 1888, when he was staying in Arles with Vincent van Gogh.\(^9\) Their discussions often turned on the subject, the practicalities as well as more utopian fantasies. Never totally impractical, Gauguin's dreams of tropical paradise seem always to have concentrated on *French* colonial possessions, first Tonkin, then Madagascar, and eventually, in late 1890, Tahiti. Of course Gauguin had no need to be aware of the precedent set by Stevenson to whet his appetite for exotic travel. He had plenty of other stimuli: for one, the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle, with its colonial exhibitions. There was also a tradition of exotic literature in France, particularly Pierre Loti's colourful book *Le mariage de Loti* (1881), set in Tahiti, which describes the

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\(^7\) Engraving by O. Lacour after a photograph taken for Stevenson, *Black and White* 1 (6 February 1891), p. 23.

\(^8\) The photograph on which this engraving is based, probably taken by American photographer Charles Spitz, is known in two different versions. I am grateful to Peter Zegers for providing me with a photocopy of the original photograph, presumably available to Stevenson in around 1890, from the collection of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Apparently taken in a studio, it is captioned ‘Photographer unknown’ and erroneously dated c. 1898. Around 1900 the photograph was trimmed down and printed by a certain ‘F. Homes’ as a commercial postcard, with the title *Tumanani (Marquisien)*. Homes was heir to Charles Spitz's photographic archive, having married his widow. I am grateful to Elizabeth Childs for this information.

author's own visit to the island in 1872. Urged on by Van Gogh, we can be sure that Gauguin read Loti.

Gauguin left Marseilles and travelled to the Pacific via the Suez Canal in April 1891. He thus approached Tahiti from the Australian not the Marquesan side. He spent two productive years on Tahiti, quickly moving away from the capital Papeete to the more remote Mataiea (not far from the southern peninsula of Tautira where Stevenson had stayed three years before). On Gauguin's

return to Paris in 1893, Stéphane Mallarmé was curious to see the fruits of his labours and to quiz the painter on his experiences.

The Mallarmé connection

It would seem that Mallarmé first came to know Paul Gauguin over the winter of 1890-91, when Gauguin was marshalling the most influential support he could to help raise the money for his first voyage to Tahiti. Indeed,
Mallarmé played a significant role in securing for Gauguin the services of Octave Mirbeau, who wrote an influential article about Gauguin's planned adventure for the Figaro. Mallarmé also presented the toast at a farewell banquet for Gauguin in March 1891. Gauguin's etched portrait was made by way of a reciprocal homage to the symbolist poet (fig. 5). As Françoise Cachin has observed, Mallarmé was a passionate admirer of Stevenson's writing. Of course, as a fluent English speaker and one time teacher of English, he could read Stevenson in the original. Witness the fact that his library at Valvins contains the complete Edinburgh edition of Stevenson's writings, published posthumously in 1896. It is clear, however, that he was already well acquainted with Stevenson's writings even before this date. He had himself contributed articles in 1892-93 to the National Observer, a journal which not only published occasional pieces by Stevenson, but whose editor, W.E. Henley, had been Stevenson's close collaborator and friend. In 1893 Edmond Gosse brought out a new book entitled Questions at issue, in which he devoted chapters to Mallarmé's symbolism and to Stevenson's poetry, respectively. In 1896, two years after Stevenson's death, it was natural for the Edinburgh committee - anxious to establish a memorial to Stevenson in France - to ask Mallarmé, one of the writer's warmest and most eminent French admirers, for support.

Over 40 of Gauguin's Tahitian paintings were exhibited at the Durand-Ruel gallery in November 1893. The artist deliberately varied the fare on show, some paintings being more difficult and symbolist than others. If Manaō tupapai (The spirit of the dead keeps watch) of 1892 (Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery) belonged to the former category, Black pigs (fig. 6) exemplified the latter; indeed it was not dissimilar to the watercolour views of Vailima painted from photographs by Count Girolamo Nerli. However, when Mallarmé was asked by Charles Morice to write a promotional article about Gauguin's exhibition, and 'to point out the analogies with and differences to the parallel movement in literature,' he declined - sadly for my investigation. For

10 I am grateful to Vincent Lecourt at the Musée Mallarmé, Vulaines-sur-Seine, for this information.
11 Edmond Gosse, Questions at issue, London 1893.
if he had read any of Stevenson's recent writings about Polynesia, he would perhaps have had some pertinent questions to pose, or parallels to draw. Despite this refusal, letters from Gauguin to Mallarmé in 1893 and 1895 reveal that they had several meetings and talks and maintained cordial relations. Unquestionably, Gauguin set much store by making a favourable impression on Mallarmé, just as in the artistic sphere he valued the high opinion of Degas. He was fond of quoting Mallarmé's verdict on his Tahiti work: ‘It is extraordinary that one can infuse so much brilliance with so much mystery.’ For example, he reported it in a letter of 1899 to André Fontainas, shortly after Mallarmé's death, sending the editor of the Mercure de France a copy of his etching of the poet. 13

Mallarmé is a precious link because one of the key questions that has guided my research is whether Gauguin knew of Stevenson's presence in the South Seas. Frustratingly, thus far Gauguin's letters and writings seem to make no allusion to Stevenson. (We eagerly await publication of Victor Merlhès's fully annotated edition of Gauguin's later correspondence.) Nor does the English-speaking Van Gogh, Gauguin's regular correspondent in this period, seem to have mentioned Stevenson at any juncture. Given these lacunae, one might ask whether one

13 Gauguin to André Fontainas, Tahiti, March 1899; see Paul Gauguin, Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis, ed. Maurice Malingue, Paris 1946, p. 288: ‘Il est extraordinaire qu'on puisse mettre tant de mystère dans tant d'éclat.’
should have bothered to look any further. However, I think there are a number of good reasons for doing so.

Stevenson's reputation in France

While it is doubtful that Stevenson would have had any reason to hear of Gauguin - in terms of public recognition Gauguin's career lagged far behind his - there are considerable grounds for suggesting Gauguin would have been aware of Stevenson. Stevenson was becoming an internationally famed figure in the late 1880s. Although the extent of his reputation in France is still a relatively under-researched question, we know that the writer was a confirmed Francophile and took a great interest in his critical standing in the country. He had spent many years living in France, making different rural areas the subject of some of his earliest non-fiction - for example, *An inland voyage* of 1878, and *Travels with a donkey in the Cévennes* of 1879. His style was once described as more ‘French than English and more English than Scots.’14 Stevenson mixed with painters, and he made his presence felt in the artists' colony of Grèz-sur-Loing, near Barbizon, between 1875 and 1877, in the company of his cousin, the painter and art critic R.A.M. Stevenson (1847-1900). Indeed, he wrote a number of articles about bohemian artistic life in Paris and the forest of Fontainebleau.15 However, according to one of his painter friends, the American Will Low, he had little appreciation of painterly form and colour.16 If Gauguin had heard of Stevenson and of his trip to the South Seas, can we next say when he would have gained this knowledge: before hatching his own similar project in 1888? Before embarking on it in April 1891? Whilst back in France in 1894? Or whilst in Tahiti? I will attempt to answer these questions stage by stage, in chronological order.

First, and most speculatively, could Gauguin have already been aware of Stevenson as an author in the mid-1880s? Were he to have come across it, it is likely he

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15 First published in the *Magazine of Art* 7 (1884), pp. 265-272, 340-345, these articles were subsequently translated and reprinted in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.
Paul Gauguin, *Black pigs*, 1891, Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts
would have empathised with the book that made Stevenson's name internationally, *Treasure Island*; Hetzel published it in France as *L'île au trésor* in 1885 in an illustrated edition. After all, Gauguin himself was a father of boys, a former merchant seaman and a lover of the sea. He revelled in his reputation as a seasoned sailor. But 1885 was the year when Gauguin first broke loose from his family ties and although he had his son Clovis with him in Paris, poverty probably precluded seeking out exciting new reading matter for the boy.

It is also worth pondering whether *The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, another of Stevenson's best-known works and one that gained an international reputation, might have passed across Gauguin's horizons in the mid-1880s. Published in 1885 and translated into French in part by 1888, this highly coloured story became such an influential work because its gruesome study of a split personality, its exploration of the ‘beast within,’ tapped into contemporary psychological thinking about the fragmented nature of the self. Is it any more than a coincidence that Gauguin began to write about himself in similar terms around this time, as in the following letter to his wife of late January or early February 1888? ‘You have to remember that I have two natures - the savage and the sensitive. My sensitive side has disappeared, which enables the savage to advance resolutely and unimpeded.’ Throughout that year he would cultivate the image of himself as a Peruvian savage. This is not to suggest that Gauguin needed to have read *Jekyll and Hyde* himself - merely that as a result of its runaway success, discussion of split personalities would have been in the air. Unquestionably for Gauguin, the notion proved a convenient peg on which to hang his artistic persona and problematic social relations. Although not a linguist himself, Gauguin had contact with numerous English speakers, particularly in Brittany, who would most likely have been familiar with and talked about Stevenson's work.

A second and more likely possibility to consider is whether Gauguin already knew of Stevenson's presence in the South Seas before leaving France for Tahiti in April 1891. The main conduit by which French readers were kept informed of Stevenson's writings and movements was Marcel Schwob (1867-1905), a relatively obscure young writer who would later join Mallarmé's circle. Schwob was an out-and-out Stevenson fan. Although the two never met, he corresponded with Stevenson from 1888 onwards; after the latter's death, he even made the lengthy pilgrimage to Samoa, in the process contracting a tropical infection that put his own life at risk. Stevenson wrote an important letter to Schwob in August 1890 whilst in Sydney and about to settle in Samoa, overjoyed to find a genuine admirer in France, the country he regarded as supremely artistic. Two months later, Schwob used it as the basis for an article


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on Stevenson. Schwob had first written about Stevenson in 1888 in *Le Phare de la Loire*, and drawn his readers' attention to the longer appreciation Thérèse Bentzon had just devoted to Stevenson's recent writings in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. In 1890, Schwob's portrait of the artist was highly romanticised and none too accurate: ‘Bring on a Scottish mountain dweller, still intoxicated with the heather perfume of his homeland; set him to the harsh regime of the most solid classical education imaginable; break him in to modern erudition and just look at the extraordinary temperament that will spring forth from such constraint. Ten years of literary life will not dampen his first impressions, they will appear to him with the same vibrancy and ardour as in the fire of youth; the

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21 ‘Robert L. Stevenson,’ *Le Phare de la Loire*, 27 August 1888; reprinted in Schwob, op. cit. (note 20), pp. 23-27. Thérèse Bentzon's article featuring Stevenson was entitled ‘Le roman étrange en Angleterre,’ and included a partial translation of *Le cas du docteur Jekyll*. It appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* 86 (1 April 1888), pp. 550-81. Coincidentally, it was directly followed (pp 582-607) by the sixth of C. de Varigny's ongoing series of informative articles on ‘L'Océanie moderne,’ which may well have been read by Gauguin.
objective admiration and lack of egoism [you find] in him will be as striking as in a 15-year-old reading Robinson Crusoe; he would abandon the warmest of homes, the easiest of lives and most-loved of parents to embark on a sea voyage and build his hut on a desert island.'

Having thus built up his hero, Schwob went on to explain, quoting Stevenson's recent letter, that this was no hypothetical image, alas: ‘And now he informs me of the strangest news: he is settling in Apia, in the Samoas, with his wife and his stepson. No flight of fancy this... Stevenson may never see Europe again. His heart has been captivated by the infinitely blue South Seas, pounding the coral reefs with white surf; he has chosen to stay under a sky filled with new stars. But if the man is lost for Europe, the artist will send us marvellous works that have flowered under the Southern Cross. He promises us a Wrecker and a Pearl fisher. “A story horrible, blackly gesticulative, full of extraordinary scenes and surprising characters.” Then again he is “waist-deep” in a great book on the South Seas. It will be, he says, “the book of the South Seas.”

The timing of the appearance of this article suggests Schwob wrote it as soon as he heard the news from Stevenson. It appeared both in the national daily L'Événement on 11 October 1890 and in Le Phare de la Loire on 15 October. One might hazard a guess that Le Phare de la Loire was distributed throughout the west of France, including Brittany; however one cannot be sure Gauguin read either paper. At the very least, we can say that were he to have done so, the content would surely have struck a chord, poised as he was on the verge of setting sail for his own tropical island. And we have documentary evidence that Stevenson's South Seas travels and ambitious artistic undertakings were being discussed in France before Gauguin's departure, particularly in elite literary circles. These facts could thus conceivably have been known to Gauguin at the time, indeed at about the period when he finally fixed on Tahiti.

Another artist has been cited as providing a possible link between the ambitions and undertakings of Stevenson and Gauguin in the South Seas: the Australian painter John Peter Russell (1858-1930), who came to live in Europe in the 1870s, studying first as an engineer, then as an art student. Following a period in London at the Slade,
Russell joined the Cormon studio in Paris, where he became friendly with Vincent van Gogh. In the first volume of her biography of Matisse, Hilary Spurling mentions as an aside that Russell, who had sailed the Pacific Ocean and visited Tahiti in his youth, may have been responsible for suggesting it as a destination to both Stevenson and Gauguin. However, there is little hard evidence to substantiate the claim. Independently wealthy, Russell was admired as a painter and cultivated as a collector by Van Gogh, who strongly hoped he would buy some of Gauguin’s work in 1888 in order to help his friend out of his financial difficulties. Although Russell settled on the island of Belle-Ile, off the south coast of Brittany, where he met Claude Monet in 1886, it would appear that he kept a wary distance from Gauguin. But there is certainly the possibility he talked of the Pacific in conversation or in letters to Van Gogh.

The likelihood that Gauguin heard talk of Stevenson during either his first or second visit to Tahiti is also reasonably high. There would surely have been fresh memories of the dramatic scenes on the arrival three years earlier of ‘le grand littérateur anglais’ [sic]. In 1894, when Marcel Schwob wrote an introduction to his translation of Stevenson’s *The wrecker (Le dynamiteur)*, he quoted a firsthand description by a young French tourist.

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24 ‘According to family legend, it was Russell who first suggested the idea of settling in the South Seas to Robert Louis Stevenson (some said he had sent Gauguin there as well); see Hilary Spurling, *The unknown Matisse 1869-1908*, London 1998, p. 127.

25 While we have three letters from van Gogh to Russell, no replies have survived.
Paul Gauguin, *The angelus in Brittany*, 1894, private collection

present at Stevenson's arrival in Tahiti in September 1888. This witness, one Desfontaines, described seeing Stevenson disembarking, coughing mouthfuls of blood: ‘he thought he was going to die; he was vomiting mouthfuls of blood; and this foreigner with the pale, gentle, evangelical face, framed by his long hair, arriving in this way from a distant land as though to die in Tahiti, had so moved the natives of Tautira that they did not know how to express their sympathy. All, one after another, paid him a visit, and to be kind to him one brought him a fowl, another a sucking pig. He received such quantities of fruit that he could have filled a whole room with it.’

The last possible point of contact between Gauguin and Stevenson during the latter's lifetime is also perhaps the most plausible. When he first went to Pont-Aven in 1886, Gauguin stepped into what was already an international rural artists' colony, and when he returned for the last time in 1894, between his Tahitian trips, that international character had not changed. By now, however, a number of the painters who flocked there were drawn by the reputation of his own stylistic innovations. Several of the many British and American artist-visitors to Pont-Aven had also spent time in Grèz-sur-Loing, most notably, for my investigation, Roderic O'Conor. An Irish artist and a former pupil of Carolus-Duran - as was R.A.M. Stevenson - O'Conor resided at Grèz in 1889-90, well after Stevenson's time, and was friendly with various American artists there. It seems probable that talk would occasionally have touched on Stevenson the author, by then a name to conjure with, and his romantic meeting in Grèz with the intrepid American Fanny Osbourne, who had since become his wife. It is highly probable that some of the company read his books. Armand Seguin, friend of O'Conor and fervent admirer of Gauguin, indicates O'Conor was a keen reader in a letter of 1897, describing the difficulty he had had in keeping up his end in intellectual circles in Brussels, where talk had been about such topics as Walter Pater.

and Stevenson: ‘I wished you had been there, you would have been happy in that
milieu.’ If my supposition is correct, Stevenson's adventure in the South Seas would
have been an obvious point of reference for O'Conor when he met Gauguin, probably
for the first time, in 1894, as it would have been for any British artist meeting Gauguin
at this juncture.

Roderic O'Conor was close to Gauguin for several months in Brittany in 1894. So
much so that he and Seguin were soon in the frame to accompany Gauguin back to
the Pacific. In September 1894 Gauguin wrote to his friend William Molard in Paris:
‘In December I will return again to Paris and exert myself to sell everything I have,
either “en bloc” or piecemeal. Once I've pocketed the proceeds, I will set out again
for the South Seas, this time taking two com-

27 Armand Seguin to Roderic O'Conor, Wednesday, 23 June 1897; see Une vie de bohème:
lettres du peintre Armand Seguin à Roderic O'Conor, 1895-1903, ed. Denys Sutton and
Catherine Puget, Quimper 1989, p. 51: ‘je vous regrettais, vous auriez été heureux dans ce
milieu.’
rades with me, Seguin and an Irishman.”

In the same letter, Gauguin asks his correspondent to see if he can find a Samoan/French dictionary. It must also have been at this time that he inscribed a monotype of the *Angelus: for my friend O’Conor one man of Samoa P. Gauguin 1894.* (fig. 7).

Who is the ‘man of Samoa?’ Gauguin himself? O’Conor? Why was Samoa now being discussed at all? We know Gauguin was disenchanted with Tahiti, so presumably had discussed with his new companions the subject of alternative destinations. I believe we would be justified in attributing to O’Conor the passing enthusiasm for Samoa, a colony over which Britain and Germany were currently squabbling and which had no allegiance to France. For by the time Gauguin wrote to O’Conor a further letter on the subject, apparently in early 1895, the combined trip was off. Gauguin now planned to leave in May for the Marquesas: ‘Since now I am having to go alone, I will head after all for the Marquesas; I am tired of trying to organise combined efforts, I'll go with what money I have and let come what may.’ In that ‘after all’ I believe we are justified in reading that the alternative destination - Samoa - was no longer under consideration. Gauguin, now diagnosed as suffering from syphilis, was reverting to his original plan, for he had been talking about going to the Marquesas since 1893.

Why would O’Conor have been so keen on promoting Samoa? The anthropologist Bengt Daniellson, author of the pioneering study *Gauguin in the South Seas,* judged that the artist would indeed have found Samoa ‘a real paradise on earth,’ a more unspoilt destination than Tahiti. Stevenson, however, thought it less beautiful than Tahiti. Is it relevant that Stevenson was the obvious prominent European artist known to be living on Samoa? O’Conor, as a reader of English journals and newspapers, would surely have been highly conscious of his presence there, even if, and I think it unlikely by this time, Gauguin was not. For Stevenson was something of a curiosity. In December 1890 the American painter John La Farge and the photographer Henry Adams, touring the South Seas, had made a point of visiting him as he set up house in Samoa. Adams described him unflatteringly as ‘looking like an insane stork, very warm and restless.’ In 1893 the aforementioned Count Girolamo Nerli had made the trip from Australia to paint the writer’s portrait.

Had there perhaps been talk between O’Conor, Seguin and Gauguin of a visit to Stevenson? And why did the trip to Samoa not go ahead? Lack of funds on his companions’ part is the usual reason given, although O’Conor could easily have afforded to think of such an adventure,

28 Paul Gauguin to William Molard, September 1894; see Gauguin, op. cit. (note 13), pp. 260-61: ‘En décembre je rentrerai et je travaillerai chaque jour à vendre tout ce que je possède en “block” soit en partie. Une fois le capital en poche, je repars pour l’Océanie, cette fois-ci avec deux camarades d’ici, Seguin et un Irlandais.’

29 Paul Gauguin to O’Conor, undated but datable to early 1895, reproduced in Roy Johnston, exhib. cat. *Roderic O’Conor,* London (Barbican Art Gallery) & Belfast (The Ulster Museum) 1985, p. 41, fig. 15: ‘Puisque je ne dois plus partir que seul je pars quand même pour les îles Marquises; cela me fatigue que de tenter les combinaisons, je partirai avec ce que j'ai d'argent et advene que pourra.’


31 See Kaori O’Connor’s introduction to *John La Farge: an American artist in the South Seas,* London & New York 1987, p. xii.

having just inherited a sizable legacy on the death of his father. Or there may have been doubts as to Gauguin's suitability as a travelling companion. Then again, might they have been stopped in their tracks by Stevenson's unexpected and sudden death in early December 1894, word of which reached Europe only about a fortnight after the event? The earliest announcement was published in the *Scotsman* on 17 December; Schwob's obituary of ‘R.L.S.,’ written in French, appeared in *The New Review* on 1 February 1895.

We will perhaps never securely resolve this tantalising question of linkage, yet the tortuous trail it takes one on brings, perhaps, its own rewards. Sometimes, borrowing Stevenson's words, ‘to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive.’

**Stevenson and Gauguin in the South Seas - some points of comparison**

The final section of this article essays some broad comparisons between Stevenson and Gauguin in their attitudes to and use of the South Seas experience in their art, pointing up a number of similarities and some even more instructive differences. It should be remembered that both men operated within the imperialist framework of their times. While undertaking such extreme voyages was certainly adventurous, and may have seemed mad and foolhardy, what made it possible in the late 19th century was the confidence each had in their life abroad being underpinned

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by a pre-existing colonial system. They were at liberty to travel the world thanks to the well established navigational and trade links with the Pacific, which had grown steadily since the islands were first ‘discovered’ and explored by Wallis, de Bougainville and Captain Cook in the 1760s and 1770s. They could rely on a regular monthly postal and communication service operating between the islands. The same service ensured that their own artistic productions could be transported safely back to their intended European audiences. This was the colonial context within which it was possible for both to plan their escapes from what they perceived as the corruption of northern Europe, and to settle in warmer, more healthful southern climes. However enlightened or open-minded the two men may seem in comparison with their fellow Europeans, these were the relationships of power that each to a considerable degree took for granted. And however critical of the iniquities of the colonial system and passionate in their identification with and celebration of the Samoans and the Tahitians, they were still more or less consciously subscribing to the European fascination with representations of the exotic ‘Other.’ Both took it as their right to live in the colonies like lords, a phrase Gauguin himself used of his future life in the Marquesas.\(^{34}\) On Stevenson's death, his coffin, draped in the Union Jack, was carried like that of a chieftain to the summit of Mount Apea by a group of loyal islanders, accompanied by chanting mourners.\(^{35}\)

In terms of their artistic creation, the Pacific, for both, was a stimulating place to be. Stevenson's productivity, like Gauguin's, increased; he was inspired by the surroundings to write about modern Polynesia, although this new vein in his work met a less favourable reception than the historical novels on Scottish themes that he also continued to turn out. The relative ease of finding one's daily bread, which proved so fatal to the native populations, demoralised by their colonised situation and sunk into a kind of moral torpor according to various witnesses, proved beneficial to these immigrant white male European artists. Although it was too late for them to overcome their infirmities altogether, they unquestionably felt healthier under the tropical sun.

Both artists also had a strong sense of artistic purpose and of the novelty of their undertaking, kept stoked by their strong links with home and the expectant letters of friends and supporters there. Both, indeed, relied on a network of friends to look after their affairs back in Europe. Both had a jaundiced view of their own civilisation - ‘a ghastly farce’ in Stevenson's words. Given the different religious backgrounds from which each had sprung and against which each had rebelled - Stevenson a Scottish Presbyterian, Gauguin a French Catholic - they observed with a dismayed and sceptical eye the influence of rival Protestant and Catholic missions and the eradication of the indigenous Polynesian religion. Both men had a lively interest in the Polynesian language - which they attempted, with limited success, to master - culture and religious rituals. For Rod Edmond, this concern with the degeneration and imminent extinction of Polynesian culture was a form of displaced anxiety about

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34 Paul Gauguin to William Molard, undated (datable to September) 1895; see Gauguin, op. cit. (note 13), p. 271: ‘Je serai là comme un seigneur avec ma petite fortune [...].’

35 For a thoughtful discussion of Stevenson and Gauguin within the context of colonial discourse, see Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: colonial discourse from Cook to Gauguin*, Cambridge 1997.
the degeneration of European culture; one might argue it also displaced anxiety about their own mortality. Fear of ghosts and preoccupation with death, marked features of a land where there had been a high death rate over recent decades, were prominent themes in the work of both writer and artist. One could draw a parallel between the ghostly tales in Stevenson's *The beach of Falesa* and Gauguin's *Manaō tupapaū*.

As somewhat bohemian settlers, both Stevenson and Gauguin adopted aspects of the indigenous way of life, dressing partly in Polynesian, partly in European clothes, eating a mixed diet of local fare and imported tinned food, yet continuing to enjoy such fruits of civilisation as wine and tobacco. For both there was a temptation, unwise perhaps and unprecedented in their careers to date, to meddle in local politics and religious affairs. This was partly due, doubtless, to their being perceived as big fish in small ponds. We find them writing enraged letters to the *Times*, or, in Gauguin's case, to the editor of the *Mercure de France*, about local political issues. Their favourable attitudes towards the native Polynesians as compared with the white settlers were, to begin with, quite similar: for Stevenson, the worst thing in the South Seas was that 'the moral tone of the whites is so low; the natives are the only gentle folk.' If at times, like Gauguin, he plays up his own role as a self-styled 'kanaque,' and 'barbarian,' yet it was the moral turpitude of grubby dealings between white traders and seafarers - the flotsam and jetsam that fetched up on the beach for instance - that mostly provided him with the content of his stories. Stevenson differed from Gauguin in that he was beginning to find his way to a

36 Ibid. p. 245.
37 R.L. Stevenson to Sidney Colvin, 25 November 1891; see Stevenson, op. cit (note 20), vol. 7, p 199.
Polynesian audience, sending copies of his ballads to Princess Moe and King Kalakua for instance, and having a Samoan translation made of one of his South Sea tales. Gauguin made occasional sales in the South Seas, but only to fellow colonials.

Their attitudes to the local women differed. The character of Uma in *The beach of Falesa* was Stevenson's only serious attempt at writing about a Polynesian woman, and she charmed his readers. Told in the first person from the point of view of Wiltshire, a white trader, and based, according to Stevenson, to a large extent on fact, *The beach of Falesa* describes how Uma is duped into a bogus ‘marriage’ with Wiltshire, ‘for one night.’ Yet Uma avoids becoming the clichéd innocent victim one finds in much exotic literature, notably in Pierre Loti's *Rarahu. The beach of Falesa* also deals with superstitions and taboos. ‘I have got the smell and look of the thing a good deal,’ Stevenson boasted to Sidney Colvin. ‘You will know more about the South Seas after you have read my little tale, than if you had read a library.’

(This artistic aim, of concentrating the essence of the place into the individual work of art, is comparable to Gauguin's.) But to his dismay, aspects of the story, particularly the hypocritical marriage document, were considered too hard-hitting, and were censored by the editors before it was allowed to appear in the *Illustrated London News* in 1892. Nevertheless, when his stories were published in New York and London in April 1893, under the collective title *Island night's entertainments* and

with evocative illustrations by Gordon Browne, the book sold out within a week (figs. 8 and 9).
In general, Stevenson's attitude to such commonplace cross-racial couplings was relatively tolerant. However, his tolerance disappeared when they involved his immediate family. When his stepdaughter Belle, his amanuensis, became the injured party due to her drunken husband Joe Strong setting up a secret ménage with a local girl, Stevenson did not hesitate to evict Strong from his home as an immoral scrounger. As we know, Gauguin, with no immediate family around to hold him back, had no such moral scruples, ‘marrying’ at least two native girls during his stays in Tahiti and fathering several children. The first of his native brides was Teha’ama’ana, whose name and family origins he evokes in the painting *Teha’ama’ana has many parents* of 1893 (The Art Institute of Chicago). Of course, Gauguin had come with a mission to paint the native women, the legendary *vahines*. Before his departure from France, he even painted and sculpted his imagined Eve in her sexually available, ideal, uncivilised form. Here he made his first use of a specific, non-Polynesian visual source that continued to inspire his paintings once in Tahiti: namely photographs of early Buddhist friezes from Borobudur, which he had acquired in France.

There were further salient differences in their personal approach to understanding the tropics. Stevenson, during his boyhood in Scotland, had spent time exploring islands in the company of his father, a lighthouse engineer. A visitor from New Zealand had awakened his interest in the islands of the South Seas in the early 1870s. Unlike Gauguin, he had no childhood nostalgia for the tropics, nor does he seem to have had Gauguin's rose-tinted, utopian hopes of the ease of life there. The powerful myth of Tahiti, dubbed ‘La Nouvelle Cythère’ by Bougainville in 1768 because it fulfilled Enlightenment intellectuals' dreams of paradise on earth, was more entrenched in French culture than in British. And because the proposition of the South Sea voyage was dropped in Stevenson's lap, he did not have the same protracted period of anticipation that we find with Gauguin. Although he was happy to publicise the novelty of his undertaking, he did not claim to be returning to his primitive roots, or promise to write about an earthly paradise. Pretty quickly, the harsh reality was being confessed in his copious letters home. To his mother he wrote in January 1891: ‘Installation on a South Sea Island is not all roses, by several fathoms.’

Ironically, where Stevenson's South Seas writing, both non-fiction and fiction, set out to be and was in fact considered less romantic, more realist, objective and dramatic than his readers had come to expect, Gauguin's Polynesian art became less and less bound by modern reality, which in its colonial form was undoubtedly a severe disappointment to him, more subjective, symbolist, idealising. Gauguin gives us scant evidence of interrelations between islanders and colonists apart from depicting the missionary costumes worn by the women. White men are totally excluded from his vision. However, the complex cross-cultural colonial realities are brought more to the fore in his multi-layered working methods. Part photo album, part sketchbook, part fictionalised account of his own life on Tahiti, *Noa noa*, which Gauguin compiled between 1893 and 1895, belongs in the category of traveller's journal. The pages of writing are interspersed with his own watercolour sketches and woodcuts, as well as

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40 R.L. Stevenson to his mother, Mrs Thomas Stevenson, 2 January 1891; see ibid., p. 68.
41 Walkely, *writing about Stevenson's Island night's entertainment*, drew a comparison between Pierre Loti, whom he judged ‘a dilettante in search of variety, exquisite sensations,’ and Stevenson’s ‘objective and dramatic’ approach; see *Black and White* 7 (12 May 1893), p. 465.

*Van Gogh Museum Journal 2003*
with photographs, which, as has been recently shown, were produced for the colonial market and probably bought from local traders in Papeete. One photograph he owned, of a figure drinking from a waterfall, was long thought to be by the American photographer Charles Spitz. Spitz’s authorship is now no longer so clear, and the photograph has recently been shown to represent a Samoan. In 1893 Gauguin used it as the basis for his painting *Pape nui* (private collection). Quantities of such photographs were on display and sale at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, which was where, indeed, Gauguin bought his photos of the Borobudur frieze. It is possible that we may yet find that Stevenson and Gauguin were in possession of some of the same photographic images. Certainly they met and, in Stevenson’s case, photographed and took down stories from some of the same colourful and illustrious figures among the Tahitian islanders.

Although Stevenson introduced a lot of the speech patterns he discovered in Polynesia into his late writings, much as Gauguin used Tahitian words as titles for his paintings, in the final analysis, Gauguin’s art, with its cultivated primitivism, makes a more pretentious claim to going native. We have to infer his European point of view from the titles of his works and from the somewhat arch, philosophical puzzles they pose; from his multiple references to a western classical tradition; from the air of heavy languor he gives his figures, which invites us to

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43 The coincidence of Stevenson, Henry Adams and John Lafarge, and Gauguin all having met Queen Marau, wife of King Pomaré V, is noted in Nicholas Wadley (ed.), *Noa noa: Gauguin’s Tahiti*, Oxford 1985, p. 66 (note 9) However, Wadley observes that Gauguin, ‘had no access to this circle. He did not speak English and anyway usually chose to associate with less elevated levels of society.’
muse on the sense of a past glory lost. The retrospective and nostalgic mood characteristic of certain paintings from his first Tahitian stay - for example *Matamua (Times gone by)* of 1892 (Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection) - becomes more pronounced on his second trip in works such as *Te reroia*, or *The dream*, executed in 1897 (London, Courtauld Institute Galleries).

Where Gauguin cultivated mystique and obscured meanings, Stevenson was open about his own Eurocentrism, whilst at the same time striving to bring in a Polynesian point of view. His concern was to uncover scams, to shine an unflinching light on to dark doings. Precisely because he paints realistic, modern pictures of Pacific life, because he explores the moral ambiguities of that colonial encounter with humour and irony, I would argue that Stevenson's writing is a vital and vibrant context within which to approach Gauguin's Tahitian art and to gauge the sometimes-wilful opacity of its symbolism. Could we but be sure that Gauguin knew of Stevenson's wide-ranging ambitions to write in a new way about Polynesia, we would be able to pose the further question: did that knowledge serve as an endorsement or an irritant, a spur or an inflection of his own artistic project?
fig. 1
Vincent van Gogh's sketch of *La mousmé* (F 1722 JH 1521), c. 23 July 1888, given to and inscribed by Paul Gauguin, cut out and pasted on to the title page of Gauguin's *Diverse choses* manuscript (p. 205 of the *Noa noa* album), 1896-97, Paris, Musée d'Orsay
Gauguin as author: writing the Studio of the Tropics
Elizabeth C. Childs

The birth of the Studio of the Tropics

The Studio of the South was a dream of collaboration and an experiment in creativity. As the recent exhibition *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the Studio of the South* richly demonstrated, the eight weeks shared by Van Gogh and Gauguin in Arles ended in the rupture of their direct collaboration, but nonetheless created a legacy that followed both artists throughout the rest of their careers.\(^1\) For both, there remained after Arles a powerful longing for further affiliation with a community of sympathetic artists joined in retreat from urban bourgeois life, and also for recognition of their achievements by the Parisian avant-garde. Van Gogh retained his abiding passion for a particular place - for the geography and culture of Provence. In the case of Gauguin, for whom the charms of *provençale* life had worn quite thin in Arles, the idea of a shared atelier in the south of France evolved into an affiliated but more exotic dream of founding a Studio of the Tropics.

As Druick and Zegers have argued, it was Vincent who first envisioned this Studio of the Tropics as early as 1888: he dreamed of young Dutch painters establishing a colourists’ school in Java (then a Dutch colony), and of himself providing a welcoming haven in Provence for the artists travelling en route between ‘Africa, the tropics, and the people of the north’\[^{719/558b}\] Gauguin, who so frequently took over the creative ideas of others and moulded them to his own needs, was soon developing and promoting the idea of an island retreat where artists could share in the bounties of nature and the ease of colonial life, while inspiring each other in their work. By the late spring of 1890, Gauguin had committed to the idea of founding a Studio of the Tropics himself:\[^{3}\] he tried to raise the funds and to convince Bernard and Meijer de Haan to join him in the venture. He first set his sights on Tonkin, then on Madagascar. By June 1890 he wrote to Vincent of his new studio as a place where artists of the future would be ‘given renewed force by a more natural, more primitive and above all less corrupt life.’\[^{4}\] In response, Vincent continued to reflect on the project as well, declaring to Theo that the Studio of the Tropics could be in Java, Martinique, Brazil or even Australia, and in spite of it all, Vincent even considered going along if it

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\(^+\) Earlier versions of this essay were presented at The Saint Louis Art Museum (April 2001) and The Art Institute of Chicago (December 2001). I would like to thank Cornelia Homburg, Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers for their encouragement of this research. Portions of this essay overlap with my article ‘Catholicism and the modern mind: the painter as writer in late career,’ in exhib. cat. *Gauguin: Tahiti*, Boston (Museum of Fine Arts) & Paris (Musée d’Orsay), 2003-04.


2 The translations of Vincent van Gogh’s letters are from *The complete letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 3 vols., Greenwich, CT 1958.


4 Ibid.: ‘[...] retrempé là par une vie plus naturelle, plus primitive et surtout moins pourrie.’
were to be in Madagascar, as one really should go to such a place ‘in twos or threes.’ Yet even in this musing, Vincent realised that ‘to go there without means of existence or relations with Paris is madness’ [894/642] - the clear necessity of keeping strong relations with the French capital was thus part of the concept from its origins. In the period following Vincent's death in July 1890, Gauguin settled definitively on his goal of moving to Tahiti, now rejecting Madagascar as too civilised. His colleague Séruier saw the project as suitable for a colony of aesthetes who could work in comparative solitude. Gauguin now envisioned himself as a martyr to art, fleeing a corrupt Europe to ‘practice his faith in art,’ and he also strategised that he could create a new demand for his art through his absence from Paris. It was with

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5 On the development of Gauguin's idea, see Druick and Zegers, op. cit. (note 1), p. 333.
these dreams that he left Paris in 1891, and with which he pursued his *atelier des tropiques* over the next 12 years, first in Tahiti, and then ultimately in the Marquesas, on the island of Hiva Oa.

Gauguin's ideal was of course tested in the very real and complex crucible of colonial life in the tropics. In the end he went alone, unable to convince any artist to accompany him from France. But his original goal of finding an exotic retreat to nurture his art, and of creating a mystique about his work from this new location, held firm throughout his Polynesian career. There were no artists in Tahiti to populate his atelier; the only candidates proved ineffectual as creative cohorts. His project became a more singular one. His art would speak for him back in Paris. And he soon discerned that in writing came power: he could control, or at least shape, the representation of his art and his avant-garde project of living the ‘savage’ life in the colonies.

### The painters as writers

With his move to Tahiti, Gauguin began to cultivate a secondary career as a writer. It was not one to supplant his visual art, but rather one by which he could shape the reception of his work with the distant audience that mattered most: the artists and dealers of the avant-garde and the writers affiliated with the symbolist movement. It is well established, by Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, and others, that by the end of 1890 Gauguin had been brilliantly received within the circles of symbolist poets and critics in Paris. He linked up with poets around Aurier, including Jean Moréas, Rémy de Gourmont, Julien Leclercq and Charles Morice, who was to become his most important literary collaborator. Gauguin was ambitious and astute in using his literary connections to generate good press for himself, as seen in essays by Octave Mirbeau for both *L'Echo de Paris* and *Le Figaro*. From the start Gauguin saw the clear value of these writers in helping him to produce a marketable persona and a mystique, both of which he needed to be powerful enough to sustain his physical absence from Paris. Not everything he would write was intended for publication. Like Van Gogh, he penned copious letters to his family (for a while) and to the friends upon whose support he could depend. Illustrated albums finished on the first Tahitian trip — *Cahier pour Aline* and *Ancien culte mahorie* — were highly personal efforts that he kept with him until his death. But beginning with *Noa noa*, which he first drafted after his return to Paris in 1893, he began to pursue the publication of a number of manuscripts. His intended audience was not the mainstream Parisian collector or amateur. He meant some writings to either inspire fellow symbolist artists or to counter his critics;

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6 Englishman Peter Studd (whom Gauguin had known previously in Pont-Aven) visited Tahiti in 1897, but the artists seem not to have resumed any significant friendship or collaboration. Colonial amateur artists such as the painter Edouard Charlier whom Gauguin met soon after his second arrival in Tahiti, also failed to provide the artistic stimulus Gauguin had enjoyed in Paris, Brittany and Arles.

7 Gauguin did write a few articles and numerous personal letters before his departure for Tahiti, but these lie beyond the scope of this study. For a list of his essays, see Richard Brettell, *et al.*, exhib. cat. *The Art of Paul Gauguin*, Washington DC (The National Gallery of Art) & Chicago (The Art Institute of Chicago) 1988, p 513.

his close reading of the *Mercure de France* while living in Polynesia kept him aware of the rising legend of Van Gogh and of the boastful Emile Bernard, who was writing missives from his new orientalist atelier in Cairo in the 1890s. He clearly wanted to make his mark in the symbolist literary circle that had helped launch him on his Tahitian sojourn in 1891: critical success in that venue would secure him both reputation and, perhaps, increased sales. He cultivated his Parisian contacts in the art world to further his written work, sending two major manuscripts to the art critic André Fontainas with the hope they would find publication in the pages of the *Mercure de France.* In

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9 In September 1902 Gauguin sent Fontainas his *Racontrars de rapin*, which the *Mercure de France* rejected. In February 1903, he sought his help in publishing *Avant et après*, which also remained unpublished during Gauguin's lifetime.
spite of conflicts with younger co-author Charles Morice over Noa noa, Gauguin dedicated one of his last major manuscripts to the young symbolist writer. Gauguin sent a special collection of his own satirical newspaper, Le sourire, to fellow artist Georges Daniel de Monfreid before leaving Tahiti for the Marquesas.\(^{10}\) It was the thought of this critical audience at home - the artists, critics, collectors and supporters in Paris - that spurred him to keep pen to paper in Polynesia, especially in the last years when illness compromised his artistic endeavours, and he grew increasingly concerned over how history would (or would not) come to reflect on his efforts.

In some measure, Gauguin owed his growing literary ambition to his relationship with Vincent, which remained fresh in his memory even into the Marquesan years. The weeks in the Yellow House had been a time of dialogue, painting and writing. Letter writing had been a ritual of daily life; on some days Vincent even wrote twice to Theo [687/539]. The artists wrote to sustain ties to the distant art community: Theo, Bernard and Schuffenecker. As Wouter van der Veen has demonstrated, letters also permitted Vincent to re-compose his past with Gauguin when face-to-face relations between the artists could no longer be sustained.\(^{11}\)

Van Gogh was a more private writer than Gauguin proved to be. Vincent's letters remained unpublished in his lifetime, and the artist probably did not write them with an eye to their publication.\(^{12}\) Yet Van Gogh's passion for expressing his thoughts on art in literary statements was consistent with his obsession for the ordered presentation of his work. It also fits with his abiding love for literature, evident in the numerous still lifes of books and pictures with literary references.\(^{13}\) Gauguin no doubt observed Vincent's particular love for such artist-writers as Delacroix, and such aesthetes as the literary brother-team the Goncourts.

Van Gogh's passion for literature and his talent for writing are surely among the factors that spurred the competitive Gauguin to become so active in this field in the final decade of his own career. That Gauguin cherished Van Gogh's letters is evidenced by the title page of Diverse choses, compiled in Tahiti in 1896. The title page pays homage to the Studio of the South, as Gauguin features not his own work (which one might expect in a such personal account), but rather a drawing of La mousmé clipped from one of Vincent's letters (fig. 1). Van Gogh imposes on an adolescent Arlésienne the identity of a mousmé or Japanese girl of marriageable age. Years later in Tahiti, when Gauguin featured this letter in his manuscript, he both

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\(^{10}\) This album, with a dedication to de Monfried, is preserved in the Reading Room of Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

\(^{11}\) See the essay by Wouter van der Veen in this volume of the Van Gogh Museum Journal.

\(^{12}\) There has been recent speculation that Vincent may have intended publication of his letters to Theo See Cornelia Homburg, exhib. cat. Vincent van Gogh and the painters of the Petit Boulevard, Saint Louis (The Saint Louis Art Museum) & Frankfurt (Städelisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie) 2001, p. 53. However, Leo Jansen, editor of the Van Gogh Letters Project at the Van Gogh Museum believes that Van Gogh never intended formal publication of the letters. He notes that Theo kept Vincent's correspondence just as he kept that of all family members. Moreover, Vincent kept up the same pace of letter writing throughout his career, so his copious letters do not necessarily reflect any increased desire in later life to shape an archive of his life and career. Personal conversation, Amsterdam, 9 March 2002.

paid homage to Vincent the writer and to the artistic legacy of their Studio of the South - a legacy he now sought to expand in Polynesia.

Nonetheless, in 1890 Gauguin failed to put his writing talents to the task of establishing Van Gogh's life and work for posterity; he was always one to put his own goals first. He was neither as active nor as generous as Bernard, who published articles and organised two exhibitions of Vincent's work soon after the artist's death.\textsuperscript{14} On the contrary, in the wake of Vincent's demise, Gauguin distanced himself from his friend, clearly fearful that his own art might be swept under the shared critical umbrella of the ‘madness’ of the avant-garde.\textsuperscript{15} At first, Gauguin intervened in discussions of Vincent only to turn the critical tide to his own favour. By 1891, Pissarro would complain

\textsuperscript{14} On Bernard's efforts on the behalf of Van Gogh, see Carol Zemel, \textit{The formation of a legend: Van Gogh criticism 1890-1920}, Ann Arbor 1980, pp. 70-73.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p. 172, note 12, and Druick and Zegers, op. cit. (note 1), p. 334.
that Gauguin had managed to get himself elected a man of genius. This ascendancy came, in part, at the price of positing Vincent as insane.

As Gauguin returned to Paris in the winter of 1893, he engaged both in writing his own romanticised journal Noa noa and in coming to terms in writing with Van Gogh's life, as his own fortune was by now inextricably linked with that of the deceased artist. Gauguin's essay Nature mortes followed hard on the critical example of Albert Aurier. Gauguin's text drives home the notion that Vincent was 'decidedly' already mad by the Arles period. Gauguin wrote about Arles again in Avant et après in 1902. At that time, long after Van Gogh's death, he would pen himself as the compassionate friend who forgave Van Gogh his violent aggressions and who brought order and maturity to Vincent's world. Beatrice von Bismarck has astutely examined the norms and values of Gauguin's self-serving account of the friendship. In spite of his assertions that he was not a professional writer, Gauguin invested precious time, especially at the end of his life, in shaping his own biography and reputation.

Imagine Noa noa

During the first Tahitian trip of 1891-93 and on his sojourn back to France, Gauguin produced three illustrated manuscripts: Cahier pour Aline, Ancien culte mahorie and

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16 This was in May 1891; quoted in Druick and Zegers, op. cit. (note 1), p 334.
Noa noa.²⁰ Each is an album filled with his own writings, quotations from other texts and a collage of illustrations that he drew, painted, printed, or clipped from other sources. These texts freely mix reflection, travel, fantasy and fact: they are idiosyncratic journals of his Studio of the Tropics. Noa noa, the only one of Gauguin's manuscripts to be published during his lifetime, appeared in excerpts in La Revue Blanche in 1897 and then in an un-illustrated La Plume edition in Paris in 1901.²¹ 

Noa noa is a mythical and poetic account of Gauguin's first trip to Tahiti. It does not directly concern the making of art, although the subjects of his pictures are described in literary tableaux. Written to provide his Parisian audience with an entry point to his art after critics had perceived his work at the Durand-Ruel exhibition of 1893 as inscrutable and esoteric, Noa noa draws on a heterogeneous fabric of texts and influences. Just as Gauguin's aesthetic taste ran the gamut from Giotto to Hokusai to Daumier, his literary tastes were profoundly eclectic. To borrow the term Pissarro applied to Gauguin's painting practice, the artist 'pillaged' both elite and popular textual sources.

This text has been thoroughly studied in its symbolist context.²² Gauguin wrote a first draft and then collaborated extensively with poet Charles Morice, with whom he eventually co-authored the publication of Noa noa in France. The creative tensions of the Yellow House echoed in Gauguin's fraught relationship with Morice, as he seemed to desire submission and deference from both his

²⁰ The manuscript Cahier pour Aline (1892) is in the Fondation Jacques Doucet, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Ancien culture Mahorie (1893) is in the Cabinet des dessins, Musée du Louvre, Paris, as is the illustrated album Noa noa (1893-97).

²¹ On the history of the versions of this manuscript, see Nicholas Wadley, Noa noa: Gauguin's Tahiti, Salem, NH 1985. The only version Gauguin saw in print were the excerpts published in La Revue Blanche 14 (15 October 1897), no. 105, pp. 81-103; and 14 (1 November 1897), no. 106, pp. 166-90.

²² On the study of Gauguin's writings in the context of symbolism, see Wadley, op cit. (note 21) and Jirat-Wasiutyński, op cit. (note 8).
artistic and literary collaborators. A second well-known point of reference for Gauguin was surely the exotic novel that had partly inspired the Tahitian subject and narrative structure of the work: Pierre Loti's *Le mariage de Loti*, a tale of love in paradise between a European sailor and a Tahitian *vahine*. Gauguin's tale echoes Loti's Eurocentric and colonialist nostalgia for an allegedly fading culture.23

A third reference point is undoubtedly Delacroix. In 1891 the Louvre had acquired his album of notes and watercolours compiled in North Africa in 1832. Moreover, Delacroix's journal, first published in 1878 and again in a new edition in 1893, intrigued not only Gauguin but his entire generation. Volume one records the artist's famous trip to Morocco, his infatuation with the landscape, the light and the women, and his position of privilege as a French artist on a government mission. It also reproduces a page of the Morocco album (fig. 2) - a precious relic of the romantic individual's sensations captured ‘en route’ - and the whole is an idiosyncratic mix of sketches, notes and details of travel that Gauguin emulates in *Noa noa*. The preface to the *Journal* praises the work as a collection of true ‘literary morsels’ that reveal, in the intimate Delacroix, a spirit, an intelligence, a character of superior quality.24 Gauguin's ambitious nature was no doubt seduced by this clear demonstration of the benefits of leaving such a personal account and compelling visual record for the generations of artists to come.

A well-known connection also exists between Gauguin's text and the ethnographic account of Tahiti by the Belgian explorer Moerenhout.25 In *Noa noa* (and earlier in his notebook *Ancien culte mahorie*), Gauguin copied passages directly from this source into his text, offering up bold plagiarism from the ethnographic record as first-hand knowledge, supposedly gleaned from his Tahitian mistress Teha'amana. His quotation of such European narratives offered both an illusion of control and a gloss of authenticity to his account of a foreign religion, which attracted him largely because it remained mysterious and inaccessible.

A fully vernacular context for Gauguin's production of *Noa noa* is the genre of the souvenir travel album of the sort compiled by sailors on sea voyages, often to be presented as gifts either to their families or naval superiors at home. This was a rich tradition of popular visual culture that Gauguin already knew well from his youthful days in the merchant marine. Yet in the creation of *Noa noa* he was probably inspired by one such album in particular. On his voyage home to Paris in 1893, Gauguin kept close company with naval officers on the *Duchaffault*, en route to Noumea, before switching to the steamer *Armand Béhic* to return to France. One of these officers, A.P. Godey, Commissaire de la Marine, was assigned to the *Duchaffault* from 1891-93 and also travelled on the *Armand Béhic* back to Marseilles on the same voyage as Gauguin. In the final pages of *Noa noa*, Gauguin lists him as one of the people with

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whom he spent time. Godey put together a travel album of sketches, photographs, a diary and quotations from local songs and lore throughout his long Oceanic voyage. In it, Gauguin may have found inspiration both for his own album and for its title, Noa noa, a phrase that means not only fragrant, but which also connotes a quality of indolence and voluptuousness. Godey's page recalling the sailors' frolic in an island river

26 See the facsimile of this page in Noa noa par Paul Gauguin, ed. Jean Loize, Paris 1966, p. 12.
is inscribed with a poem entitled ‘Tiare Noa noa Tahiti’ (fig. 3). Gauguin may have recognised in this poem a concept he had often encountered in his two years on the island - that is, a world of no'ano'a, one that is very full of opulence, the perfumes of life and nature, rich in potential and commanding the greatest interest.  

In the Godey album, photographs invoke the transient dalliance between sailor and indigenous woman, while the poem celebrates one of the faded tiare flowers as an ‘[...] ardent symbol of love in this happy island [...]’  

Many pages of Gauguin's album, put together back in France in 1893-95 (or soon after his return to Polynesia in 1895), restatethesetopoiofislandbeauties,transientpleasuresandmythic encounters with love and the women of Polynesia. Moreover, Gauguin's own eclectic collages of watercolour, woodcuts and purchased photographs used to elaborate the work recall the visual play of the heterogeneous sailors' travel albums (fig. 4).

A somewhat unexpected literary point of reference in Noa noa are the writings of the artist's grandmother Flora Tristan (1803-1844) (fig. 5). She is perhaps best known as a utopian socialist and feminist, and this aspect of her legacy indeed holds relevance for Gauguin. She was also an accomplished narrator of exotic travel experience, both in her first book Les pérégrinations d'une paria (1838), which recounts her travels in Peru and in

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27 New research by Tahitian linguist Hariata Millaud indicates that Gauguin may have understood more nuances of the Tahitian language than has been previously thought. She argues that Gauguin understood ‘Noa noa’ to indicate more than simply ‘nature embaumée’; rather, she claims, he understood that the notion ‘no'ano'a […] exhalent aussi le parfum des “délices d'une vie indolente et voluptueuse [...]”’ She translates the meaning as ‘très parfumé, sublime, très chanceux, très riche, d'une potentialité absolue, d'un intérêt indéniable.’ Hiriata Millaud's full text will be published in a study on Gauguin's titles, forthcoming in 2003-04. I am grateful to Mme Hillaud for sharing her work in progress with me.

28 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ‘Godey Album,’ text on left side of p. 2: ‘[...] ardent symbole d'amour dans l'île heureuse [...]’
Promenades dans Londres of 1840. Gauguin so admired the former volume that he loaned it to Bernard and demanded its return before his departure from France.\textsuperscript{29} Tristan had, like Gauguin, left her young family in France to travel abroad, in her case to London, Switzerland and Peru. In Pérégrinations, she accentuates the encounters of a European with foreign culture and champions the superiority of the beauty, grace and seductiveness of the women of Lima over their northern counterparts. For example, a passage from Tristan's chapter on the women of Lima celebrates the greater liberty of the Peruvian woman: ‘[…] one can easily see that [the Lima women] must have a set of ideas quite different from those of their European sisters, who from childhood are slaves to laws, values, customs, prejudices, styles and everything else; whereas under the saya [the Peruvian costume of a skirt and a manto covering shoulders and head], the Lima woman is free and enjoys her

\textsuperscript{29} Paul Gauguin, Lettres à sa femme et à ses amis, ed. Maurice Malingue, Paris 1992, p. 175.

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independence. [...] The woman of Lima, whatever her position in life, is always herself; never is she subject to constraint."  

Flora Tristan, *Les péregrinations d'une pariah*, Paris 1979, p. 338: ‘[...] on concevra facilement qu'elles doivent avoir un tout autre ordre d'idées que celui des Européennes, qui, dès leur enfance, sont esclaves des lois, des mœurs, des coutumes, des préjugés, des modes, de tout enfin, tandis que, sous la saya, la Liménienne est libre, jouit de son indépendance. [...] La femme de Lima, dans toutes les positions de la vie, est toujours elle; jamais elle ne subit aucune contrainte.’
In *Noa noa*, Gauguin adopts a similar rhetoric of cross-cultural comparison to denigrate the restrictions imposed on the female body by fashion in Europe: ‘Among people who go naked, as among animals, the difference between sexes is less evident than in our climates. We accentuate the weakness of woman in guarding her from fatigue, that is to say, from the possibilities of development, and we model her after a false ideal of slenderness.’

At this point in his career, Gauguin was probably little concerned with woman's liberties, except as social convention ruled sexual behaviour. Both Gauguin and Tristan were heirs to the Enlightenment legacy of Rousseau and Montaigne, who had used cross-cultural rhetoric that drew on agrarian and tribal societies to foreground the ills of modern Europe. Gauguin knew this literary tradition through the travel writings of his freethinking writer-grandmother, who had used her exotic sojourns to frame her critique of the conventions of the bourgeois society of her time.

**In the Marquesas: writing for posterity**

In Tahiti, following the completion of his major work *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* (1897-98, W 561, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts) and the related works shown at Vollard's gallery in 1898, Gauguin's painting entered a slump. The artist's health was poor and he was forced by economic need to take a dull job as a low-level draughtsman in the public works department from the spring of 1898 until January 1899. By the next summer, he had recovered his energies and made a serious foray into the craft of journalism, which had been the career of the radical Republican father he had barely known. As a writer and then editor-in-chief of the pro-Catholic newspaper *Les Guêpes*, and as the founder and editor of his own satirical journal *Le sourire*, Gauguin entered with verve into the goldfish bowl of colonial politics in Papeete between 1899 and 1901. This activity seems to have given him the voice and a public position he had heretofore been denied by the French colonial community. The locals might not appreciate his painting, but they snapped up the papers with their barbed editorials attacking the Protestant community.

Journalism also provided Gauguin with a source of much-needed income. This chapter of his literary career, beyond the scope of this essay about his longer manuscripts, still begs for scholarly study. His commitment to journalism was, however, short-lived. The new stipend from Vollard, agreed to in March 1900, had purchased

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31 Paul Gauguin, *Noa noa: séjour à Tahiti*, Paris 1989, p 51 ‘Chez les peuples des nus, comme chez les animaux, la différence entre les sexes est bien moins évidente que dans nos climats. Nous accentuons la faiblesse de la femme en lui épargnant les fatigues, c'est-à-dire les occasions de développement, et nous la modelons d'après un menteur idéal de gracilité.’


33 Although he published no newspapers in the Marquesas, he may have intended to try. It is notable that he took with him to Atuona a mimeograph machine, presumably the one that he used to publish the small edition of *Le sourire*. See Papeete, Société des études océaniennes, ‘Procès verbal de la vente [...] de la succession de M. Paul Gauguin, Papeete, 2 September 1903,’ Br/Fo/36c/34.
him important creative freedom, and in a little over a year he left Tahiti for the last time, editing his ultimate issue of *Les Guêpes* just one month before his departure.34

For Gauguin, the village of Atuona on the island of Hiva Oa in the Marquesas was a writer's retreat as much as it was an escape from the colonial modernity of Papeete and a fresh start in the Polynesian world. During his final two years, he was as engaged in writing as he was in painting and sculpture. At his death in 1903, the inventory of his estate sale included 13 manuscripts (of which only five exist today).35 We know Gauguin completed at least three manuscripts in his 21 months on Hiva Oa: *Racontars de rapin* (Gossip of an art dauber), *L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme* (Modern thought and Catholicism) and *Avant et après* (Before and after). He had started the first two while still in Tahiti, and he now found the desire and energy to return to them in Atuona. He continued to care deeply about his status as a published author. In his last years, his interest in the publication of *Noa noa* in France became obsessive. Unpublished correspondence from 1902 finds him in the Marquesas begging friends to mail him a copy of the published book.36 It is yet one more irony of his literary career that he never saw *Noa noa* in print.37 Nonetheless, in these last literary projects he was able to set out his thoughts on a wide variety of topics, including art, history, religion, the origin of the human spirit and the events and meaning of his life. Many of the concerns he addressed in his painting manifesto *Where do we come from?* are taken up again in essay form.38 These texts thus comprise a testimony to the Studio of the Tropics.

**Racontars de rapin**

As early as October 1898, while waiting in Tahiti to hear the response to *Where do we come from?* and while reading the *Mercure de France*, Gauguin began to set down his reflections on the century's developments in both art and history. He continued sporadically with this exercise over the next four years, finishing in September 1902. The result was *Racontars de rapin*, a 14-page, un-illustrated essay that is rambling and entirely lacking in organisation.39 In the fall of 1902 he sent it to Fontainas in Paris, in an unsuccessful effort to have it published in the *Mercure*.
de France. He here employs a strategy of opposition devised in primitivist rhetoric. He contrasts artist and critic, history and modernity, and the notions of what is revolutionary and traditional or conventional. In the opening lines he claims the voice of an artist, as opposed to a man of letters, who is going to speak on art; he also characterises his text not as a duty, ‘un devoir,’ but as a fantasy. He thus allows himself the liberty of writing freely, in no particular order, in a space between all poles, on matters of modern art, criticism, art history (Rembrandt to Burne-Jones), museums and French revolutionary history. He sets these European musings against a few bizarre descriptions of ‘native life’ in the Marquesas - a cannibal who opens sardine cans with his ferociously sharp teeth, and a blind woman who leaves her home in the bush to approach Gauguin in order to examine his sexual parts. Oddly, he relocates the story from his actual home at Atuona, on the island of Hiva Oa, to his early days, which he falsely claims to have spent on Fatuiva, near a ‘simple hut of bamboo.’ He thus further exoticises his narrative, placing the tale in an even more remote and less Europeanised island than Hiva Oa, the one on which he actually lived. Such interjections, fictional in part or whole, are Gauguin's fantastic excursions back from matters urban and artistic to the exotic and the extraordinary. He includes them to make his account all the more individual, eccentric and, by inference, himself more authentic as a spokesperson for the avant-garde. He validates himself through linkages to the great chains of history (if an artist ‘adds one new link to the chain that has already been begun, that in itself is a great deal’), yet he determines that too much connection with history, with academic technique (which he derides as the Volapuk, Esperanto, or formulaic language of mediocre art), or with bureaucracy helps only the uninspired artist, and enforces ‘a terrible torment for men of genius’ such as Delacroix and, by extension, himself. We can draw a comparison between his anger at the power of the state and his fury over the corruptions of the Catholic Church, which are a focus of the next major treatise he completed in the Marquesas.

L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme

Racontars de rapin was not the only old writing project to which Gauguin returned while in the Marquesas. He again took up the treatise he had begun in Tahiti in 1897 as the 37-page essay L'église catholique et les temps modernes, which formed a part of the Diverse choses manuscript he inserted at the end of the Louvre Noa noa album. In 1898-99 Gauguin made the woodcut prints that he later attached to the cover of the notebook, but he did not finish copying over and expanding the manuscript, or

40  Racontars de rapin, cit. (note 39), p. 17.
41  It is possible, but unlikely, that Gauguin visited Fatuiva, as his friend William Grelet lived there, in the village of Omoa. He first intended to settle on Nuka Hiva; he chose Hiva Oa instead. No evidence indicates that he ever lived on Fatuiva.
42  Racontars de rapin, cit. (note 39), p. 13: ‘Qu’il apporte un nouveau maillon à la chaîne commencée c’est déjà beaucoup’; p. 20: ‘[..] mais en quelque sorte un volapuk formé avec des recettes [sic]’; and ibid.: ‘[..] pour les hommes de génie un terrible tourment.’
make the monotypes for the cover, until he was in the Marquesas.\textsuperscript{43} In the text, he addresses matters of comparative

\textsuperscript{43} On the evolution of these prints and related works of art, see Ziva Amishai-Maisels, \textit{Gauguin's religious themes} (diss.), New York 1985, pp 314-15 See also Childs, op. cit. (note 38)
Paul Gauguin, outside cover of *L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme*, transfer drawings (traced monotypes) made in 1902, The Saint Louis Art Museum, gift of Vincent L. Price, Jr in memory of his parents, Marguerite and Vincent L Price

religion, the origins of the Christian faith and the corruption of spirituality by the institutions of the Catholic Church. When he returned to the manuscript in 1902, he renamed it *L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme* (figs. 6 and 7). At this time, he expanded the essay and decorated the cover with woodcuts, monotypes and transfer drawings. The cover suggests the hybrid ideas on religion found inside. On either side of the title are signs of the dual religious cultures he discusses: on the left, the fleur-de-lis of France and its Catholic institutions; at the right, the Maori-inspired glyphs that surround his own name.

Gauguin had, to be sure, strategic motivations for revising this essay in 1902. He had recently learned of Morice's plan to sell *Where do we come from?* to a group of investors, with the aim of donating it to the French state. Gauguin revised the text in part to lend further credit to himself and to his painting in France. But not

44 The original manuscript of 1902, in The Saint Louis Art Museum, has not been published in facsimile. The French text, however, is fully transcribed in Philippe Verdier, "Un manuscrit de Gauguin: *L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme*," *Wallraf Richartz Jahrbuch* 46 (1985-86), pp. 299-324.

withstanding his habits of self-promotion, we should accept this text as a sincere effort at theological inquiry and social criticism.

Debora Silverman has emphasised the role of Gauguin's early Catholic seminary experience in drafting the first version of this text. She argues that his biblical quotations and modes of argument reflect his youthful training at the Petit Séminaire de La Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin, near Orléans. These years, she claims, resulted in the abiding imprint of Catholic education on his ‘assumptions, language and habits of argument.’46 She reveals how his education gave him a rigorous grounding in Catholicism, and the catechistic formulae gave him an interrogatory language for examining the spiritual. Yet our perspective needs also to include the impact of the alternative religious traditions that nourished Gauguin in his

critique of the rigidity and dogmatism of Catholicism. Of central importance to this manuscript of his last years is the context of his encounter with missionary Catholicism in Polynesia and his exposure to spiritualism and theosophy, some of whose texts he quotes directly in *L'esprit moderne*. In addition, in his agenda of social reform, particularly regarding the areas of marriage and prostitution, he moves far outside any formative tenet of Christianity, instead recalling the socialist utopian writings of his grandmother, Flora Tristan. It is within these literary contexts that we can best position Gauguin's *L'esprit moderne*: as a manifesto that critiques social and religious institutions while attempting to make spirituality once again amenable to the modern age.

Gauguin's text surveys various religious explanations of the meaning of life, interweaving Christian, Tahitian and Hindu creation stories. It was in Brittany in 1889-90 that Gauguin was probably introduced to theosophical thought, through his association with Ranson and Sérusier. As Robert Welsh reminds us, while we cannot know definitively if Gauguin read theosophical texts prior to his departure for Tahiti, one of his letters to Schuffenecker suggests a limited knowledge of occultist
numerology as early as 1885.\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, it is clear that by 1889-90 his colleagues in Pont-Aven had been thoroughly exposed to esoteric literature.\textsuperscript{48} Of interest to the Pont-Aven circle were the writings of Madame Blavatsky, a formidable magus of spiritualism, and Schuré’s \textit{Les grands initiés}, published in 1889. Gauguin's growing attraction to mysticism and esoteric religion dates to the period just following the tenure of the Studio of the South, although as Druick and Zegers point out, Van Gogh and Gauguin had discussed some esoteric Christian symbols, such as Ictus, in their final days in Arles, and a letter from Vincent written to Gauguin after his departure even reproduces this esoteric sign.\textsuperscript{49}

More than a decade later in Tahiti, writing \textit{L’église catholique}, Gauguin again pursues an interest in spiritualism and comparative religion, and engages - with some inconsistencies - with the writing of the English author Gerald Massey (1828-1907), who explored the notion of Christ as a mythical figure, rather than the historical one adhered to by Schuré. Massey, a Christian socialist and spiritualist, was a self-educated thinker whose humble background appealed to Gauguin. At mid-life, Massey


abandoned poetry to undertake philosophical studies on the origins and evolution of religion. His major work, published in London in 1883, was *The natural genesis: the second part of the book of the beginnings, containing an attempt to recover and reconstitute the lost origins of the myths and mysteries, types, and symbols, religion and language with Egypt for the mouthpiece and Africa as the birthplace.* Massey drew on the nature-myth idea of religion promoted by an Oxford scholar, Max Muller. His school used the comparative study of linguistics to determine the unifying principles of world religions. Adopting this approach, Massey concluded that all religions had originated in Africa and developed in Egypt. For Massey, the Old Testament was merely a compilation of myths the Jews had derived from more ancient cultures, and Jesus himself had grown out of the Egyptian sun god Horus. Massey was already a well-known thinker to readers of Blavatsky's *The secret doctrine*. By 1896-97, excerpts from *The natural genesis*, translated into French in a pamphlet *Le Jésus historique*, reached Gauguin in Tahiti. 50 Throughout *L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme*, Gauguin praises the spiritual goals of Christianity but indicts the institution of the Catholic Church, which he charges with having only an economic and political interest in the soul. This critique is consistent with Massey, and with the nature-myth school of Max Muller, who argued that comparative study of religion exposed the ‘inevitable decay to which every religion is’ subject. 51 Gauguin seeks to liberate Christianity from the corruptions of the modern church, and lambastes Catholicism for its ‘absurd irrational supernaturalism, unjustified dogmatic authority, violent and oppressive theocratic regimes and its profane cults of devout practices [...]’. 52 He imagines that modern

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52 Gauguin, *L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme*, in Verdier, op. cit. (note 44), p. 300: ‘Son surnaturalisme absurde, irrationnel; son dogmatisme autoritaire injustifié, son régime théocratique violemment oppressif, son culte profane de pratiques dévotes [...]’
society can recuperate the spirit of Christianity once the ‘falsifications and audacious imposture of the Catholic Church’ are eliminated.\(^\text{53}\)

In *L'esprit moderne*, Gauguin accepts Massey's basic idea that all religions share a common truth based in myth. Although the primary images of the text are located on the cover, there is one drawing inserted in the text: Gauguin copied out of Massey's *The natural genesis* a Gnostic design of Christ-Horus, standing on a crocodile and holding a fish (figs. 8 and 9). This interest in esoteric

\(^{53}\) Ibid.: ‘[...] la falsification et de l'imposture audacieuse de l'églyse catholique [...].’
Christian symbols was not new: a Gauguin watercolour of 1889 (fig. 10) features a fish and its Greek name, ICTUS, the traditional acrostic for Christ. In the watercolour, the fish symbol and its label float behind the head of a nude who sits cross-legged in a Buddhist position before a mystical sphere, a sign of the Egyptian sun-god Horus. The pose both invokes Buddhist gestures and emulates the cross-legged stance of a fifth-century Egyptian sculpture Gauguin drew in the Louvre. The work thus documents Gauguin's early attraction to religious syncretism and the esoteric theories of the spiritualists even before his first Polynesian sojourn. His copy of the Christ-Horus motif as the only illustration in his text indicates his fascination with Massey's theories of religion during his late career.

Although Christian iconography still appears in several Polynesian works, Gauguin generally kept the Catholic Church as institution out of his art. One rare exception is Femmes et cheval blanc, a landscape from 1903 (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts), in which Marquesan women frolic in verdant paradise, apparently in harmony with the presence of the white cross of the Christian cemetery visible on the crest of a distant hill. Works such as this, shipped back to Vollard in Paris, neither subverted the Oceanic pastoral that was Gauguin's signature, nor pointedly interrogated the conflicts between Catholic and native cultures.

In both his writing and his art, Gauguin's spiritual idealism had a flip side of anti-clericalism. He displayed his sculpture Père paillard (Washington, DC, The National Gallery of Art) near the entrance of his Maison jouir. Here, Gauguin transformed the local Catholic bishop, Joseph Martin, into a horned devil figure, satirising the pious man who was rumoured to have had an affair with a local woman. In L'esprit moderne, Gauguin's campaign against bourgeois convention and religious hypocrisy revolves around issues of morality. In particular, he engages the issue of illegitimacy, condemning the general stigma Christian society imposes on children born outside marriage.
His concerns over legitimacy probably stem less from worry over his own local children, who were being raised in the communal manner of the Polynesians, than from reflections about his own family history in Europe. Flora Tristan had suffered profoundly from a French system that had refused to recognise her parents' Spanish marriage, and had declared her illegitimate and an outcast. Tristan's identity as a 'pariah,' asserted in her writings, is once again relevant. As a consequence of French law, she was denied the paternal inheritance that would ultimately have assured Gauguin's beloved mother Aline, and even the artist himself, a financial security neither ever enjoyed. In *Avant et après*, Gauguin returns to the issue of his noble heritage in Spain and Peru, claiming descent 'from a Borgia of Aragon, and a viceroy of Peru,' yet at the same time from a family that - in more recent times - had had to live like scavengers. It is revealing that the notion of legitimacy and its benefits of uncontested acceptance and entitlement still mattered to a 54-year-old man living in someone else's culture on Hiva Oa and sorting through a lifetime of assumed identities - French, Peruvian, sailor, bourgeois, bohemian, colonial, Polynesian. In this state of perpetually 'not belonging,' exaggerated by living in a colony, there was allure in the notion of finally having a lineage somewhere else. Gauguin is now famous for dying in self-imposed exile in the distant Marquesas, but this was certainly not his intention. Less than a year before his death he schemed about returning to France, about staying in the French Pyrenees with de Monfried and taking a three-year period in Spain to find well-known subjects he would paint in fresh ways - 'the bulls, the Spaniards, their hair plastered with lard.' The land of his maternal ancestors beckoned with the assurance of his personal roots, an authentic biological connection Oceania could never offer. This personal context of his unstable identity as a colonist bridging two worlds, of his abiding anger over a history of illegitimacy, and of his longing for a mythic reunion with personal origins, lies behind his written diatribe against a European culture and a church that presumed to dictate selfhood and destiny through the institution of marriage.

In search of what he imagines as 'an intelligent, just and humanitarian world,' Gauguin calls for the end of marriage. He argues instead for a culture of free love, in which '[...] our mother, our daughter, our sister has the right to earn her bread, to love him who pleases her, has the right to dispose of her body and her beauty [...]. [She] has the right to esteem, as much as the woman who merely sells herself in marriage (by order of the Church); [...]'. He argues that marriage and prostitution both commodify women, and that a Christian morality that dictates marriage tacitly endorses prostitution as the option for those who do not care to marry. The tragic loss in all this, he sees, is the possibility of authentic love as it might be experienced outside the restrictions of institutions. Hence his choice of the woodcut on the inside cover of *L'esprit moderne* (fig. 7). This print embodies his maxim, 'Soyez amoureux
et vous serez heureuse,’ a theme reprised from the sculpture *Soyez amoreuse* of 1889 (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts).

The pro-feminist aspect of the text comes as a surprise to those accustomed to thinking of Gauguin as a rake and sexual tourist. It reads, in this closing section, as a serious tract in favour of the socialist liberation of women. Some might argue that Gauguin merely intended to justify his own sexual habits of luring Marquesan girls from the nearby convent school. But there is far more to his polemic than this. Here, he directly engages the writing of his grandmother, Flora Tristan, and makes his own modest effort at writing about social reform.

Tristan's social theory was deeply imbedded in the utopian socialism of her day. She shared some views with the Fourierists and the Saint-Simonians, but saw herself as a mouthpiece for no one. Gauguin surely did not absorb the intricacies of her work, but he owned some of her books and he knew her to have been a great reformer, an advocate for divorce and a harsh critic of the institution of marriage. She started an organised working-
class movement that recognised sexual equality and women's emancipation through education and work opportunity. Gauguin valued his copy of Tristan's *Promenades dans Londres*, a book that recounts her visits to London brothels and includes a fiery condemnation of a society that tolerates prostitution. *L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme* echoes many of her sentiments. In Tristan's words: ‘let [woman] be taught to earn a living; let her be given an alternative other than selling herself as a young woman to a husband without benefit of love or later to prostitute herself before falling in any case into poverty. [...] These unfortunate women, for the most part, let themselves be seduced; they did not have the courage of hypocrisy, because they had a heart.’

Where Tristan and Gauguin agree was on an ideal of greater social and economic freedom for women that protected the partners' mutual respect, permitted the expression of love and resisted the control of the church in matters of private life. Where they differed significantly was on the potential of the institution of marriage: Gauguin, as we have seen, would have abolished it. Tristan's ideal, on the other hand, was a freely chosen marriage, which a woman entered into from a position of education and economic empowerment, rather than having to sell herself to it for financial security. Clearly, Gauguin's agenda was not identical to Tristan's. But his commentary on women in *L'esprit moderne* pays homage to this writer-ancestor with whom he identified as part-Peruvian, as a social pariah who flaunted the conventions of French bourgeois life, and as a writer of serious treatises on the issues of love and social reform.

**Avant et après**

In his final manuscript, *Avant et après*, finished in Hiva Oa in early 1903, Gauguin returns to the authorial ‘I’ and to autobiography, but not in the conventional form. In February, Gauguin sent his 241-page text to Fontainas, in yet another (unsuccessful) effort to convince the *Mercure de France* to publish it. At this point in his literary career, perhaps aware that he was nearing the end of his productivity, Gauguin was a realist: he firmly wanted this book published, but he did not expect a big readership.

On six occasions Gauguin dissembles as author, claiming: ‘This is not a book,’ elaborating that ‘a book, even a bad book, is a serious affair.’ *Avant et après* is a collage of anecdotes, vignettes and loose associations. Gauguin described it as ‘a miscellany of childish recollections, the wherefore of my instincts, of my intellectual development.’ Unlike the travel narrative of *Noa noa*, it is not a unified or Cartesian self that Gauguin presents. Rather, the artist figures himself in shifting terms, registered in the suggestive fragments so appreciated by the symbolists. He jumps

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59 A useful discussion of the literary references in *Avant et après* can be found in Rima Drell Reck, ‘Gauguin écrivain,’ *The French Review* 64 (March 1991), no. 4, pp. 632-42.
60 Gauguin, op. cit. (note 29), p. 312: ‘[…] le lisant vous comprendrez entre les lignes l'intérêt personnel et méchant que j'ai à ce livre soit publié. Je VEUX qu'il le soit, même sans luxe; je ne tiens pas à la lecture de beaucoup -- quelques uns seulement.’
61 Ibid.: ‘[…] un recueil -- souvenirs d'enfance, ces pourquoi de mes instincts, de mon évolution intellectuelle [...]’
about in time, undermining the chronological expectations of biography, memoir and history. He dismisses narrative form as he had dismissed realism in his painting: ‘I should like to write as I paint my pictures - that is to say, following my fancy, following the moon and finding the title long afterwards.’62 In seeking its publication, he concluded that the work was something other than literature; it was an example of ‘civilization and barbarism face to face.’ He chose his style to be in harmony with his subject, namely himself: ‘undressed like a natural man, and often shocking.’63

His presumed reader is Parisian, white, male and familiar with the culture of the avant-garde. A sampling of his topics reveals both the common ground of the Petit Boulevard circle, as well as markers of Gauguin's exotic persona. On artists he writes of Cézanne, of Degas, of Daumier, of the beauty of Japanese art, of the negative example of Carolus Duran. He revisits Bernard to chide him for his pride, and Van Gogh to praise him. On writers, he mentions the salons of Mallarmé, the poetry of Poe. He is jealous of Loti's command of adjectives; he holds in awe the Confessions of Rousseau. Of the Marquesas he writes as a witness of an allegedly vanishing culture and as a great defender of native rights in the face of colonial ineptitude. Under this broad umbrella, there is something for any Parisian reader with an interest in modern art. He resists choosing one particular legacy; he opens the tale to new histories. In reading the Mercure de France in Polynesia, he could track the rise of Van Gogh's fame:

62 Gauguin, op. cit. (note 18), p. 8: ‘Je voudrais écrire comme je fais mes tableaux, c'est-à-dire à ma fantaisie selon la lune et trouver le titre longtemps après.’
63 Gauguin, op. cit (note 29), p. 312: ‘[…] le civilisé et le barbare en présence. Là donc le style doit concorder, déshabillé comme l'homme tout entier, choquant souvent.’

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reviews of Vincent's large exhibition at Vollard's in 1897 had declared his deceased friend to be as influential as he himself." Gauguin does not write to set the record straight with firm truths and documentation, but to weave a myth, to start a rumour, to shape a memory or to conjure a dream on the matter of his relations with fellow artists and on much else.

*Avant et après* offers no steadying plumb line for legend to follow. Instead Gauguin shoots a thousand disconnected points of fantasy and selected fact into the void of future memory. By 1903, Gauguin was leery of the fate that befalls dead artists. He writes that in death the artist is completely stripped: ‘With this in mind, I strip myself beforehand. That is a comfort.’ He refers here to ridding himself of the stories of his life, to sending out this legacy into the world. His writings would become the link between disparate realities, the way to bridge the profound gap between the *atelier des tropiques* and its audience half a world away, who still mattered and who would be reading and then even writing his history. Gauguin was right. He did not write ‘a’ book. What he composed was the start of the many other books that would, in time, address the ambitions, motivations and achievements of his Studio of the Tropics.

64 Zemel, op. cit. (note 14), p. 77.
fig. 1
Vincent van Gogh, *Still life with Bible and La joie de vivre by Emile Zola* (F117 JH 946), 1885, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
A remarkable literary mind

Vincent van Gogh's spiritual, intellectual and artistic concerns have always been inextricably connected, being the three cornerstones that support the edifice of the artist's life and work. It would be inconceivable nowadays to study one of the three without considering the other two.

Nearly 800 literary references can be found in the 900 letters that comprise Vincent van Gogh's correspondence, while almost 150 authors are mentioned. These figures are not exceptionally high, given that the artist conducted this correspondence over a period of 18 years. They do show, however, that Van Gogh liked to share his impressions of what he was reading with his correspondents, and that he liked to illustrate his remarks using examples drawn from literature.

Literature appears to have permeated every aspect of the painter's life. His social contacts and family rapport, his successive choice of careers, his aesthetic theories, and, inevitably, his intellectual development, seem to a large extent to have been conditioned by authors and books - the first and foremost of which was the Bible. Nevertheless, Van Gogh's relationship to religious writings was extremely odd, for he combined a sometimes-blind faith and extreme devotion with a tendency to cite texts that profoundly questioned the very foundations of Christianity. His desire to put himself entirely in God's hands did not stop him from reading the works of Jules Michelet, Ernest Renan, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and many other authors who had expressed serious doubts about the truth of the Scriptures (fig. 1).

Nevertheless, thanks to the agency of his father, who was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, Van Gogh was raised with the greatest respect for biblical texts. What he may have retained the most from this education, however, from his earliest years, was that books were a source of invaluable knowledge, and that there was a text to justify, or at least explain, every event, every action and every situation.

In this context it is not surprising that Van Gogh used his readings to validate, explain and illustrate the activity that would bring him immense posthumous glory, that of painting. As he himself wrote in a famous letter, his first in French: ‘If you now can forgive a man for considering pictures in greater depth, [you can] admit besides that the love of books is as sacred as that of [loving] Rembrandt, and I even think that the two complement each other’ [154/133] (fig. 2).

The notion that some literary theory, school or specific movement fundamentally conditioned Van Gogh's painting is not, however, tenable. Although the artist certainly compared everything around him and everything that concerned him with what he
was reading, analysis of this comparison does not foster greater understanding of the man and his work unless one appreciates *how* Van Gogh read.
It should also be remembered that the ideas circulating in the age to which Van Gogh belonged did not emanate from just a few limited sources. On the contrary, the cultural and intellectual context in which these ideas emerged should be regarded as a milieu in ferment, characterised by an extraordinary dynamism, subject to numerous influences and stimulated by continual interaction. For example, Van Gogh certainly read and admired naturalist literature, in particular that of Emile Zola.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Nothing could be less surprising. But is it really appropriate to compare Zola's naturalism with Van Gogh's works, in order to prove that the one influenced the other?

Reading the literature of one's age, even literature one deeply admires, does not necessarily mean one is influenced by it. And inevitable analogies prove nothing - save that one artist is a contemporary of another. Even if Van Gogh found novel and original ideas in Zola's work, ones that may have caused him to investigate new and unexplored intellectual areas, he certainly did not read Zola in the same way as Zola wrote. It is therefore far more appropriate to consider the specific characteristics of Van Gogh's style of reading, and to attempt to comprehend the effect of the prisms and distortions that made up his intellectual reading spectacles, than to compare raw products created by artists of such differing temperaments, careers and education.

In *Avant et après* (1903), Paul Gauguin wrote that ‘Daudet, de Goncourt [and] the Bible burned that Dutchman's brains.’ Indeed. And the nature and intensity of that fire should certainly be considered, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the ideas Van Gogh derived or encountered during his reading.

In attempting to follow the evolutions and perturbing convulsions of Vincent van Gogh's mind, it is therefore essential to establish what he was reading and how he was reading it, as well as what he was not reading. Joris-Karl Huysmans proves a striking example. Although Van Gogh had read works by Huysmans, and even judged
him one of the most important writers of the period, he viewed the author as a member of the naturalist school, like Zola. In so doing, Van Gogh missed the most important aspect of Huysman's work. Significantly, he probably did not read any of the author's decadent work, and if he did, he entirely failed to notice the difference between Les soeurs Vatard and En ménage. Moreover, Van Gogh makes no reference in his correspondence to A rebours (1884), a book which profoundly marked his contemporaries and represented a brutal break with naturalism.2

Nor does Van Gogh refer to any poets of his time. At the age of around 20 he had certainly mentioned several celebrities of sentimental romanticism, poets who had been all the rage some 40 years before and whose work seeped down to him in lingering traces through the moral filters of what was ‘done’ and ‘not done.’ At no point, however, does he plunge into the unfathomable depths of the innovative poetry produced by his contemporaries. The artist refers neither to Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, nor to Stéphane Mallarmé. Charles Baudelaire barely merits a

2 This work is sometimes referred to as ‘le livre jaune’ (for example in Oscar Wilde's Picture of Dorian Gray, 1890), an allusion to the characteristic yellow cover of modern French novels. A rebours is regarded as the manifesto of the decadent movement, which fiercely opposed Zola's school of naturalism.
mention - and a grudging one at that, in which Van Gogh declares that the poet had understood nothing about Rembrandt. As for the writers of the Enlightenment, Vincent quotes prolifically from *Candide* and proclaims his admiration for Denis Diderot, but appears to have been oblivious to the existence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu. The artist was very fond of Victor Hugo, but ignored everything by François-René de Chateaubriand. These omissions are very telling, since they reveal that Van Gogh was only interested in material he could apply to his own life. Having learned at an early age to use texts to justify his actions, his points of view and his decisions, it was natural for the artist, in the pursuit of pleasure and intellectual development, to consider only those writings that he might utilise on his chosen path, as guides, manuals and defences. Thus, the literary panorama that emerges from Vincent van Gogh's correspondence should be regarded as the mirror of his intellect, rather than the source of his ideas.

Unlike Gauguin, Van Gogh never wrote anything he intended for publication. Although he wrote a great deal - with passion and integrity, employing striking, often well-chosen language - this is not enough to make an author of him. What is certain, however, is that he endeavoured to live what he called ‘the life of an artist,’ and that the status which he accorded to writing in this life was so great that it is impossible to explain other aspects of his existence - such as his relationship with Gauguin - without exploring his literary mind.

**Justifications**

It is useful to recall several events in Van Gogh's life and to highlight the role that literature played on these occasions. In 1881, for example, when he fell passionately in love with his cousin Kee Vos (fig. 3), literature was at the heart of the affair. This famous episode has been already expounded from a number of angles by various authors, so it is unnecessary to reconsider all the details of Van Gogh's unrequited love.\(^3\) Kee Vos energetically rejected Van Gogh's insistent proposals, using words that would haunt the developing painter for many months to come: ‘nooit, neen, nimmer’ (‘never, no, never ever’) [153/177]. This triple refusal, intended to deny Van Gogh any hope of seeing their relationship take a positive turn, did not discourage the young man from Brabant. On the contrary. He countered her ‘nooit, neen, nimmer’ with two phrases that

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\(^3\) All Van Gogh's biographers have extensively described and commented on this edifying episode. In order to obtain a fair impression of the affair, however, readers are advised to restrict themselves to Vincent van Gogh's correspondence from March to December 1881.

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seemed to him to negate all problems: ‘she, and no-one else,’ and ‘love more.’ The latter phrase is a quotation from *L'amour* (1858), a work by Michelet (fig. 4). Van Gogh constructed a dense and abstruse chain of reasoning around these quotations, which seemed to him entirely logical. From March to December 1881 his main concern was to convince Theo, his family and every individual who was more or less involved in the matter that the only truth was his contention that he and Kee should marry.

Many of the arguments he used to weave the chaotic fabric of his reasoning were drawn from Michelet's *L'amour*. Van Gogh regarded the renowned historian as an authority, a specialist in matters of the heart, whose opin-
ions were synonymous with truth. According to Van Gogh, Michelet's advice was ‘immediately applicable to this wearing modern life,’ and his books were a modern gospel that could guide him along life's difficult path. Nevertheless, Van Gogh only selected those passages in *L'amour* that he could use to serve his purpose, thereby ignoring the rest of the work, in which there is no suggestion, as one might easily guess, that it was possible to force one human being to love another.

Unfortunately for Van Gogh, Kee's feelings did not evolve in the direction he had expected. It was quite the opposite. Although this setback might have led him to admit that his interpretation of Michelet's thinking was incorrect, or simply that Michelet himself was wrong, it did not. Van Gogh continued to idolise Michelet, judging his family too narrow-minded to understand that his love for Kee would have brought her the most natural kind of happiness, if only he had been allowed the opportunity to meet her and thus convince her of it. Van Gogh even began to think that his own father, his former role model and example, understood nothing of human relationships, and he did not hesitate to state this openly. In a letter to Theo, he wrote: ‘I told Father bluntly that, given the facts, I would rather stick to Michelet's advice than his, and should choose which of the two I would follow’ [149/184].

This episode clearly shows the position occupied by literature in Van Gogh's life and mind: a dominant one, but cast in the mould - through selective references in his letters - that he wished to give it in order to best serve his interests. Although it is impossible to judge to what extent Van Gogh's use of literature was conscious, it was undeniably strategic in nature. He was not emotionally affected by literature; neither did he use it as therapy or simply to pass the time. He was an active reader, who used and applied the materials that could benefit his varying causes.

Another episode, or rather a step in the evolution of the painter's life - the loss of his faith - is very revealing of the way Van Gogh used the texts he knew. Before deciding to become an artist, his reading of the Bible was marked by an unbridled enthusiasm verging on fanaticism. It is known that he endeavoured to live a life of humility, denial and sacrifice, in order to draw as close as possible to Jesus Christ. 4 What Van Gogh absorbed most from Christ's teachings was the message than in Him everything was new: Christ forgave and consoled. This divine consolation allowed believers to be ‘sorrowful yet always rejoicing,’ 5 because ‘Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.’ 6

When Van Gogh found himself without employment in the Borinage, his faith declined and he seems to have abandoned this rather literal interpretation of the Bible. After dozens of letters amounting to little more than strings of biblical quotations, his correspondence suddenly ceases to contain any such references at all. But although the artist abandoned the Scriptures, he did not abandon his approach to reading. As his fruitless attempt to obtain the heart and hand of his cousin shows, he simply transferred his literal, selective and ardent interpretation of the Bible to other works in which he found material of use to him.

Thus, when Van Gogh set off down the path of art, he sought to support his choices with meticulously selected literary extracts. For example, in 1883, while endeavouring

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4 This aspect was particularly commented on by Johanna Van Gogh-Bonger in the preface to *Brieven aan zijn broeder*, Amsterdam 1914.
5 See for example letter 74/88 and John 16:16-24 or II Corinthians 6:10.
to improve his drawing skills in The Hague, he found a great deal of comfort in *Le peuple* (1846), another book by Michelet. He considered it a superb model, one that demonstrated that art was not inevitably associated with refinement: a rough sketch, such as *Le peuple*, was just as admirable as the French historian's more finished works [266/324]. This was Van Gogh's response to any remarks or criticism regarding the rough, unfinished or hasty appearance of his own drawings.

At a later stage, Van Gogh would find more explicit elements of aesthetic theory in naturalist literature, in particular in the work of Edmond and Jules de Concourt, Huysmans, Zola, Alphonse Daudet and Guy de Maupassant, and put these to use. His discovery of this movement led him to develop the view that art was ‘man added to nature,’ representing reality in the most objective manner possible but also taking account of the fact that the artist's intervention is necessarily accompanied by a certain degree of subjectivity, and that artistic representation is conditioned by the specific characteristics of the artist's personality. As Van Gogh wrote in 1888: ‘Am reading Pierre and Jean de Guy de Maupassant. It's fine - have you read the preface explaining the freedom which the artist has to exaggerate, to create a nature [that is] more lovely, more simple [and] more comforting in a novel [...]’ [470/589] (fig. 5).

Zola called this essential freedom ‘temperament,’ an unfortunate choice of term, but appropriate in the case of Van Gogh, whose temperament effectively conditioned his artistic production, as it conditioned other aspects of
his life. Van Gogh thus found a new defence, a new justification in naturalist theory: modern French authors, whom his family had entirely failed to understand, thought it possible to be an artist only by interpreting reality through temperament. This, however, was Van Gogh's own conception of naturalism. The fact that he herewith overlooked its most fundamental aspects did not bother him in the least: heredity, background - Van Gogh had no time for these. What mattered to him was being able to pursue his own course while brandishing the new flag of naturalism - a modern, scientific theory. In his relationship with his brother, Van Gogh was a shrewd strategist, using literature to demonstrate in pseudo-scholarly turns of phrase, erudite terms and with lashings of literary reference, that his acts and choices were correct.

Of course, Van Gogh was not a naturalist in the true sense. He preferred the simple stories of Erckmann-Chatrian and the novels of Charles Dickens to the literary experiments of the de Goncourt brothers, who only described relentless misfortune. Van Gogh admired exaggerated characters, with no psychological depth, such as Daudet's Tartarin or Voltaire's Candide. He was not interested in what actually lay at the heart of naturalism, at its core. He even admitted this himself: ‘At present I am finally reading *L’immortel* by Daudet, which I think very fine but hardly comforting. I believe I shall be obliged to read a book about elephant hunting or a totally fallacious book of categorically impossible adventures by Gustave Armand, for example, in order to overcome the distress in which *L’immortel* will leave me. Precisely because it is so fine and so true in showing the emptiness of the civilised world. I should say, however, that I prefer his Tartarin as a real force’ [530/676].

Although ‘fine and […] true,’ *L’immortel* is, in fact, depressing. And this is precisely what Van Gogh feared in matters of art. *Tartarin de Tarascon*, on the other hand, gave him the comfort he sought in a work of art, through simplification and caricature.
Beauty and reality: the ‘type’

In their respective creative processes, Zola and Van Gogh both sought an aesthetic emotion - which Van Gogh prosaically called ‘beauty’ - born of the encounter between reality and art. The artist is set apart by his capacity to communicate the sensation of beauty he has experienced, through great technical skill and an ability to extract from reality that which is characteristic. Thus, for both Van Gogh and Zola, reality and beauty were indissociable concepts in matters of art. It was not a question of faithfully reproducing reality, but of obtaining representative models from the world at large. Artistic emotion then grew out of the reader or viewer's recognition of these models. For Zola, the key was objectivity; for Van Gogh consolation.

The reality Van Gogh sought in the works of art he saw and produced was superior to reality itself. It was a transcendent reality. In a letter [133/154] written during his time in the Borinage, he expressed the idea that what great artists had in common, beyond the limits of art or literature, was their ability to present a reality that was ‘more real’ than reality itself. Van Gogh remained faithful to this idea, and to the desire to surpass reality in order to show the beauty of it, until the end of his artistic career. Logically, he refused to detach himself completely from the world of objects, as Gauguin suggested during their time together in the Yellow House in Arles. Van Gogh intended to exaggerate, but not to betray reality. During the last year of his life he wrote: ‘Aurier's article would encourage me, if I were to dare to let myself go, to take more risks and go beyond reality and do things with colour like a tonal piece of music, in the same way as certain Monticellis. But trueness to life is so dear to me, striving to create what is true to life, too, that after all I believe, I believe I still prefer to be a cobbler than a musician, with colours’ [626/855] (fig. 6).

Van Gogh had a highly personal recipe for conjuring up this ‘dear reality’ - the notion of the type. This term first appears in his correspondence during the period in which he began drawing the Walloon miners, in 1879, at which point he had not yet mentioned a single naturalist work [126/147]. In June of the same year, he
formulated a theory on the way to render reality through artistic means: ‘I know no better definition of the word Art than this, Art is man added to nature, reality [and] truth, but with a meaning, with a point of view, [and] with a character which the artist brings out and to which he gives expression, which he extricates, disentangles, releases [and] clarifies’ [130/151]. The final occurrence of the word ‘type’ in his correspondence appears in a letter written at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, in January 1890: ‘To give an idea of Provence it is essential to do several more canvases of cypress trees and mountains. The ravine and another canvas of mountains with foreground path are the types for this. [...] It has taken me all this time to observe the character of the pine trees, cypresses etc, in the pure air here, the lines that do not change and which one finds at every step’ [622/838].

Van Gogh also wrote that he thought it ‘very interesting’ [448/559] that both Daudet and Turgenev shared the idea of using different models to create a single entity, a standard model or type. Once again, Van Gogh did not derive this idea from the authors themselves: he simply encountered in their writings what he himself was already thinking, thereby finding confirmation for his opinions.

What Van Gogh expected to find in the books he read and the pictures he viewed was a ‘type’ that characterised an aspect of reality. This is also what he endeav-
oured to reproduce in his own work, by exaggerating the most striking features of his surroundings. Undoubtedly this is also the way in which he eventually grasped reality, that ‘dear reality’ which was not, however, ‘real life...’ He thus painted Patience Escalier not as a Provençal shepherd, but as the archetypal Provençal shepherd. Beneath Van Gogh's brush, the Roulin family members are merely a representation of French types, of secondary interest as individuals in themselves. Eugène Boch is ‘the poet,’ Madame Ginoux the Arlésienne... suitable representatives, characteristic of a category.

The life of an artist

During his first weeks in Arles, Van Gogh wrote: ‘Morals, moreover, seem to me less inhuman and contrary to nature than in Paris. But with my temperament, having a wild time and working are not at all compatible, and in the given circumstances [one] should make do with making pictures. Which is not happiness and not real life but what do you expect? Even this artistic existence, which we know is not the real one, seems to me so full of life [that] it would be ungrateful not to make do with it’ [480/604].

In other words, Van Gogh had left Paris and its bustle in order to live the life of an artist. In his mind, this implied artistic views, artistic impressions and artistic discussions, without any interruption other than to sleep. He thus created for himself an intense and feverish existence, into which he plunged with delight. He arrived in the Midi as much a stranger to Arles as he was to ‘real life’; inevitably, he resorted to literary means to describe his surroundings: ‘the zouaves, the bordellos, the adorable little Arlésienne girls going to their first communion, the priest in a surplice who resembles a dangerous rhinoceros, the absinthe drinkers, also seem to me beings from another world’ [470/589].

Living an ‘artist's life’ was Van Gogh's own idea. It cannot be associated with any specific influence, nor is it attributable to a particular author, as had so often been the case when he took pains with his writing or was busy defending an original point of view. No text inspired this notion of taking a deliberate step outside reality. This remarkable step, free and authoritative in itself, is the missing piece of the puzzle that explains Van Gogh's conduct as a reader and man of letters: he was not, in fact, dependant on his literary sources. Of course, when he needed to justify an important choice, or had to explain some action that could potentially cause problems, particularly for Theo, his financial and moral support, he turned to ‘the greats.’ But in Arles he began to display a maturity and an assurance in his writing that had previously been lacking. As a result of his intention to ‘learn to read as one should learn to see and to live’ [133/154], Van Gogh now proclaimed his ideas loudly and often joyously described his surroundings, reducing them to a simplified environment peopled by ‘types’ whom he distinguished and seemed to appraise with the greatest of ease in this strange new world.

In Arles, Van Gogh no longer restricted himself to comparing his natural and social environment with literature, but also describes it in a highly personal and extraordinarily literary manner, stepping far beyond the framework of a pure exchange.
of information and using literary language to communicate his thoughts and impressions. The artist's writing perfectly exemplifies the consequence of adding man to nature: he was never as animated as when endeavouring to put into words something he considered 'typical.'

In his letters from Arles, Van Gogh describes Gauguin (who was still in Brittany) in a manner that is clearly not exempt from this specific way of apprehending reality. What Van Gogh describes is a man he could not see, and whom he in essence did not really know. This did not prevent him from considering Gauguin a very close friend, however. He could only envisage Gauguin via memories of moments spent in the company of other artists in Paris, and through the few letters his colleague had sent to him.

Van Gogh and Gauguin

Gauguin's first two letters to Vincent, written in February (fig. 7) and March 1888, were polite, measured and respectful. Although Gauguin began his missives with 'Mon cher Vincent,' he displayed little interest in his correspondent. His remarks were essentially centred on Theo, the art dealer in charge of selling his canvases.

In May of the same year, Van Gogh wrote a letter in a very familiar tone, which he first sent to Theo by way of precaution. If Theo approved of his strategy, he was to send the missive on to Gauguin. In this letter, Van Gogh uses extremely familiar language, addressing Gauguin with the familiar ‘tu,’ calling him ‘mon copain’ and inviting him to come to Arles, where they would live like monks (with the occasional visit to the brothel). There
were many elements in the letter that assumed an already close relationship between the two artists. It seems unlikely Gauguin ever read this letter. Theo must have decided not to forward it to him, undoubtedly because he considered its language too abrupt. Gauguin's next missive is dated July. Although it concludes with the expression 'a fond hand,' the language is far removed from the camaraderie Van Gogh had displayed two months previously. Obviously, the latter had overestimated the degree of familiarity he could employ when addressing Gauguin. In the series of letters that followed, Gauguin and Van Gogh called each other 'vous' and showed at most the conventional tokens of friendship.

During the period of his correspondence with Gauguin, Vincent also wrote prolifically to Theo, his sister Wil and his friend Emile Bernard. These letters contain numerous references to Gauguin. However, the way in which the artist describes his 'pal's' projected stay in Arles owes much to his imagination. In fact, in the Dutchman's overactive fantasy there developed a complete fiction of a harmonious rapport between two individuals, a rapport that everything in the real world would obstruct. As was his custom, Van Gogh used many literary references and devices to establish this imaginary bond.

Initially, Van Gogh only imagined a simple collaboration. Gauguin, the ex-mariner, could teach Vincent how to cook, so that the two artists would spend less together than Vincent - who ate in restaurants - disbursed on his own. However, Van Gogh's expectations rapidly began to multiply. The projected collaboration went from being useful to essential. He and Gauguin would become the painters of the Midi, and Bernard would join them. They would share all their works, all their profits and losses. Van Gogh then expanded the horizons still further: instead of a collaboration between two artists, he began to talk of an entire school of painters. He expressed his conviction that Gauguin would like the countryside of Provence and the same subjects as he, Vincent, did. At any rate, living alone was to live like a criminal. He invited his sister Wil to visit when he had settled in with Gauguin. He announced that he and his friend would walk through Provence, and would stroll on the Canebière in Marseilles, with Van Gogh dressed for the occasion like Monticelli.

At the time of these reveries, Gauguin had still not clearly stated that he would even be coming to Arles. Reading between the lines, it becomes perfectly obvious that he was extremely hesitant about the trip. Feeling that his circumstances were incommensurate with his talent, however, he wrote to Vincent that they ought indeed to combine forces, if they wished their work to gain the recognition it deserved. Van Gogh thought that Gauguin had no other choice than to join him, and mentioned several years of living together in order for the two to continue the work begun by Monticelli. Bernard wrote to Vincent that he would also like to come to Arles, together with Laval and Moret, two other painters. Upon receiving this good news, Van Gogh became even more enthusiastic: although the group would now be too large to manage without a leader, this role could be adopted by Gauguin, the greatest, most intelligent, respected, talented and experienced artist among them.

It was at this point that the concept of the 'Studio of the South' was born, a project that would eventually involve four or five individuals; a project imagined by Van Gogh, who interpreted the tokens of consideration shown him and his colleagues' fanciful resolutions as actual components of a future reality. But the Yellow House was not to be the realisation of this dream, and the few weeks Vincent spent with
Gauguin can in no way lay claim to the title ‘Studio of the South.’ Van Gogh urged Gauguin to hasten to Arles, write an article with him for the local paper and meet the Félibres, the poets of Provence; he even thought Seurat might like to join them.

Reality, however, proved entirely different. When Gauguin finally arrived in Arles, one of the first things he remarked on was that the town was the dirtiest place in the south. He did not like the landscape or countryside at all, and Van Gogh unexpectedly agreed with him. The two months they spent together were at odds with everything Van Gogh had imagined. *Le personnage à la Loti*, the man who would love Provence, the seafaring friend and cook, had obviously remained in Brittany, while someone else had come to Arles in his place. The man with whom Van Gogh shared the Yellow House did not in any respect correspond to the image he had constructed of him. The two artists did not get on. They did not walk across Provence. They did not go to Marseille to stroll on the Canebière. Bernard, Laval, Moret and Seurat never joined them.

It is therefore not so surprising that Van Gogh became agitated and threw a glass at him when Gauguin announced his planned departure. The Dutchman, who had spent nearly eight months imagining all kinds of wonders,
must have spent the past six weeks suppressing his disappointment. It was not simply
incompatible temperaments that made the Arles experiment a total failure; rather, it
was the incompatibility of Van Gogh's imagination with reality that produced the
disastrous outcome. As Van Gogh himself had said, he was living the life of an artist,
outside reality. Sharing his everyday existence with Gauguin - a confrontation with
'real life' - could only be a disappointment. At the end of his tether, his ‘brain burned’;
Van Gogh was unable to cope with the immense disillusion.

Once Gauguin had left Arles, Vincent severely condemned him, describing his
‘distinguished friend’ as a deserter. At this point their friendship seemed doomed,
for there was no more friendship. After several months, however, their relationship
recovered from these wounds and was revived through letters, imagination and
distance. As Van Gogh himself wrote: ‘come on, the imagination of the south makes
friends, and between us we always have friendship’ [GAC VG/PG/743].

Imagination. Not reality. Gauguin returned to Brittany where, once again, he found
himself in need of money. He wrote to Vincent, who was happy to hear from him
and apologised for any harm he may have done to Gauguin during the troubled days
of December. Gauguin kindly set his mind - undoubtedly prompted at least in part
by his own need to keep in Theo's good graces. In the letters that followed there was
no sign of any trouble: to all appearances nothing had happened and nothing had
changed. The bond between Van Gogh and Gauguin returned to its natural habitat:
the written word.

Like a work of art, a letter can embellish, transform or soften reality. It is not intended
to convey life as it is, with all its setbacks and brutality. Under the pen of a painter
who had resolved to live the life of an artist, a letter was liable to become instead a
skilful disguise for reality, a strategic weapon, a means of recording the fiction of
Van Gogh's own existence. His friendships with Anton van Rappard (1858-1892),
Emile Bernard (1868-1941) and Gauguin all confirm this.

Van Gogh had a literary mind. His relationship with Gauguin demonstrates that
his mind and spirit were not conditioned by French naturalism, or by any other
literary, scientific or artistic theory. A product of his time, a performer of his age,
Van Gogh applied a drastic selection process to what he read, what he saw and how
he lived,
employing a system that revolved around the pursuit of the ‘type.’ In so doing, the painter displayed an unwavering single-mindedness, solidly secure in an impregnable bastion which would, however, eventually prove his undoing: a resolve, a decision to live the life of an artist, without restraint, without limits and with no other concern than to produce the marvels that have made him famous today. ‘Le copain Gauguin’ had a place in this ‘artist's life.’ But not in the Yellow House.
[Van gogh studies]

fig. 1
Hermanus Gijsbertus Tersteeg, c. 1885, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum Archives
Self-portrait between the lines: a newly discovered letter from Vincent van Gogh to H.G. Tersteeg
Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker

It looked as though it would never happen again, but an unknown letter written by Vincent van Gogh surfaced a short while ago. One would assume, because of the fame of this artist, his work and his letters, that all the private collections and archives had already been gone through with a fine-tooth comb, and yet a private collection of autographs recently yielded up a single letter that is in many respects a valuable addition to the known correspondence.

If we confine ourselves to the letters written by Van Gogh, the last, modest acquisitions date from 1990, the year in which they appeared in an expanded Dutch edition of Van Gogh’s correspondence. Since the previous, large ‘centennialedition’ of 1952-54, more than 40 new items had been added to the correspondence as a whole. The majority of these were fragments and pages that had been previously overlooked, or presumed superfluous and deliberately ignored. Several of these were definitely worthwhile, such as the sermon Van Gogh delivered in October 1876 in the church at Richmond. In addition, in the decades between these editions around a dozen new letters had surfaced; these had appeared in scattered publications, mainly during the 1960s and 1970s. They include the letters Vincent wrote to his landlord in The Hague, De Zwart (4); to Anton Kerssemakers, an amateur painter in Eindhoven (4); one letter to the painter Charles Angrand; and one to the mayor of Nuenen, Johannes van Hombergh. The only pieces of writing in the 1990 edition that could be considered new consisted of a friendly note written by Van Gogh on 7 July 1874, just before leaving for London, in a little sketchbook he made for Betsy, the daughter of H.G. Tersteeg, his former employer at Goupil & Cie. in The Hague; a letter written from Paris to his acquaintance Egbert Borchers, dated 2 September 1875; and three telegrams sent on 27 March 1885 to Theo, occasioned by the sudden collapse and subsequent death of their father, Reverend Theodorus van Gogh, in Nuenen.

In the course of the Van Gogh Letters Project, various small acquisitions have been made, but none of these have the status of complete and full-fledged ‘letters’ by Van Gogh.

3 The 1990 edition restored most of the rather long appendixes containing the literary and biblical texts Van Gogh copied out and sent with his letters. Deemed unnecessary at some point, these extracts had been omitted from previous editions.
4 In the 1990 edition these are numbers 24, 43, 490 and 491, respectively.
The new find is a two-page letter to the aforementioned Hermanus Gijsbertus Tersteeg (1845-1927; fig. 1), dated 3 August 1877 by Van Gogh himself and written in Dutch on the front and back of a single piece of paper, which is still in good condition. The sheet measures $15.2 \times 22.2$ centimetres and was written on with black ink, which has turned brown with age. It is hand-made, cream-coloured laid paper, with a total of eight chain lines with a distance between them of 2.9 centimetres; it was folded once horizontally and once vertically. The illustrations (figs. 2 and 3) are full-size reproductions. The annotated, edited text of the letter is printed at the end of this article, accompanied by an English translation.⁶

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⁶ We have interfered as little as possible with the text, limiting such intervention to places that are either incomprehensible or confusing. There are two such places in the present letter, and these are explained in the notes. Van Gogh’s punctuation is often erratic. The punctuation we have added is rendered by a, for a comma and a _ for a full stop. The translation is by Diane Webb.
fig. 2
Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Hermanus Gijsbertus Tersteeg, Amsterdam, 3 August 1877, recto, private collection
fig. 3
Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Hermanus Gijsbertus Tersteeg, Amsterdam, 3 August 1877, verso, private collection
There can be no doubt as to the letter's authenticity. The paper is identical to that of 13 other letters dating from the Amsterdam period that are preserved in the Van Gogh Museum. A batch of this fair-quality paper had been given to Van Gogh by his Uncle Cor, as Vincent enthusiastically reported to Theo when he used it for the first time. All of these sheets display the same faded black ink. The handwriting is completely in accordance with that seen on other letters written by Van Gogh at this time.

The manuscript is still in private hands. The current owner inherited it from his grandmother, who in her youth - from 1896 onward - collected autographs of well-known figures from the world of politics, the arts and literature. Her parents were acquainted with H.G. Tersteeg and his wife. Tersteeg's position in the art trade and his involvement in the artistic life of The Hague naturally meant that he corresponded extensively with famous people. From the notebook in which the young collector recorded her acquisitions, it appears that Tersteeg's wife, ‘Mrs Tersteeg,’ was one of her regular donors. Indeed, she was the one who gave the collector this letter by Van Gogh.

That this letter was preserved is all the more surprising because until now we had reason to believe that all the letters Vincent wrote to Tersteeg had been destroyed. On 25 June 1917 Tersteeg's son Johan confessed to H.E. van Gelder that one day they had needed to raise the temperature in the room by several degrees: ‘And we coolly threw two or three hundred letters from Vincent van Gogh into the central heating system when they got in our way. My father thought all that writing unimportant - don't talk, Artist, create!’

7 ‘Yesterday Uncle Cor sent me a batch of old paper, such as the sheet on which I'm writing to you. Isn't it wonderful for doing my work on?’ [114/95].
8 Archives of H.E. van Gelder (1876-1960), in the possession of his heirs, placed in the keeping of the Gemeentearchief in The Hague (inv. no. 796, 19): ‘En in koelen bloede gooiden we twee- of driehonderd brieven van Vincent van Gogh in de centrale, als ze ons in de weg
The letter presented here is therefore the only one known to have survived from what must have been a relatively long and extensive correspondence, carried on, moreover, with a man who for a number of years played a dominant role in the lives of Vincent and Theo van Gogh (fig. 4), and even served as an example to them. Both brothers worked for Tersteeg during their first years in the art trade, in the Hague branch of Goupil on the Plaats (fig. 5), and the boys also visited the family at home. It may be inferred from the tone in which Vincent wrote to Theo in his youthful years about ‘Mr Tersteeg’ that the brothers had great respect for the man who had taken a fatherly interest in them during their adolescence in The Hague, far from the warmth of their parents’ home. They learned much from him in the fields of art and literature, and they both kept in touch with him after they had gone to work elsewhere - Vincent to England and Theo to Paris. This fact emerges, for example, in a letter Vincent wrote to Theo from the English village of Isleworth (London) on 26 August 1876: ‘Herewith a note for Mr Tersteeg, the last time I wrote to him I was still in Paris and it's time I wrote again; we've always kept in touch with each other since I...”

lagen; mijn vader vond al dat geschrijf zo belangrijk niet - rede nicht Künstler; bilde!’ With thanks to Agnes van den Noort-Van Gelder in Scheveningen.

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left The Hague’ [88/74]. Moreover, their mother remarked in a letter to Theo: ‘When Vincent was home last year he let us read letters from Mr Tersteeg which he had received in London. So nice, and kind.’

Tersteeg himself could indeed be a warm and entertaining correspondent, as evidenced by a cheering note he sent to Theo, who was home sick with his parents in Etten in November 1876.\(^9\)

**Dear Theo**

It is truly a pleasure for me to see from your letter that you are making continual progress. A pity, though, that the weather has not always been kind to you: the stove will often have attracted you more than the country air. That you might feel like starting work again next Monday is thoroughly understandable, and I readily admit that you would not be unwelcome by any means; but as I told you before, it will be much better for both you and me if you come back only when you have regained your strength. I can see from your letter that this is not yet the case. It would be better for you to start by staying another week by the fleshpots of Egypt and then taking another look at your body. If your sleeves and trouser legs are no longer too wide and you feel just as strong as before, there is time enough to inform me that you are on the way. Warm regards and best wishes to you and your parents from us both.

Yours,

H.G. Tersteeg.

Although Tersteeg did not approve of Vincent's wayward behaviour after he left Goupil in 1876, when Vincent decided while in the Borinage to become an artist, Tersteeg sent him a box of paints and a sketchbook and lent him Charles Bargue's *Cours de dessin* and *Exercises au fusain* to help him master the art of drawing.\(^11\) When Van Gogh went to The Hague in 1882 to establish himself as an artist, he expected much from his earlier contact with Tersteeg, but the latter objected to Van Gogh's lifestyle (he was living with the prostitute Sien Hoornik), and

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9 Van Gogh Museum, Family Records (hereafter abbreviated as FR), 31 March 1878, b972. In the letters written before August 1877, mention is made five times of letters from Tersteeg and twice of letters to him.

10 H.G. Tersteeg to Theo van Gogh. The Hague, 9 November 1876, FR b2791

11 See letters 152/131 and 156/135.
turned away from him. Being dropped by Tersteeg was one of the most unfortunate aspects of the unhappy social circumstances in which Van Gogh found himself during these difficult years in The Hague. He and Tersteeg would never be on good terms again.

The recently discovered letter, however, dates from the time when their relations were still amiable. Vincent was prompted to write the letter by news he had had from Theo about a blow the Tersteeg family had suffered, a fact
Letter 124/104 from Vincent to Theo van Gogh, Amsterdam, 3 August 1877 (detail), Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Postscript written crosswise on the recto of the letter from Vincent van Gogh to Hermanus Gijsbertus Tersteeg (fig. 2)

we knew already from a letter Vincent had written to Theo on Friday, 3 August 1877: ‘What you write about Mr Tersteeg's loss, that his youngest child has died, moved me and I felt the need to write to him again’ [124/104] (fig. 6). We now know that Vincent was not only intending to write a letter of condolence, but that he had in fact already done so. The postscript written in the left-hand margin of the first page (fig. 7) reveals that the two letters - to both Theo and Tersteeg - were actually sent in the same envelope from Amsterdam to The Hague. That Van Gogh asked the mourning father to pass on the enclosed letter to Theo is beyond the pale by present-day standards, and was probably considered improper at the time as well. Seen in a practical light, it is understandable that Vincent should ask this - Theo and Tersteeg worked in the same building, Vincent was always short of money and sending a letter this way saved him the cost of a stamp - though his request comes across as rather indelicate.

It is not only this self-serving faux pas that is characteristic of Vincent: the rest of the letter's contents are equally revealing. During the period in question, the 24-year-old Van Gogh was living with his uncle Jan van Gogh at the naval dockyard in Amsterdam, where he was preparing to take the entrance examination to study theology. He wanted to become a clergyman, just like his father and his uncle Johannes Stricker, whom at this time he still held in great esteem. The Amsterdam letters are thus peppered with pious talk - whether derived from the Bible, Protestant hymns or rhyming psalms - since he was ultimately to become, as he himself said, a 'sower of the word.' In these years, religious faith admittedly played a dominant role in the social and personal life of the Dutch - in the letter quoted above, Tersteeg also made use of a light-hearted reference to Exodus 16:3. But Van Gogh's religious zeal was excessive, not only in the eyes of his sister Lies, who complained that her brother had gone 'daffy with piety,' but even in the eyes of their father, who confessed his concern to Theo: ‘Oh, if only he would learn to be simple like a child, and not to

12 In the months of May and June, Vincent had already asked Theo three times about the health of Mrs Tersteeg. On 24 July 1877 her daughter Marie, less than three months old, had died at The Hague (see also note 1 to the letter, below). Vincent and Theo's father, Theodorus van Gogh, had also expressed his sympathy to the couple (cf. FR b2549, 6 August 1877).

13 It is possible that this incident embarrassed Theo, or that Tersteeg spoke to him about it, because the very next day Theo sent his brother some stamps. See letter 125/105, 5 August 1877.
bandy biblical texts about in such an exaggerated and overwrought manner - it is the cause of increasing worry to us and I fear that one day he will become unfit for practical life. It is such a great pity. What are his letters to you like? If he wants to be an evangelist, he must be willing to undertake the preparation and necessary study. Then I would have more faith in it. Now, though, we have to go to bed. We are tired and not very cheerful, if only things would brighten up.’

14 Elisabeth van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Tiel, 18 August 1876, FR b2766, and Theodorus van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Etten, 8 September 1876, FR b2770. See in this context Marita Mathijsen, *De gemaskerde eeuw*, Amsterdam 2002, pp. 242-44.
At first glance the new letter is an unenlightening addition to the 30 other Amsterdam missives, which testify to an obsession with edifying and scriptural texts. But things are not what they seem here. First of all, the writer took pains to include in his condolence letter a few of the traditional ingredients, such as helping the bereaved parents to acknowledge their loss, expressing his sympathy and offering appropriate quotations. This suggests that Van Gogh did not simply write down whatever popped into his head; on the contrary, he seems to have kept his mind fixed on a preconceived rhetorical aim. On the one hand, the elaborateness of his epistle exceeded the generally accepted prescription for letters of condolence: if the friendship was not a particularly close one, it was thought best to keep the letter short. On the other, his letter did contain the formulaic elements recommended in those days: an allusion to the parents' mourning, to God's moving in mysterious ways, and a comparison to other unhappy parents who have suffered a similar ordeal. To improve its overall appearance, he went over the finished letter and made his rather pernickety handwriting more readable by tracing over many of the letters. And, what is more - and, moreover, of psychological interest - he here made a conscious attempt to compose a piece of pastoral writing, ambitiously casting himself in the role of consoling counsellor and thereby giving himself a taste of the ministry to which he aspired.

The central theme, the loss of a child, is introduced by way of Vincent's recollection of the much-admired Dordrecht minister P.M. Keller van Hoorn, who had also lost a child and could therefore serve as an example to Tersteeg. Keller van Hoorn found in religious faith the strength to bear that loss - even to see a deeper meaning in it, as befits an adherent of Protestant-Christian teachings. The biblical passages quoted by Keller van Hoorn in a sermon delivered at the time are copied out for Tersteeg in their entirety, and not only Keller van Hoorn but also such greats as King David, the prophet Elijah and Oliver Cromwell are held up to Tersteeg as examples. By way of added consolation, Van Gogh had sent the day before a comforting little book, most likely L.L.F. Bungener's *Bij het lijkje van mijn kind: drie dagen uit het leven van een*.

16 See L.F. Geerling, De Nederlandsche briefsteller, inhoudende brieven en andere opstellen over de meeste onderwerpen, die in het maatschappelijk leven gemeenlijk voorkomen, 7th ed., Gouda 1870 This book also offers a model letter 'To a friend upon the death of his child' ('Aan een Vriend bij den dood van zijn Kind'); Van Gogh's letter has little in common with the example, however
vader (‘Keeping vigil over the body of my child: three days in the life of a father’), which he says had given his own father much comfort in a similar situation.

This last bit of information is one of the most startling passages in the letter, since it is here that we find for the first time a reference by Van Gogh to his stillborn brother Vincent, born exactly one year before him (fig. 8).
There has been much speculation about the effect this event must have had on Vincent - the inevitable trauma of being a ‘replacement child’ and the influence this supposedly had on the development of his personality\(^\text{17}\) - but until now no trace of this episode was to be found in the extant documents.\(^\text{18}\) Now we see Vincent pausing to reflect on what had taken place in 1852. Theodorus van Gogh was

\(^{17}\) Regarding ‘replacement children’ and the feelings of guilt supposedly felt by a second child for the death of the first, as well as the fears accompanying this syndrome later on, see Marc Edo Tralbaut, *Van Gogh: le mal aimé*, Lausanne 1969, pp. 22-23. According to Matthias Arnold, this death ‘doubtless [led] to identity problems in the second Vincent’: Arnold is convinced that Van Gogh suffered from feelings of inadequacy and thought that his parents did not love him enough. ‘The cause of this was certainly the role of substitute which had been forced upon him’; see idem, *Vincent van Gogh: Biographie*. Munich 1993, pp. 32-35. Both Tralbaut and Arnold refer approvingly to the psychoanalyst Humberto Nagera. In her biography, *Van Gogh ou l’enterrement dans les blés* (Paris 1983), Viviane Forrester takes it for granted that the young Vincent was continually confronted with his dead brother’s gravestone. Wilfred Niels Arnold questioned the value of such hypotheses - in our view rightly so - in ‘Vincent van Gogh’s birthday,’ *The Pharos of Alpha Omega Alpha* 58 (1995), no. 4, pp. 28-32.

\(^{18}\) The only known contemporary reference is an entry in the diary of Anna van Gogh-Carbentus dated 20 March 1852, from which it emerges that she was expecting the birth of her first child at any moment (document in private hands).
30 years old at the time (fig. 9); Vincent's mother, Anna Van Gogh-Carrentus, 33. They were therefore at the same stage in life as Tersteeg in 1877. The gravestone in the Zundert cemetery bears the biblical passage quoted in the letter: ‘Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of God’ (fig. 10). There is nothing to indicate that Van Gogh dwelled excessively on this event; on the contrary, he attaches to it no personal emotion or recollection. This had nothing to do with the high rate of mortality in this period, which supposedly made death more ‘normal.’

That the rate of child mortality was much higher then than it is now does not mean that there was less suffering at the loss. This is evident from the many and various outpourings of sorrow and emotion dating from the time.\(^{19}\) Moreover, it was of course the parents who were weighed down with suffering and not the baby born a year later. Until now, the only reference to this

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\(^{19}\) The mortality rate, especially of infants, was still high in the second half of the 19th century, though there were great regional differences. Of every 1,000 babies born between 1860 and 1880, around 200 died in their first year, one in five on average; the number of stillborn babies in the Netherlands in those years is not known. See E.J. Jonkers, *Beschouwingen over de oorzaken der groote kindersterfte (meer speciaal in het 1e levensjaar) en de middelen, die tot verbetering daarvan kunnen leiden. Met statistische overzichten van de huwelijken, de geboorten en de sterfte in Nederland van 1840 tot 1900*, Groningen 1903, pp. 55 and 73. Regarding expressions of mourning in the Netherlands in the 19th century, see Mathijsen, *op cit.* (note 14), pp. 104-31.
event in the letters was a very indirect one: Vincent mentions the Zundert cemetery after he had gone there one night in April 1877 on his way to visit a dying acquaintance. Even though in such circumstances he must have been thinking about death, he does not mention the child's grave. All in all, there is no hard evidence to prove that Van Gogh was plagued by the feelings of guilt often experienced - according to some child psychologists - by ‘replacement children.’ These should not be confused, however, with the feelings of inadequacy that Van Gogh may have had later on, when he failed to live up to the expectations his parents naturally had for their eldest son.

The close of the letter affords some insight into the personality of a man who was egocentric by nature: in his typical brusque manner. Van Gogh changes the subject and jumps from condolence to his own situation. This abrupt change of tack was certainly not prescribed by the conventional formulas for such letters. Clearly, Van Gogh wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to show Tersteeg that things were going well for him in his new life, calling upon a witness - his tutor, Mendes da Costa - to supply corroborative testimony. Mentioning the arrival of his sister Anna and her fiancé was also a way of showing that he was perfectly capable of making his way in the world. Whether Tersteeg was in the mood for such talk is questionable. The sentence at the end - ‘Do not think ill of me for writing to you as I have done, I felt the need to do it’ - cannot be considered a closing dictated by the conventions of the genre. And the laconic request in the margin even less so.

Van Gogh cannot be approached more closely than through his letters. Though they are not always unqualified self-portraits, they usually betray a contour or a bit of background, point out a few highlights or draw attention to some shadows, or add a finishing touch. This unexpected relic of the correspondence with Tersteeg, an important person in Van Gogh's life, has added biographical and psychological depth to an already exceptional corpus of letters.

Text (for notes see pp. 109-11)

Vincent van Gogh to Hermanus Gijsbertus Tersteeg, Amsterdam, Friday, 3 August 1877.

Amsterdam 3 Augustus 1877

Waarheer Tersteeg,

Uit het laatste schrijven van Theo' hoorde ik van Uw verlies en het is mij behoefte U een woordje te schrijven.

‘Zoo wie niet heeft liefgehad die heeft God niet gekend want God is Liefde’, 2 over die woorden hoorde ik D’ Keller van Hoorn te Dordrecht, een oud vriend van mijn

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20 See letter 111/91-91a, 8 April 1887.
1 Marie Tersteeg died in The Hague on 24 July 1877. She was the third child of Hermanus Gijsbertus Tersteeg (1845-1927) and Maria Magdalena Alida Tersteeg-Pronk (1845-1925), the girl was born on 2 May 1877 (The Hague, Gemeentearchief; see also FR 62547 and h2548, 1 and 2 August 1877).
2 ‘He that is love’: 1 John 4:8.

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Vader, preekten op een Zondagavond, enige dagen na het overlijden van zijne dochter.  
- Hij zeide: wat mij bij dezen slag, den gevoeligsten die mij ooit heeft getroffen versterkte en staande hield, was het geloof in mijn God, zonder dat kan ik niet leven,  
- mijn troost vond ik ook nu weer in den rijken schat van Zijn woord. Onwillekeurig sloeg hij den Bijbel die vòòr Hem lag op en wel, als doorleefde hij dat oogenblik van zielssmart opnieuw, op dezelfde plaatsen als toen. n.l.

En David zocht God voor dat jongsk, toen zijn kind zeer krank was, 4 en ging in 5 en lag den nacht over op de aarde. Toen maakten de oudsten van zijn huis zich op tot hem, om hem te doen opstaan van de aarde, maar hij wilde niet en at geen brood met hen. - En het geschiedde op den zevenden dag dat het kind stierf en Davids knechten vreesden hem aan te zeggen dat het kind dood was want zij zeiden: Zie als het kind levend was spraken wij tot hem maar hij hoorde naar onze stem niet, hoe zullen wij dan tot hem zeggen: het kind is dood, want het mogt kwaad doen. Maar David hoorde dat zijne knechten mompelden, zoo merkte David dat het kind dood was, en hij zeide tot zijne knechten: is het kind dood? En zij zeiden: het is dood. Toen stond David op van de aarde en wiesch en zalfde zich en veranderde zijne kleeding en ging in het huis des Heeren en bad aan, daarna kwam hij in zijn huis

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3 On Sunday, 21 January 1877, Vincent had written to Theo about this sermon given by Petrus Marinus Keller van Hoorn (1825-1908) [101/84]. During his time in Dordrecht, Van Gogh frequented ministers who adhered to the ethical or ‘modern’ movement in the Dutch Reformed Church (Hervormde Gemeente). Keller van Hoorn was one such minister. The minister, his wife Maria Sophia Singels, and their children placed an obituary in the Dordrechtse Courant on Saturday, 6 January 1877: ‘Our dear Willem died today peacefully; he would have been eight years old on Sunday, Dordrecht, 5 January 1877.’ Van Gogh was therefore mistaken about the child's sex.

4 The phrase ‘when his child was very sick’ was taken by Van Gogh from the previous verse and inserted here in the place of ‘and David fasted.’

5 ‘went in’: Van Gogh wrote only ‘went’ (ging); the Bible says ‘went in’ (ging in).
en eischte brood en zij zette den hem brood voor en hij at. Toen zeiden zijne knechten: wat is dit voor een ding dat gij gedaan hebt. om des levenden kinds wil hebt gij gevast en geweend maar nadat het kind gestorven is zijt gij opgestaan en hebt brood gegeten. En hij zeide, Als het kind nog leefde heb ik gevast en geweend want ik zeide: wie weet de Heer zoude mij mogen genadig zijn, dat het kind levend bleve. Maar nu is het dood, waarom zoude ik nu vasten, zal ik hem nog kunnen wederhalen? ik zal wel tot hem gaan maar hij zal tot mij niet wederkomen.  

En verder 1 Kon XIX:3-15 Toen Elia dat zag maakte hij zich op, en ging henen, om zijns levens wil, en kwam te Berseba dat in Juda is, en liet zijnen jongen aldaar. Maar hijzelf ging in de woestijn eene dagreis, en kwam en zat onder eenen jeneverboom, en bad, dat zijne ziel stierf, en zeide: Het is genoeg, neem nu Heer mijne ziel. Want ik ben niet beter dan mijne vaderen. En hij leide zich neder, en sliep onder den jeneverboom, en zie toen roerde een Engel hem aan, en zeide tot hem, sta op, eet! En hij zag om, en zie, aan zijn hoofdeneinde was een koek op kolen gebakken, en eene flesch met water, alzoo at hij, en dronk, en leide zich wederom neder. En de Engel des Heeren kwam ten anderen male weder en roerde hem aan en zeide: Sta op, eet! want de weg zoude voor u te veel zijn. Zoo stond hij op, en at, en dronk en hij ging door de kracht dezer spijis, veertig dagen en veertig nachten, tot aan den berg Gods, Horeb.  


Toen deed hij den Bijbel weer digt en sprak lang en met onbeschrijvelijk veel gevoel hoe onze dagen en levensomstandigheden wel anders zijn dan die van David en Elia maar hoe toch hun God niet verre is van een iegelijk onzer en er ook voor ons versterking is van Boven, als wij zwak zijn dan zijn wij krachtig, uit den

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6 ‘David therefore .. return to me’: 2 Samuel 12:16-23.
7 ‘And when ... thy way’: 1 Kings 19:3-15. At this time Van Gogh was very interested in this passage, which occupied his thoughts even outside this context, as evidenced by the fact that he had already copied it out for Theo at least twice, in letter 85/72 as well as in letter 118/99.
8 ‘for when ... we strong’: 2 Corinthians 12:10. Vincent wrote ‘krachtig’ (strong) instead of the ‘machtig’ (powerful) given by the Dutch Statenvertaling, but in fact this accords with the ‘strong’ of the King James Version.
overvloed zijns harten sprak zijn mond,9 de woorden vielen van Zijne lippen als de sneeuw of den regen van den hemel valt,10 het een volgende op het ander, dat was het, het geloof. - Zij hebben een eigenaardigen klank die woorden op zulk een uur uit zulk een mond: Ik ben de opstanding en het leven, die in Mij geloof zal leven al ware hij ook gestorven, en een iegelijk die leeft en in Mij geloof zal niet sterven in eeuwigheid._ Geloof je dat?11 En ook dat andere woord: Het is niet gestorven maar het slaapt. -12

Mijn Vader heeft ook gevoeld wat dezer dagen in U zal zijn omgegaan, onlangs stond ik nog des morgens vroeg bij het grafje op het kerkhof te Zundert waarop staat: Laat de kinderkens tot Mij komen want derzulken is het koningrijk Gods.13 Het is nu ruim 25 jaar geleden sedert Hij Zijn eerste jongsken daar begroef, in die dagen trof Hem een boek van Bungener14 dat ik U gisteren zond, denkende het een boek ook naar Uw hart zou zijn. Alle dingen zullen medewerken ten goede dengenen die God liefhebben,15 dat heeft Hij (mijn Vader n.l.)16 wel ondervonden, en bij alles wat Hem zalven en zijnen kinderen wederover is Hij steeds gaandeweg sterker geworden tot nu toe, en heeft zijn geloof zich vaster geworteld, dat er een band is die ons nooit loslaat zelfs dan wanneer wij het meeste lijden, de band van Gods liefde.

10 ‘as the snow ... from heaven’: a paraphrase of Isaiah 55:10.
11 ‘I am ... thou this?’: John 11:25-26.
12 ‘She is ... but sleepeth’: Mark 5:39; cf. Luke 8:52.
13 ‘Suffer the ... of God’: Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16. On 30 March 1852, exactly one year before Vincent's birth, his mother had given birth to a stillborn child, whom they named Vincent. (See Jan Huiskes, Lotgenoten: het leven van Vincent en Theo van Gogh, Weesp 1985, pp. 21-22, or the revised version: Vincent and Theo van Gogh: a dual biography, Ann Arbor 1990, pp. 5-6.) Van Gogh's visit to the Zundert cemetery had taken place early in the morning of Sunday, 8 April 1877, as emerges from his description of it in letter 111/91-91a, in which he does not explicitly mention the child's grave: ‘It was still very early when I arrived at the cemetery in Zundert, where it was so quiet, I went to have a look at all the old places and paths and waited for the sun to rise. You know the story of the Resurrection, everything reminded me of it that morning in that quiet cemetery.’
14 Although Van Gogh says that his father found comfort at the time of his son's death (in 1852) in a work by the French writer Laurence Louis Félix Bungener (1804/1814-1874), he is surely here referring to a book that was not published until 11 years later, in 1863, namely Bij het lijkje van mijn kind: drie dagen uit het leven van een vader (‘Keeping vigil over the body of my child: three days in the life of a father’), translated by W.G. Brill, Amsterdam 1863. The original version is entitled Trois jours de la vie d'un père: quelques pages intimes, Paris & Geneva 1863. This consolatory volume, which is eminently suited to comforting bereaved parents, is the only work in Bungener’s oeuvre that would have been appropriate to the occasion. The Dutch translator speaks in the foreword of the ‘outpourings [.] of a deeply moved father's heart,’ and Bungener himself says in his introduction: ‘I would like to offer my sympathy to all those hearts that have been similarly wounded. But it will, I hope, not be idle sympathy; if I tell them frankly about my weakness, I shall also tell them where I have found strength, and perhaps it will do a number of them some good’ (p. 2). Bij het lijkje van mijn kind was written in the form of a diary covering the time from the death of Madeleine, the writer’s daughter, until the leave-taking beside the grave three days later.

15 ‘All things ... love God’: Romans 8:28.
16 ‘(namely my Father)’: Van Gogh added these words later; the parentheses were added by the editors.
Toen Cromwell\textsuperscript{17} bij het lijkje van zijn jongske stond en als het ware een zwaard hem door de ziel ging,\textsuperscript{18} versterkte hem het woord: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and know how to abound, every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need_ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philip IV:11-13)\textsuperscript{19}
Ben nu ongeveer 3 maanden aan de studie van Latijn en Grieksch en mijn meester Mendes da Costa, zeide dezer dagen toen ik hem er naar vroeg dat wij zoover gekomen waren als hij gemeend had wij komen zouden in dien tijd indien ik voor studie geschikt was, dus ben ik niet zonder hoop en ga met goed vertrouwen, met iets van het oud vertrouwen van dag tot dag voort. - Vandaag komt mijne zuster Anna met den aanstaanden zwager te Amsterdam en ben niet weinig verlangend naar hen. - Duid het mij ten goede ik U zoo schrijf als ik doe, het was mij behoefte mijne hartelijke groete aan Mevrouw en aan Betsy en geloof mij met een handdruk in gedachten aan U allen

Yours truly
Vincent

Wilt U zoo goed zijn het ingesloten briefje aan Theo te geven. -

English translation

Amsterdam, 3 August 1877

Dear Mr Tersteeg,

Theo told me of your loss in his last letter, and I feel the need to write a few words to you.

‘He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is Love,’ I heard Rev. Keller van Hoorn, an old friend of my Father, deliver a sermon on this text in Dordrecht one Sunday evening, a few days after the death of his daughter. He said: what has given me strength and kept me going after this, the most crushing blow I have ever been dealt, was faith in my God, without which I cannot live - I found comfort yet again

20 Maurits Benjamin Mendes da Costa (1851-1938) was a private tutor of classical languages in Amsterdam.
21 ‘the faith of old’: translated from the Dutch rhyming psalm 42:7.
22 Van Gogh’s eldest sister Anna Cornelia van Gogh (1855-1930) and her fiancé Joan Marius van Houten (1850-1945), manufacturer of shell lime. They married on 22 August 1878.
23 Vincent had made for Betsy (Elisabeth) Tersteeg (1869-1938), the eldest child, a little sketchbook containing five drawings, in which he also wrote a ‘letter’ on 7 July 1874 from Helvoirt (24/- and Van Gogh Museum, inv. no. d 410 V/1965).
1 Marie Tersteeg died in The Hague on 24 July 1877. She was the third child of Hermanus Gijsbertus Tersteeg (1845-1927) and Maria Magdalena Alida Tersteeg-Pronk (1845-1925), the girl was born on 2 May 1877 (The Hague, Gemeentearchief; see also FR 62547 and b2548, 1 and 2 August 1877).
2 ‘He that is love’: 1 John 4:8.
3 On Sunday, 21 January 1877, Vincent had written to Theo about this sermon given by Petrus Marinas Keller van Hoorn (1825-1908) [101/84]. During his time in Dordrecht, Van Gogh frequented ministers who adhered to the ethical or ‘modern’ movement in the Dutch Reformed Church (Hervormde Gemeente). Keller van Hoorn was one such minister. The minister, his wife Maria Sophia Singels, and their children placed an obituary in the Dordrechtse Courant on Saturday, 6 January 1877: ‘Our dear Willem died today peacefully; he would have been eight years old on Sunday. Dordrecht, 5 January 1877.’ Van Gogh was therefore mistaken about the child’s sex.
in the great riches of His words. He couldn't help opening the Bible that lay before him and, as though reliving that moment of heartbreak, hit upon the same passage as then, namely:

David therefore besought God for the child, when his child was very sick, 4 and went in, 5 and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. 6

And also 1 Kings XIX:3-15: And when Elijah saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto

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4 The phrase ‘when his child was very sick’ was taken by Van Gogh from the previous verse and inserted here in the place of ‘and David fasted.’
5 ‘went in’: Van Gogh wrote only ‘went’ (ging); the Bible says ‘went in’ (ging in).
6 ‘David therefore .. return to me’: 2 Samuel 12:16-23.
him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him. What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way.7

Then he closed the Bible and spoke at length and with incredible feeling about how our days and circumstances are different from those of David and Elijah, yet their God is not far from each and every one of us, and for us, too, there comes strength from Above, for when we are weak, then are we strong,8 his mouth spoke from the abundance of the heart,9 the words fell from his lips as the snow or the rain cometh down from heaven,10 one thing followed another, this was it, faith. Those words have a special sound coming at such moments from such lips: I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever

7 ‘And when ... thy way’: 1 Kings 19:3-15. At this time Van Gogh was very interested in this passage, which occupied his thoughts even outside this context, as evidenced by the fact that he had already copied it out for Theo at least twice, in letter 85/72 as well as in letter 118/99.
8 ‘for when ... we strong’: 2 Corinthians 12:10. Vincent wrote ‘krachtig’ (strong) instead of the ‘machtig’ (powerful) given by the Dutch Statenvertaling, but in fact this accords with the ‘strong’ of the King James Version.
10 ‘as the snow ... from heaven’: a paraphrase of Isaiah 55:10.
liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believeth thou this?¹¹ And those other words too: She is not dead, but sleeppeth.¹²

My Father has also felt what you will have been feeling these past days. I recently stood early one morning in the cemetery at Zundert next to the little grave on which is written: Suffer the little children to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of God.¹³ More than 25 years have passed since he buried his first little boy there, in those days he was moved by a book by Bungener¹⁴ which I sent to you yesterday, thinking it would be a book after your own heart. All things will work together for good to them that love God,¹⁵ this has been his (namely my Father's)¹⁶ experience at least, and in everything that has befallen him and his children he has until now grown gradually stronger, and his faith has taken root more firmly, so that there is a bond that never lets go of us, not even when we suffer the most, the bond of God's love.

When Cromwell¹⁷ was standing by his little boy's body and a sword pierced his soul,¹⁸ as it were, these words gave him strength: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and know how to abound, every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry,

¹¹ ‘I am... thou this?’: John 11:25-26.
¹² ‘She is... but sleeppeth’: Mark 5:39; cf. Luke 8:52.
¹³ ‘Suffer the... of God’: Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16. On 30 March 1852, exactly one year before Vincent's birth, his mother had given birth to a stillborn child, whom they named Vincent. (See Jan Hulsker, Lotgenoten: het leven van Vincent en Theo van Gogh, Weesp 1985, pp. 21-22, or the revised version: Vincent and Theo van Gogh: a dual biography, Ann Arbor 1990, pp. 5-6.) Van Gogh's visit to the Zundert cemetery had taken place early in the morning of Sunday, 8 April 1877, as emerges from his description of it in letter 111/91-91a, in which he does not explicitly mention the child's grave: ‘It was still very early when I arrived at the cemetery in Zundert, where it was so quiet, I went to have a look at all the old places and paths and waited for the sun to rise. You know the story of the Resurrection, everything reminded me of it that morning in that quiet cemetery.’
¹⁴ Although Van Gogh says that his father found comfort at the time of his son's death (in 1852) in a work by the French writer Laurence Louis Félix Bungener (1804/1814-1874), he is surely here referring to a book that was not published until 11 years later, in 1863, namely Bij het lijkje van mijn kind: drie dagen uit het leven van een vader ('Keeping vigil over the body of my child: three days in the life of a father'), translated by W.G. Brill, Amsterdam 1863. The original version is entitled Trois jours de la vie d'un père: quelques pages intimes, Paris & Geneva 1863. This consolatory volume, which is eminently suited to comforting bereaved parents, is the only work in Bungener's oeuvre that would have been appropriate to the occasion. The Dutch translator speaks in the foreword of the 'outpourings [...] of a deeply moved father's heart,' and Bungener himself says in his introduction: 'I would like to offer my sympathy to all those hearts that have been similarly wounded. But it will, I hope, not be idle sympathy; if I tell them frankly about my weakness, I shall also tell them where I have found strength, and perhaps it will do a number of them some good' (p. 2). Bij het lijkje van mijn kind was written in the form of a diary covering the time from the death of Madeleine, the writer's daughter, until the leave-taking beside the grave three days later. Bungener describes his life with his daughter, how he copes with his grief, and how he finds support in his religious faith: ‘I began to realise that one day I would be reconciled to the idea that one of my children had left the parental home and was in the care of a father better than I - and it was with this thought that I could finally close my eyes’ (p. 15).
¹⁵ ‘All things... love God’: Romans 8:28.
¹⁶ ‘(namely my Father)’: Van Gogh added these words later; the parentheses were added by the editors.
¹⁷ Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658).
¹⁸ The phrase about the sword piercing the soul is derived from Jeremiah 4:10 and Luke 2:35.
both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Philip IV:11-13).\textsuperscript{19}

Have now been studying Latin and Greek for about 3 months and my tutor, Mendes da Costa,\textsuperscript{20} said a few days ago when I asked him about it that we had progressed as far as he thought we would in this amount of time if I were suited for study, so I am not without hope and I go on from day to day with good hope, with something of the faith of old.\textsuperscript{21} My sister Anna is coming to Amsterdam today with my future brother-in-law and I am looking forward not a little to seeing them.\textsuperscript{22} Do not think ill of me for writing to you as I have done, I felt the need to do it.

My warm regards to Mrs Tersteeg and Betsy\textsuperscript{23} and believe me, with a handshake in thought to all of you

Yours truly

Vincent

Would you be so good as to give the enclosed note to Theo?

\textsuperscript{19} Van Gogh borrowed this episode from the book Cromwell by the French writer Alphonse Marie Louis Prat de Lamartine (1790-1869). Here, again, he did not choose the passage specifically to fit Tersteeg's situation. A short while before, in June, he had in fact copied out a longer excerpt for Theo, in which the passage quoted here also occurs. See A.M.L.P. de Lamartine, Cromwell, Paris 1864, pp. 247-48 and letter 119/100. Lamartine also refers to this passage from Paul's epistle to the Philippians, though he quotes it in French.

\textsuperscript{20} Maurits Benjamin Mendes da Costa (1851-1938) was a private tutor of classical languages in Amsterdam.

\textsuperscript{21} 'the faith of old': translated from the Dutch rhyming psalm 42:7.

\textsuperscript{22} Van Gogh's eldest sister Anna Cornelia van Gogh (1855-1930) and her fiancé Joan Marius van Houten (1850-1945), manufacturer of shell lime. They married on 22 August 1878.

\textsuperscript{23} Vincent had made for Betsy (Elizabeth) Tersteeg (1869-1938), the eldest child, a little sketchbook containing five drawings, in which he also wrote a 'letter' on 7 July 1874 from Helvoirt (24/- and Van Gogh Museum, inv. no. d 410 V/1965).
fig. 1
Anna van Gogh-Carrentus to Theo van Gogh, Leiden, 29 December 1888, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
The illness of Vincent van Gogh: a previously unknown diagnosis
Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Erik Fokke

The enormous volume of writing inspired by Vincent van Gogh's illness ranges from mere speculation to serious attempts to gain insight into what he actually suffered from. His life was beset by difficulties, and he himself was well aware of his melancholic temperament, sensitive nature and nervous character, to which his extensive correspondence bears witness. There was friction in the Van Gogh family; several of his infatuations remained painfully one-sided; he never completed any course of education; the various jobs he had all came to nothing; and in 1882 he had to be treated for gonorrhoea in the 'citizens' hospital' in The Hague. Those around him also suffered from his overwrought state and high-strung nature. As evidenced by the extant letters, Van Gogh's non-conformity and obstinacy were frequently the subject of family correspondence, which reveals how often his parents voiced their anxiety and concern about him. They seldom mention his health, however, let alone his mental health. Generally they talked about how eccentric he was and what strange ideas he had. They also worried about his nervous exhaustion and his unfitness for practical life, and deplored his 'dejected mood.' In March 1878 Vincent's father wrote: 'Is it surprising that we feel pain and sorrow upon discovering that he has absolutely no joy in life? But he always just plods on, with his head bowed, while we did what we could to help him towards an honourable goal! It is as though he deliberately chooses the difficult path.' And a month later he wrote: 'I fear it is an unhealthy existence he has made for himself.'

Most of the interest in Van Gogh's case history has understandably focused on the last 18 months of his life (1888-90), the period in which he was living and working in Arles, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence and Auvers-sur-Oise. In Arles an act of self-mutilation landed him in hospital; in Saint-Rémy he had himself committed to the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole asylum, where he suffered several nervous breakdowns; and finally, on 27 July 1890, he shot himself in the chest in Auvers, where he died of his injuries two days later.

A variety of illnesses have been ascribed to Van Gogh over the years, including syphilis, dementia praecox, hallucinatory psychosis, alcoholism and turpentine

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1 The official diagnosis in the patient register of the Haagse Burgergasthuis was ‘Gonorrhoea,’ and the method of treatment recorded as ‘Injectiones c[um] Sol[utio] Sulph[atis] Zinc[icum]’, see The Hague, Gemeentearchief, bnr. 424, inv. no. 756. It has not been proven whether Van Gogh was suffering from syphilis at the end of 1885 in Antwerp, as maintained by the grandson of the doctor who treated him, H.A. Cavenaille. See Kenneth Wilkie, The Van Gogh file. a journey of discovery. London 1990, pp. 140-65 and 209.
2 Theodorus van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, 30 November 1883, FR b2247. All the letters quoted come from the family correspondence - abbreviated hereafter as FR (Family Records) - and are preserved in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation).
3 Theodorus van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, 2 March 1878, FR b968.
4 Theodorus van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, 1 April 1878, FR b973. Van Gogh himself wrote in a letter to Theo: 'I spent years in that stony, barren state of mind. [...] People said that I was going mad, I myself felt I was not'; Hoogeveen, 12 October 1883, 397/332.

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poisoning. Théophile Peyron (1827-1895), director of the hospital at Saint-Rémy, informed Theo that he saw Vincent not as a lunatic but as someone suffering from attacks of an.

epileptic nature. P.H.A. Voskuil arrived at a similar conclusion in his comprehensive study, which, in so far as his findings apply to the ‘attacks of an epileptic nature,’ suggests that such symptoms did not appear until 1888.

The complaints Vincent suffered from include the following:

Spells of confusion, which included sleep-walking, a feeling of emptiness in the head, a stuporous state, the ingestion of paint and rubbish from the floor, and possibly drinking - or attempting to drink - turpentine.

Hallucinations resembling ecnnesia, such as déjà-vu déjà-vécu, in which he saw details of his native village of Zundert; paranoid delusions, in which he imagined he was being followed by the police and a crowd of people, or was afraid of being poisoned; nightmares; and a state of anxiety displaying violent agitation.

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6 Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh, 4 October 1889, 808/ T18: ‘He doesn't consider you insane at all & says that the crises you have had are of an epileptic nature.’ Dr Paul-Ferdinand Gachet of Auvers also thought that one could deduce from Theo’s accounts of the attacks that they had nothing to do with madness: ‘he did not believe that it had anything to do with insanity’; Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh, 29 March 1890, 861/T31. See H.E. Fokke and J.P. Nater, ‘Spreekuur in Auvers-sur-Oise: Paul-Ferdinand Gachet (1828-1900) en Vincent van Gogh,’ in Op het lijf geschreven. Bekendheden en hun lijfarts, Amsterdam & Overveen 1995, pp. 147-60.

Tonic convulsions, during which he fell to the ground.

Personality disorders and hypo-sexuality, the latter manifesting itself after the attacks during the last years of his life.

Voskuil concluded that Van Gogh inhabited an interesting borderline region between neurology and psychiatry: ‘Epilepsy as we define it today was not the most probable diagnosis in Van Gogh's case. In this exceptional man his very complicated symptomatology can best be explained by complementary and not contradictory psychological and neurophysiological factors. The latter cause the psychiatric disturbance including dysfunction of the temporal lobe, partly because of, but not always at the same time as, thujone intoxication. Added to these, neurotic development, psychological stress and possible genetic traits, caused symptoms which may have been manifested as epileptic limbic activity.’ Temporal lobe epilepsy is characterised by a complex relationship between epilepsy and depression; people suffering from this complaint are 25 times more likely to commit suicide.

A document only recently discovered sheds some light on the course taken by Van Gogh's illness: a letter written by his mother, Anna Cornelia van Gogh-Carbentus (1819-1907) (figs. 1 and 2) in December 1888 - an eventful month in the artist's life, when Van Gogh and the painter Paul Gauguin were living in the Yellow House in Arles. The letter dates from a few days after Vincent had cut off part of his ear, which had occurred just before Christmas. Vincent's brother and patron, Theo (fig. 3), who took the train from Paris to Arles as soon as he received Gauguin's telegram, must have informed his mother of the incident directly from Arles, since she had already replied from Leiden by 29 December. The letter is interesting for a number of reasons: not only does it offer a revealing look at the gloomy thoughts their mother had about Vincent

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fig. 3
Theo van Gogh, c. 1885, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

and at the close bond between the two brothers, it also betrays surprising suppositions regarding Vincent's illness. Professing her sympathy and referring to times past, she writes about a specific incident in her moving epistle, published here in full for the first time.
My dear Theo!

I was deeply moved by your letter. Oh Theo, what sorrow. Thank you for your love for the unhappy Vincent. God be with him and us. Oh, the poor boy! I had hoped things were going well and thought he could quietly devote himself to his work! I had just written him a note to tell him what Israëls and the others had said about his work, and for the New Year, because don't think I forgot him. Oh Theo, what will happen now, how will things turn out? I would almost say, if only he would become really ill, it would bring things to a head, but he already is very ill, you might say, the worst that one could imagine. My consolation is that he is a child of our heavenly Father, and He will neither fail nor forsake him. If it was for me to say, I would ask, 'Take him unto Thee,' but we must take things as God gives them. Oh Theo, if it is borne out, you remember what Prof. Ramaar in The Hague said - when Pa so much wanted him to go with him as a mental patient, and Vincent said he was willing to go and ask for medicine, and just when they were supposed to leave, he refused and Pa went anyway to tell him - and he said, from what I now hear something is missing or wrong in the little brain." Poor thing, I believe he was always ill, and that what he and we have suffered are the consequences of it. Poor brother of Vincent, sweet, dearest

fig. 4
Johannes Nicolaas Ramaer, from Eigen Haard (1887), no. 50, p. 593, The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek

9 The cerebellum, also called the little or hinder brain.
Theo, you, too, have been very worried and troubled because of him. Your great love, wasn’t it too heavy a burden, and now you’ve again done what you could, Wil went to The Hague today, how disappointed she will be, too, I am grievously saddened and anyway you will no doubt send me news as often as possible, honestly Theo, if things get even worse and Aix has to happen, tell me everything, otherwise I’ll think even worse. What a coincidence, after your hope for happiness, and this deep sorrow, may she be a comfort to you, but Theo, I didn't say anything, I wrote nothing to Jo before you had your answer from Amsterdam. Write to me as soon as you know anything, although I am saddened with grief, I can however be glad about happiness and would like to tell the good news, Jo and Anna also wanted to write. Oh Theo, must the year end with such a disaster? Where is Aix? Such suffering for both of you, how he must feel it all, how touching about Zundert, together on one pillow. Goodbye, dear Theo, may God be near with His comfort, and if possible bring help. God bless the remedies. Thanks for your love, God bless your endeavours. Anna is also sad, Jo and Wil are not at home. A kiss from your ma.

10 Vincent's sister Willemien, who lived at home with their mother
11 Theo was then waiting for his mother and Johanna Bonger's parents to give their consent, and planned to go to Amsterdam at the beginning of January 1889 for the official announcement of their engagement See Brief happiness: the correspondence of Theo van Gogh and Jo Bonger, ed. Leo Jansen and Jan Robert, with an introduction and commentary by Han van Krimpen, Amsterdam & Zwolle 1999, p. 69.
12 Vincent and Theo's sister Anna and her husband Joan (Jo) van Houten.
13 Anna van Gogh-Car bentus to Theo van Gogh, Leiden, 29 December 1888, FR b2425 (some punctuation has been added by us): ‘Beste Théo! Diep ontroerd las ik Uw brief. Och Théo, wat smart. Dank voor je liefde voor de ongelukkige Vincent. God zij hem en ons nabij. Och arme kere! ’k Hoopte hij was nu zoo goed en ’k dacht hij kon zich zoo rustig wijden aan zijn werk! ’k had net een briefje aan hem geschreven en verteld wat Israels enz. van zijn werk hadden gezegd, en met den N.J. want denk niet dat ik hem vergat. Och Théo hoe zou ’t gaan, hoe zou ’t nu wezen. ’k Zo haast zeggen werd hij maar eens erg ziek, zou dat breken, maar hij is erg ziek genoeg, zult ge zeggen, wel ’t ergste wat men denken kan. Mijn troost is, hij is een kind van onze hemel scha Vader en Die zal hem niet begeven noch verlaten. Had ik ’t voor ’t wenschen ’k zou vragen Neem hem tot U maar we moeten ’t nemen zoo als God het geeft. Och Théo als ’t zich bevestigt, weet ge toch wel Prof. Ramaar in den Haag toen Pa zoo graag wou hij als zenuwijlder met hem gaan wou en Vincent zich bereid verklaarde geneesmiddelen te vragen gaan, en op ’t oogenblik dat ze vertrekken zouden weigerde en Pa toch ging om hem te vertellen, zei nu al wat ik hoor ontbreekt of manqueert er iets in de kleine hersens. Arme, ’k geloof hij altijd krank was, en wat geleden is door hem en ons daar gevolgen van waren. Arme broër van Vincent, lieve beste Théo ook gij hebt veel door hem geleden van zorg en moeite. Uwe groote liefde, viel ’t niet zwaar, en nu wat hebt ge weer gedaan wat ge kon, Wil is van daar naar den Haag. wat zal zij ook teleurgesteld zijn, ik ben bitter bedroefd en hoe dan ook zult ge heusch zoo dikkwijls ’t kan mij bericht zenden, heusch Théo, als is ’t nog erger, al moet dat gebeuren van Aix, zeg me alles anders denk ik nog erger. Wat zamenloop, na Uw hoop op geluk en deze diepe smart moge zij Uw troost zijn, maar Theo ik vertelde toch nog niet ik schreef niets aan Jo vóór dat ge Uw antwoord hadt van Amsterdam Schrijf me het zoodra ge wat weet want ben ik bedroefd om de smart, ik kan toch blij zijn met geluk en vertelde het graag, ook Jo en Anna wilden schrijven. Och Theo moet ’t jaar met zoo een ramp eindigen. Waar is Aix. Wat lijden tusschenbeiden, goed zal hij alles voelen, hoe aandoenlijk van Zundert zamen op een kussen. Dag beste Theo, God zij nabij met zijne vertroosting en geve zoo mogelijk uitkomst. Zegen op de middelen. Dank voor Uwe liefde Zegen op Uw pogen. Anna is ook bedroefd, Jo en Wil niet te huis. Een kus van je moe.’ A day later Willemien also wrote to Theo, and she, too, talks about childhood memories of Zundert, which Vincent must have mentioned: ‘Do tell me in as much detail as possible how he is. How wonderful that you could go to him. When you write in this way,
Obviously Theo had already suggested to their mother that Vincent might be admitted to a hospital in Aix-en-Provence. Theo must have talked about this possibility to Felix Rey, the assistant doctor who treated Vincent in the hospital at Arles. Indeed, Vincent later wrote to Theo: ‘There are so many times when I feel entirely normal, and it seems to me that if what I have is only an illness specific to this part of the country, I'll just have to wait here quietly until it's over. Even if it were to happen again (let's assume that won't be the case). But this is what I say once and for all to you and M. Rey. If sooner or later it would be desirable for me to go to Aix, as has already been suggested - I consent in advance and will submit to it’ [751/577].

A completely new particular in Vincent's case history is that his father wanted to take him to a certain 'Prof. Ramaar.' This was Johannes Nicolaas Ramaer (1817-1887), a prominent psychiatrist in The Hague, who was one of the founders of mental health care in the Netherlands (fig. 4). On 26 July 1863, Ramaer was appointed physician-director of the mental hospital at Delft, where he stayed until July 1869. After this he settled in The Hague as a ‘consulting physician,’ but kept his post at the institution in Delft until 1872. On 19 July 1872 he was appointed an inspector of lunatic asylums; on 1 October 1884 he was named to the state inspectorate for lunatics, after which he could no longer practise medicine privately.

Ramaer advocated a brand of scientific psychiatry in which psychological disorders were thought to be the result of physical processes taking place in the body. The

he becomes for me very different from an ordinary patient whom no one knows anything about. You won't keep anything back, will you, and tell everything exactly as it is? You don't know how much I'd like to go to him. If he were dying, I would, I have the money for it. Do the doctors talk only about mental faculties, which will probably not return, or do they fear for his life? It is those very moments of consciousness, and that he is alone then, that I find so terrible. Did you get the impression that he feels his own suffering very badly? [...] Touching, that story about the little room you two had in Zundert. Could I write to him? Do tell me where he is. And the exact truth about how he is. Do you hear something from a doctor now and then? Could it have been foreseen, did Gauguin see it coming, did he notice more than usual recently or did something happen to cause the outburst? [...] But what a difficult life, and how difficult things have always been for him. If only he could ever find some peace. That is possible, isn't it, or is it too much a physical illness? I feel awfully sorry for him, and I wish he knew that’ (FR b2276)

14 Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, c. 17 February 1889. ‘Il y a tant de moments où je me sens tout à fait normal, et justement il me semblerait que, si ce que j'ai n'est qu'une maladie particulière du pays, il faut tranquillement attendre ici jusqu'à que cela soit fini même si cela se répétait encore (ce qui ne sera pas le cas mettons). - Mais voici ce que je dis une fois pour toutes à toi et à M. Rey. Si tôt ou tard il serait désirable que j'aïlle à Aix comme il en a déjà été question - d'avance j'y consens et m'y soumettrai. - '

15 On Ramaer (who was not in fact a professor), see Ingrid Verhoeven, Historische bibliotheek voor de psychiatrie: Catalogus der boekenset van dr J.N. Ramaer, Utrecht 1994, and Joost Vijselaar, Neerlands eerste psychiater: Dr. J.N. Ramaer, n.p., n.d [1995].
intriguing reference to the ‘little brain’ (the cerebellum) must point to the fact that Ramaer viewed Vincent's symptoms as purely physical, and not primarily as an emotional or psychological condition. The clinical symptoms of cerebellar dysfunction are ataxia (the inability to co-ordinate voluntary movements), hypermetry (excessive, uncontrolled movement) and dysdiadochokinesis (an inability to execute rapidly alternating movements).

From what we know about Van Gogh, however, it cannot be inferred that he was suffering from one of these disorders, though he must have had certain facial tics, as we shall see below. Ramaer kept up with the medical journals, that much is certain, but in his day little was known about the cerebellum. Ramaer's diagnosis - made without ever having seen the patient, and therefore based solely on what Vincent's father had told him, and, moreover, passed on to us by Vincent's mother - unfortunately seems to have been a shot in the dark, and thus of mainly historical importance.

This leaves the question as to when the visit took place. It is unlikely that it was as early as 1868-69. In March 1868 Vincent had been removed - for reasons that remain unclear - from the Tilburg Hoogere Burgerschool (secondary school), after which he lived with his parents in Zundert until August 1869. He subsequently started work as an assistant in the firm of Goupil & Cie., art dealers in The Hague. In any case, the alleged visit could not have taken place until after Ramaer had set up practice in The Hague in July 1869. Moreover, the fact that Vincent refused to go along indicates that he was over the age of 16. It is therefore most likely that the visit to Ramaer was connected with the so-called ‘Gheel affair’ of 1880, at which time Vincent's father was planning to have his son committed to lunatic asylum in Gheel (now Geel), Belgium.

Van Gogh experienced increasing difficulty while working as a lay preacher in the Borinage (a mining district in Belgium) from December 1878 to September 1880. Not only was he living in reduced circumstances and losing a lot of weight, he was also in no way equal to the task in hand. His concerned parents went to visit him,
and during this period Vincent returned twice to his parents' home. (It may be inferred from his mother's letter that Vincent was at home at the time of the planned visit to Ramaer.) The first time was mid-August 1879, when he arrived in Etten unannounced. We know from his parents' letters that he was given different clothes to wear, spent whole days reading Dickens, and refused to engage in any normal conversation, giving only short answers and ‘pulling ugly faces.’ The last remark must refer to facial tics. It is not known how long he stayed, only that his behaviour was a cause of great concern. This was also the case seven months later, in March 1880, when he again returned home; as his father wrote to Theo: ‘Vincent is still here, but oh, it's nothing but a struggle.’

It was not until a year later that Van Gogh reflected on what had taken place in 1880. In the meantime his controversial love for his cousin Kee Vos had come to light: ‘Though it causes me much sorrow and grief, I simply cannot accept that a father who curses his son and (remember last year) wants to send him to a madhouse (which I of course resisted with all my might) and calls his son's love “untimely and improper”!!! can be right [...]. That matter of Gheel last year, when Pa wanted to have me committed to an institution against my will!!! has taught me to be on the qui vive’ [183/158, 184/159]. It looks very much as though Vincent's father viewed Ramaer's ‘diagnosis’ as grounds for having his son committed to a lunatic asylum.

Vincent played down his psychological problems to ease his mother's mind, both in 1880-81 as a 27-year-old, and again seven years later in Arles. The only thing he wrote to her and his sister Willemien shortly after the ear incident, namely on 7 January 1889, was that he had been

19 Anna van Gogh-Car bentus to Theo van Gogh, 19 August 1879, FR b2492.
20 Theodorus van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, 11 March 1880, FR b2496.
21 Both letters were written on 18 November 1881. See also Jan Hulsker, ‘The Borinage episode: the misrepresentation of Van Gogh, and the creation of a new myth,’ in Ködera and Rosenberg, op. cit. (note 7), pp. 314-16.
slightly ‘unwell’ and that it ‘had not been worth the trouble of telling you.’ But although he assured them that there was no reason for ‘fretting’ [736/569a], we know from Theo's letters that Vincent had a clear understanding of his illness. His full awareness of the seriousness of his condition may well have prompted him to seek salvation in death, a solution his mother had envisioned 18 months earlier as the answer to her prayers.
Gustave Caillebotte

*View from a balcony*, Paris 1880
Catalogue of acquisitions: paintings and drawings
August 2002 - July 2003

This catalogue contains the paintings and drawings acquired by the Van Gogh Museum from August 2002 to July 2003. Each work has an inventory number made up as follows: the first letter stands for the technique (s = painting, d = drawing); this is followed by a reference number and then by a capital letter (B = loan, N = State of the Netherlands, S = Van Gogh Museum [after 1 July 1994], V = Vincent van Gogh Foundation) and the year of acquisition.

Paintings

Caillebotte, Gustave
French, 1848-1894

View from a balcony, Paris 1880
Oil on canvas, 65.6 × 54.9 cm
Stamped lower left in blue: G. Caillebotte
s 508 S/2003

Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894) was a prominent member of the impressionist movement. At the end of the 1870s and early 1880s he exhibited his work in five of the eight shows the impressionists organised between 1874 and 1886. As a wealthy patron Caillebotte also fulfilled an important role by collecting of the work of his friends. Most of his impressive collection is now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. He owned fives canvases by Cézanne; eight pastels by Degas; four paintings by Manet, including his monumental Balcony (Musée d'Orsay); and no fewer than 16 Monets and 18 canvases by Pissarro, while he had nine works each by both Renoir and Sisley.

Caillebotte worked in diverse genres, but is particularly famous for his pictures of contemporary urban life - the retrospective exhibition of his work held in 1994-95 (Paris, Chicago, Los Angeles) bore the title Gustave Caillebotte: urban impressionist. In their originality of motif and imaginative composition, Caillebotte's works rival those of Edgar Degas. Indeed, in its finished state Caillebotte's early work most resembles that of this French master - a good example being The floor-scrapers of 1875 (Musée d'Orsay). However, Caillebotte would gradually develop a more painterly brushstroke far more reminiscent of Monet. At the same time, his palette became lighter and View of boulevard Haussmann seen from the balcony is a result of this development. Whereas some of Caillebotte's large intricate compositions tend to be painted in a somewhat flat and static manner. The cityscape discussed here, however, has a spontaneous and fluent brushstroke that perfectly matches the unusual subject matter.

The scene is painted on a so-called toile de 15, portrait, a canvas of standard format measuring 65 × 54 centimetres that artists could purchase on a stretcher in specialist art shops. The question as to whether this was a study for a larger canvas or an independent painting was once declared to be unsolvable,¹ but technically speaking

¹ Kirk Varnedoe, Gustave Caillebotte, New Haven & London 1987, no. 45.
everything would suggest that Caillebotte conceived the piece as a work complete in itself. Although the brushwork is undeniably fluent and spontaneous, the treatment is far from loose. The shapes of the balcony balustrades were first laid down in a range of blacks and greys of varying thickness. Later this fencing is further worked up in black mixed with dashes of colour - white, bright green, dark red, blue and yellow - adding subtleties of light and shade. Then the canvas was left to dry for a while, after which light, pastel shades (cream, pink, pale blue) were introduced in the background. The carefully thought-out method visible throughout the whole work and the two stages in which the painting was executed indicate that the artist was engaged in making a real picture, rather than a simple impression. Moreover, no more fully worked-out version is known.

The work is one of a series of Parisian cityscapes painted in 1880 showing the view from Caillebotte's apartment balcony, on the corner of boulevard Haussmann and rue Gluck. Other impressionist artists were also fond of depicting a view of the city seen from a high vantage point; Caillebotte, however, gave the motif a strong personal character. He considered the various possibilities in an almost playful manner; for instance, several of the pictures in this group give an important role to the decorative cast-iron balustrade, and in the painting discussed here it has in fact become the main motif. This type of decoration forms part of many compositions by Caillebotte, albeit chiefly as a secondary motif. Thus we find a similar balustrade

2 With thanks to René Boitelle.
in the background of the above-mentioned Floor-scrapers.

Although as far as its subject matter is concerned View from a balcony is representative of the artist's oeuvre, it is at the same time an experiment pushed to the extreme. It clearly reflects the influence of Japanese prints, with their curious compositions and daringcroppings of the picture's edge, which deeply influenced impressionist artists. Without any apology, the cast-iron balustrade has become the subject of the composition, creating a picture that takes us by surprise and seems to represent a conscious - and successful - attempt at a truly modern composition. With his direct approach, Caillebotte seeks above all to intrigue rather than simply please. In this way his painting makes a remarkably idiosyncratic impact.

Several prominent authors have recognised the importance of this work. In his standard work on Caillebotte, the late Kirk Varnedoe expressed himself in lyrical terms when speaking of the canvas: ‘The picture is not only one of the most original conceptions in Caillebotte's art; it is also a pivot point in the history of painting, standing within one tradition while announcing another. [...] The image embodies not only a striking graphic beauty - a design before whose exuberance the name of Matisse springs irresistibly to mind - but also an extraordinary creative leap of the visual imagination.’ The authoritative scholar of impressionism, Richard Brettell, pronounced: ‘This boldly painted and brilliantly composed work is one of the most original cityscapes of Paris by any Impressionist painter.’

Caillebotte was a wealthy man and did not have to earn his living from his art. This is presumably why he sold little of his work during his lifetime and rarely exhibited. It is thought that View from a balcony was displayed at the fifth impressionist exhibition in 1880, but there is no absolute certainty about this. The artist died at an early age and his paintings remained largely in the family. Unlike other impressionist artists, Caillebotte more or less sank into oblivion. Not until the second half of the twentieth century would his work gradually appear on the art market and his fame spread. The Caillebotte family sold View from a balcony to Wildenstein in 1968 and it remained with this owner until it was bought by the Van Gogh Museum in 2003.

Sjraar van Heugten


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3 Varnedoe, op. cit. (note 1).
4 R R Bretell et al., exhib cat. Impressionism: painting quickly in France, London (National Gallery) & Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), 2000-01, p 221
5 Varnedoe, op. cit. (note 1).
Works on paper

Béraud, Jean
French, 1849-1936

The fortifications in the evening 1884
Transparent and opaque watercolour, 34 × 48 cm
Signed lower left: Jean Béraud
d 1126 S/2002

Having studied law, Jean Béraud initially planned a future at the bar. However, in 1872 he enrolled as a pupil of the portraitist Léon Bonnat (1833-1922) and spent two years studying under him. Beginning in 1876 Béraud exhibited regularly at the Salon. Later his work became widely known through his magazine illustrations. His paintings were also often seen outside France. Indeed, he gained a silver medal at the world's fair held in Amsterdam in 1883.

From 1884 on, Béraud participated in the annual exhibitions of the Société d'aquarellistes français, held in Paris. In his debut year he showed for the first time the watercolour that has recently been acquired by the Van Gogh Museum, entitled Les fortifications le soir.

Béraud is known primarily for his colourful scenes depicting the contemporary life of the Parisian beau monde against the backdrop of, for example, boulevards and ballrooms. Vincent van Gogh was decidedly unappreciative of Béraud's qualities. In September 1888 he wrote to Theo that Alphonse Daudet's L'immortel, 'with all those subtle and precise observations,' reminded him of 'the sombre paintings by Jean Béraud, so cold and cheerless' [677/531].

In The fortifications in the evening we see a stream of people from various social classes making their weary way to the railway station after a long day's drudgery. Part of the city wall of Paris can be seen on the right; Vincent van Gogh, too, took
life on and nearby the fortifications as the subject for a number of watercolours and drawings.

Generally speaking, the small number of surviving watercolours by Béraud have a fresher and livelier appearance than do his oil paintings. This new acquisition by the Van Gogh Museum adds a fine work to the museum's collection, a representative piece by an artist who in his day was one of the best-loved chroniclers of Parisian life.

*Jan Gorm Madsen*

**Provenance** M Tedesco collection, 1936, Paris (Hôtel Drouot), 21 March 1938, lot 3, Versailles (Hôtel Rameau), 6 March 1960, lot 41, Hon Roderic Henderson, Newport (Rhode Island), Ivo Bouwman, art dealer, The Hague, private collection, the Netherlands; Amsterdam (Sotheby's), 22 October 2002, lot 89, acquired by the Van Gogh Museum (2002)

**Literature** P. Offenstadt, *Jean Béraud La Belle époque, une époque revée*, Cologne 1999, cat no 159
Toorop, Johannes Theodorus
Dutch, 1858-1928

Corcordium, 1891
Black chalk and pencil on wove paper on cardboard, 58.3 × 55.1 cm
Signed and annotated at lower right: naar de ‘COR CORDIUM’ van // Alb.
Verwey // J Th Toorop
d1118 S/2003

The iconography of Jan Toorop's drawing Cordium (‘Heart of all hearts’) is typical of this artist's symbolist work, and with all its ambiguous complexities is difficult to unravel. Toorop regularly turned to literature for the inspiration for his designs. This magnificent drawing owes its genesis to a passage from the poem of the same name by Albert Verwey (1865-1937), which was published in the De Nieuwe Gids, a magazine by and for writers and artists, in 1886:

‘Alas for me! Sitting within my house
I heard a whispering inside my head
The voices of my thoughts, from distant places slowly drawing near.
Sounding like the wind rustling between
Walls of tenements. But the noise was strange,
Like a northern tongue spoken in southern parts
Unfamiliar curious-sounding words
Like the deaf speaking in a foreign street.
And I beheld, and see it still today!
From the deep shadows of my soul there rose
A throng of figures such as I sometimes saw
Crossing the bridges when I left my house
And walked along the canal still wrapped in mist
On a November morning; the air hung leaden above the city streets
And I was filled with a like heaviness.’
In the foreground a sombre procession of around 40 people moves across a bridge (‘a throng of figures [...] crossing the bridges’). Among the crowd, an elegant woman mounted on a horse occupies a prominent position. The figures are rendered sketchily and thus form a marked contrast to the precise detail of the setting. This resembles a kind of stage décor, in which we see a street with gleaming cobblestones, houses with step-gables, a tree and a tall pillar. Twelve grave-looking women are visible in rags and shreds of mist floating between the houses (‘[...] the canal still wrapped in mist [...]
among them are one resembling a Madonna and a Japanese woman, presumably derived from a Japanese woodcut.

Toorop and Verwey became acquainted around 1890. In the years that followed the artist would repeatedly make reference to Verwey and his literary oeuvre in his work. Verwey, by contrast, only mentioned Toorop once, and then only in 1918, at the request of one of his editors.

In addition to Verwey, Toorop was also inspired by the writings of Emile Verharen, Jules Laforgue, Frederik van Eeden, Walt Whitman and Charles Baudelaire. The literary works he turned to did not necessarily have anything to do with his ideas about art; they were more of a stimulus to his rich imagination.

For the most part, Cor cordium is drawn in black chalk; Toorop used pencil only to highlight certain details on some of the heads of the figures in the procession. He apparently did not bother too much about the quality of the paper he used: there was already a horizontal crease in the sheet when he began the work. When Toorop had almost completed the drawing he decided the paper was not large enough and he folded it around a piece of cardboard. He continued the drawing on the left-hand side, occupying about two centimetres of the new surface. The drawing still has its original moulded frame.

In terms of formal, technique and style, this drawing is a beautiful and characteristic example of Toorop's work of around 1890. This was the period in which Toorop abandoned his neo-impressionist style for symbolism, without, however, going to extremes. Other masterpieces of these years include his Garden of sorrows in the Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam, and Les rôdeurs in the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo.

With the acquisition of Cor cordium, the Van Gogh Museum now owns a drawing by Toorop, in addition to a painting, seven prints and seven letters. The letters in question were written to Johanna van Gogh-Bonger and shed light on Toorop's role in spreading Van Gogh's fame at the turn of the last century. Toorop had seen some of Vincent's paintings in Brussels at exhibitions of Les XX, and in 1892, using paintings and drawings from Johanna's collection, he compiled the first sizeable exhibition of Van Gogh's work to be held in the Netherlands; it was shown in The Hague at the artists' society the Haagsche Kunstkring.

In 1894-95 Cor cordium formed part of a portfolio produced by this same society. The portfolio, containing prints and drawing for sale, would travel the length and breadth of the Netherlands. Cor cordium, with an asking price of 450 guilders, was the most expensive work and remained unsold until 1899, when it was acquired by no less a figure than the poet Albert Verwey. Before 1899 the drawing appeared for sale at various exhibitions. One such show was that held in Utrecht in 1898-99 at the Vereeniging 'Voor de Kunst,' which had on display works by Toorop together with drawings by Van Gogh from Johanna van Gogh-Bonger's collection. The critics were enthusiastic about the combination of these two artists. One spoke in a review of '[...] two isolated individuals [...] as one in thought and feeling; so utterly different in their manner of expressing those thoughts and feelings, but both equally powerful, equally lofty and [...] equally beautiful.' The drawing Cor cordium has been on loan to the museum for several years and now with its acquisition it joins the work of Van Gogh for good.
Marije Vellekoop

**Provenance** Albert Verwey, Noordwijk aan Zee, 1899-1936, Mrs Dr M Nijland-Verwey, Santpoort, 1936, heirs of Mrs Dr M. Nijland-Verwey, private collection, Utrecht (on loan to the Van Gogh Museum, 1996-2003), acquired by the Van Gogh Museum (2003)


*Van Gogh Museum Journal 2003*
Exhibitions 2003

Van Gogh down to the micrometer: a presentation of technical research into paintings by Van Gogh
3 May 2002 - 23 November 2003

American Beauty: painting and sculpture from the Detroit Institute of Arts, 1770-1920
18 October 2002 - 19 January 2003

Fire & ice: treasures from the photographic collection of Frederic Church
18 October 2002 - 19 January 2003
(ISBN 0-8014-4081-5)

Animals in Japanese prints
28 November 2002 - 26 January 2003

Vincent's choice: the Musée imaginaire of Van Gogh
14 February - 15 June 2003
(ISBN 90-6153-532-8)

On Vincent's walls
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Van Gogh Museum Journal 2003
27 March - 15 June 2003
(ISBN 90 400 8806 3)

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6 June - 28 September 2003

**Gogh Modern: Vincent van Gogh and contemporary art**

27 June - 12 October 2003
Exhib. cat. Andreas Blühm et al., *Gogh Modern: Vincent van Gogh and contemporary art*, Rotterdam 2003
(ISBN 90 5662 314 1)

**Edouard Vuilllard, 1868-1940**

3 October 2003 - 11 January 2004

**La Scala: the opera and the Orient, 1780-1930**

7 November 2003 - 8 February 2004
Theme number of the art magazine *Kunstschrift: Grand passions and distant vistas. La Scala: the opera and the Orient, 1780-1930*
(ISBN 01667297)

**From Kirchner to Beckmann: Expressionist prints and drawings from the Hamburger Kunsthalle**

7 November 2003 - 8 February 2004

Compiled by Adrie Kok
Works on loan to the Van Gogh Museum 2002-03

The following is a list of paintings lent to the Van Gogh Museum between 2002 and 2003. Each work has an inventory number made up as follows: the first letter stands for the technique (s = painting, d = drawing); this is followed by a reference number and then by a capital letter (B = loan) and the year of the loan.

Paintings

Munch, Edvard
Norwegian, 1863-1944
Winter morning 1892
Oil on canvas, 71.5 × 66.9 cm
s 262 B/2003
Loan from a private collection

Drawings

Allebé, August
Dutch, 1838-1927
Brussels: man on a ladder with a bucket of whitewash 1874
Pencil and watercolour, heightened with white, 29.3 × 22.4 cm
d 252 B/2002
Loan from a private collection
Street in St Emilion 1872
Pencil, watercolour, 49.9 × 35.3 cm
d 253 B/2002
Loan from a private collection

Alma Tadema, Laurens
Dutch, 1836-1912
A silent counselor
Watercolour, 14.4 × 30.5 cm
d 255 B/2002
Loan from a private collection

Bosboom, Johannes
Dutch, 1817-1891
Limekiln at the quarry at Chaudfontaine
Watercolour, 33.4 × 53.2 cm
d 254 B/2002
Loan from a private collection
Jongkind, Johan Barthold
Dutch, 1819-1891
The banks of the Isère 1883
Watercolour over black chalk, 17.3 × 37.2 cm
d 257 B/2002
Loan from a private collection
The banks of the Drac near Grenoble 1875
Black chalk and watercolour, 23.1 × 46.2 cm
d 258 B/2002
Loan from a private collection

Nuijen, Wijnand
Dutch, 1813-1839
Stormy weather on a rocky coast 1837
Watercolour, 27.9 × 34.3 cm
d 251 B/2002
Loan from a private collection

Roelofs, Willem
Dutch, 1822-1897
Livestock market in Scotland
Watercolour, 28.5 × 63.2 cm
d 256 B/2002
Loan from a private collection

Vuillard, Édouard
French, 1868-1940
La salle Graveau (Madame Jourdan-Morhange playing the violin)
c. 1914
Distemper on paper laid down on canvas, 73 × 105 cm
d 263 B/2003
Loan from a private collection

Compiled by Monique Hageman