NOTES

INTRODUCTION


2 Vincent Van Gogh, *Vincent Van Gogh: The Letters*, ed. Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten, and Nienke Bakker, 6 vols. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2009). All references are to this edition, and letter numbers are indicated in the text, with the volume and page number following the slash. The 2009 edition also contains twenty-five “related manuscripts” (rM); these consist of stray pages that could not be situated within the correspondence, as well as some drafts and a few letters that were never sent. An expanded version of the printed edition can be searched free of charge at http://www.vangoghletters.org.


10 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 287. The term “polyphonic” is often used in this context as a way of describing the multiplicity of dialogues that constitute the fabric of cultural exchange. As Holquist says, “the simultaneity of these dialogues is merely a particular instance of the larger polyphony of social and discursive forces that Bakhtin calls ‘heteroglossia’” (69).


14 Ibid., 82, 83. Further page numbers are cited in the text.


CHAPTER 1
THE PAINTERLY WRITER

1 Hans Luijten, who is working on Jo’s biography, pointed this out.
4 See Steiner, *Colors of Rhetoric*, xii.
9 In a further interesting, admittedly unusual example, Vincent writes to Theo, describing his relationship with Kee Vos as if it were a painting: “Forgive the rather harsh terms I’m using to make my position clear to you. I admit that the colours are a little harsh and the lines are drawn a bit too hard” (179/1:302).
10 Van Gogh wonders if his uncle C.M. (Cornelis Marinus Van Gogh, who is also referred to as Uncle Cor) is being hesitant about his drawings because C.M. prefers watercolours: “I readily admit that, to an eye used only to watercolours, drawings which have been scratched by pen or had lights scraped off or put back on in body-colour may seem a little harsh” (235/2:88).

CHAPTER 2
BINARIES, CONTRADICTIONS, AND “ARGUMENTS ON BOTH SIDES”


CHAPTER 3
READING VAN GOGH’S LETTER-SKETCHES

1 See Vincent Van Gogh, Vincent Van Gogh: The Letters, ed. Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten, and Nienke Bakker (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 6:34, where the editors write that the sketches “provide evidence of an earlier version of a work or one that has since been lost” and also have value because “they forced Van Gogh to depict the essence of a drawing or painting.” See also Leo Jansen, Van Gogh and His Letters (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2006), 6:1: “An attractive feature of Van Gogh’s letters, and one that adds immensely to their art-historical value, is their frequent embellishment with a small drawing or the inclusion of a loose-leaf sketch, which he referred to as ‘krabbetjes’ (little scratches) or ‘croquis’ (sketches).”

In the following discussion, I consider the loose-leaf sketches as part of the correspondence. The online edition of Vincent Van Gogh: The Letters, http://www.vangoghletters.org, makes it possible to view all of the letter-sketches, including those reproduced in this volume. In the “Search” box, enter the number of the letter in which the sketch occurs and press the double arrow. Then click on “facsimile,” and the sketch will download, together with the letter. Double-click to enlarge the sketch, if required. In addition, clicking on “with sketches” will produce a list of all the letters that contain them, from which individual letters can again be downloaded.

3 See *Vincent Van Gogh: The Letters*, 6:70: Vincent “decides to become an artist, probably on Theo’s advice.” References are given to letters 156 and 214. In letter 156, from Cuesmes, 20 August 1880, Vincent writes about his drawings in a manner which assumes that Theo is both understanding and encouraging. In letter 214, from The Hague, 2 April 1882, Vincent writes: “I remember very well that when you spoke to me back then about my becoming a painter, I thought it very inappropriate and wouldn’t hear of it.” This suggests that Theo encouraged Vincent to take up painting. For an imaginatively rendered reconstruction of Van Gogh’s troubles at the time, see Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Van Gogh: The Life* (New York: Random House, 2011), 205–10.

4 Carol Zemel points out that Van Gogh addresses the bourgeois themes illustrated in magazines focusing on the plight of the poor. But he also “reverses the narrative fantasy” — for instance, by showing women and children in profile, or looking away, thereby short-circuiting the sentimental intimacy of the forlorn gaze directed at the viewer. I will return to this point about Van Gogh’s portrayal of people with their heads turned or looking away. For now, it is sufficient to note that Van Gogh reproduces the conventional themes and narratives, even as he registers some degree of discomfort with them. See Carol Zemel, *Van Gogh’s Progress: Utopia, Modernity, and Late-Nineteenth-Century Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 32.

5 Vincent left Drenthe on 5 December 1883. His parents had moved from Etten to Nuenen in August 1882.


9 Ibid., 77.

10 Vincent drew the map with his brother Cor. See 145/1:230.

11 Simon Schama points to two paintings that add up to Van Gogh’s “visual signature: the beaten up boots and the cut sunflowers, the wayfarer and the mysteries of organism.” See Simon Schama’s *Power of Art* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2006), 320.
CHAPTER 4
IMAGINATION AND THE LIMITS OF SELF-FASHIONING


2 For Van Gogh’s utopianism, see Carol Zemel, *Van Gogh’s Progress: Utopia, Modernity, and Late-Nineteenth-Century Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

3 See letter 358/2:365, and note 11 to the letter.


5 See note 4 to letter 732/4:380.

6 For a concise and helpful account, see Joan Greer, “‘Christ, This Great Artist’: Van Gogh’s Socio-Religious Canon of Art,” in *Vincent’s Choice: The Musée Imaginaire of Van Gogh*, ed. Chris Stolwijk, Sjraar van Heugten, Leo Jansen, and Andreas Blühm (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2003), 61–72.

CONCLUSION


2 Ibid., 347.


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