



Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait*, 1887. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Vincent van Gogh was born in a small, rural town in the southern Netherlands, the son of a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. Accounts of his childhood describe a serious and solitary boy who was often at odds with his parents and his five siblings—although his younger brother, Theo, adored him. A few weeks before his fifteenth birthday, Van Gogh left school and soon became an apprentice at an art dealership, Goupil and Co., where his uncle (also named Vincent) was a partial owner. Already a voracious

reader, Van Gogh now devoted himself to the study of art and traveled to museums in Amsterdam and Antwerp to see masterpieces by Vermeer, Rembrandt, and Rubens. As a young boy, he had taken nature walks, collecting beetles and studying various species of birds, and he now applied the close looking skills he had developed to categorizing the thousands of images he encountered in the Goupil stockrooms. Although Van Gogh relished the opportunity to study art closely, he struggled with interpersonal relationships and was transferred first to London and then to Paris.

Increasingly withdrawn and argumentative, Van Gogh was fired from his job as an art dealer in 1876. Spurred by deep religious fervor, he traveled to a downtrodden area of Belgium to work as an evangelist among the local coal miners. His failure was apparent after just a few years, however, and in 1880, on the verge of a breakdown, he decided to devote himself to painting. Van Gogh moved first to Brussels and then to The Hague to study art, taking painting lessons from Anton Mauve, a leading Dutch realist artist and his cousin by marriage. In the fall of 1883 he traveled to the northeastern province of Drenthe and finally returned to his family's home, now in the town of Nuenen in Brabant, in 1884. He resolved to be a painter of peasant life, inspired in part by Mauve, the French artists Jules Breton, Jean-François Millet, and Honoré Daumier, and the Dutch painter Jozef Israëls.

Van Gogh and Millet

Van Gogh's decision to draw and paint the working class date to his time as an evangelist in the Borinage, a coal-mining region in the south of Belgium, and was supported by his close study of works by Breton, Millet, and Daumier. These artists, grouped under the umbrella of "Realism," rejected the academic tradition of painting beautifully modeled figures from mythology or antiquity. Instead, they took as their subject matter images from contemporary life. Whereas the Realist novelist Émile Zola focused on the lives of modern Parisian women in *Au bonheur des dames*, Van Gogh wrote to his brother, Theo, that Breton and Millet "worshipped" the peasant. Millet, born to a farming family in 1814, painted scenes that monumentalized the life of the community in which he had grown up: men and women baking, hauling well water, winding wool, sowing seeds, or harvesting crops.

Van Gogh called himself a "painter of peasant life," and his first submission to the Salon, an annual contemporary art exhibition, was *The Potato Eaters* of 1885. This painting depicts a family eating a humble dinner in their darkened hut, lit only by a lamp hanging from the ceiling. Van Gogh's aim, like Millet's, was to honor what he saw as the honesty of manual labor. Van Gogh was so moved by the works of Millet (many of which he owned in reproduction)



that he later created a series of copies after his works, interpreting the compositions in his own style.

Jean-François Millet, *Bringing Home the Calf Born in the Fields*, begun ca. 1860. Princeton University Art Museum, gift of Dr. and Mrs. A. Richard Turner, Class of 1955 and 1959

Van Gogh saw this painting in an 1887 exhibition of Millet's work. He described it in a letter to his friend Émile Bernard as a painting "so powerful it made one tremble."

One must paint the peasants as if being one of them, as feeling, thinking as they do themselves.

— Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh (April 30, 1885)

Van Gogh's parents did not support his career. He left their home and moved to Antwerp, where he enrolled in the School of Fine Arts but withdrew after only two months. A major port city, Antwerp provided Van Gogh with access to a wide variety of art, including Japanese woodblock prints, which he began to collect.

Van Gogh and Japanese Prints



Vincent van Gogh, *The Bridge in the Rain (After Hiroshige)*, 1887. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation), F 372

Japonisme—the mania for all things Japanese—swept through Europe in the wake of the 1878 World's Fair in Paris, which featured a Japanese pavilion, but many avant-garde artists had begun collecting inexpensive Japanese ukiyo-e prints as early as the 1860s. These woodblock prints of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Japan featured Kabuki actors, geishas, landscapes, and scenes of contemporary life. Van Gogh painted copies of some of these prints, translating the printed images into his own signature style of brushstrokes. He also found inspiration for his work in the prints' use of broad planes of color, thick black lines, and unusual compositional choices.

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Supported by Theo, who was managing the Montmartre branch of Goupil (now called Boussod, Valadon, and Co.), Van Gogh moved to Paris in 1886. Through Theo, he experimented with Impressionist painting and met the new generation of artists living in Montmartre. Some of these artists, such as Paul Signac and Georges Seurat, as well as Camille Pissarro and his son, Lucien, were developing a new style of Impressionism, dubbed Neo-Impressionism by the critic Felix Fénéon. Others, such as Paul Gauguin, Émile Bernard, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, built on the innovations of previous generations to create their own individual styles.

Van Gogh soon began to paint with broken brushstrokes and vivid contrasts of complementary colors, reflecting his interest in contemporary color theory. His work also demonstrates the influence of the expressive, graphic quality of Japanese prints. He translated these elements into a distinctive style, based on thick layers of impasto paint with undulating rhythms.

The painter of the future will be a colorist such as has never yet existed.

— Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh (May 4, 1888)

In early 1888, Van Gogh moved to the town of Arles in the south of France, which he praised in letters to Theo for the clarity of light, vivid colors of landscape, and rustic lifestyle he found there. Arles was an escape from the bustle of Paris and provided a calmer environment in which to paint. Van Gogh hoped to create an artists' community there, a so-called "Studio of the South." He rented a dilapidated four-room house painted yellow (which he called the "Yellow House") and invited other artists to join him.

Paul Gauguin accepted his invitation and arrived in Arles in late October. The two artists had different approaches to painting: Van Gogh preferred to paint from life and to lavish his canvases with thick layers of paint applied at a feverish pace, while Gauguin championed painting from one's imagination and applied his paint more sparingly and methodically. Gauguin was already enjoying critical success in Paris, which continued to elude Van Gogh. After only two months of living and working together, the two men had a major falling out, which culminated in the infamous incident in which Van Gogh cut off part of his ear. It was also at this time that Theo announced his engagement to Johanna Bonger.

The concurrence of the two events likely roused feelings of abandonment in the already-fragile Van Gogh. His previous battles with mental instability were coupled with his increasing abuse of alcohol, especially absinthe. He spent the next few months in and out of the hospital in Arles, sometimes in an isolation cell. In the spring of 1889, Van Gogh voluntarily committed himself to an asylum in Saint-Rémy, a town fifteen miles north of Arles. He stayed there for a year, telling Theo that the steady schedule gave him peace. He continued to paint: views of the surrounding countryside—including *Starry Night* (now in the Museum of Modern Art, New York)—the garden in the asylum courtyard, and a number of penetrating self-portraits.

In early 1890, Van Gogh began to receive favorable attention from art critics. He elected to leave the asylum and traveled north to be closer to Theo and his growing family. Van Gogh spent his last months under the care of Dr. Paul Gachet at Auvers-sur-Oise, where he continued to paint with great fervor. However, he continued to suffer psychological attacks, and, in July, he apparently shot himself in the chest, dying a few days later with Theo at his side.

Theo resolved to ensure his brother's legacy as an artist, but his own ill health overtook him, and he died only six months after Vincent. His widow, Jo, took up the mission of gaining recognition for her brother-in-law. She edited Vincent van Gogh's letters—one of the best resources for those wishing to understand his life and art—and oversaw the sale of many of his works that had been in the family's care. It is in large part thanks to her tireless efforts that Vincent van Gogh is now revered as one of the great modern masters.

Vincent van Gogh

Tarascon Stagecoach, 1888

The Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation, on long-term loan to the Princeton University Art Museum

Before your visit

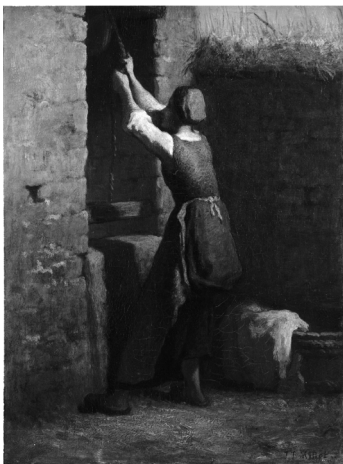
1. Many of Van Gogh's works have been collected together online as part of Google's Art Project <http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/project/art-project>. Ask your students to choose their favorite landscape by Van Gogh from this selection and compare it with an image of *Tarascon Stagecoach*.



You can download a high-res image of *Tarascon Stagecoach* from the Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation's website at http://www.pearlmancollection.org/files/artwork/L1988-62-11_0.jpg

- *What are the subjects of these two paintings?*
- *What are some of the key elements of Van Gogh's painting style? Think of color, line, and texture.*
- *Compare Van Gogh's use of such elements in these two works. Are they similar? Different?*

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Jean-François Millet, *Woman at Well*, ca. 1850. Princeton University Art Museum, bequest of Brooks Emery, Class of 1924

2. Compare an image of Van Gogh's *Tarascon Stagecoach* of 1888 with Jean-François Millet's *Woman at Well* of about 1850 (on view in the galleries of nineteenth-century European art).

You can download a high-res image of the Van Gogh painting from the Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation's website at http://www.pearlmancollection.org/files/artwork/L1988-62-11_0.jpg

You can download a high-res image of the Millet painting from the Art Museum's website at <http://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/32429>

Van Gogh greatly admired Millet and even made copies of some of his paintings. Here is an example: Van Gogh's copy (top) and the original (bottom).

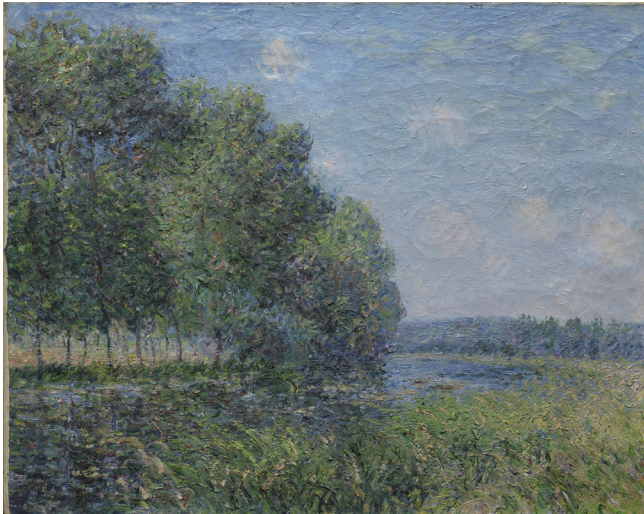
- What are the subjects of these two paintings?
- Which elements of painting did each artist use to communicate his scene? Think of light and dark, texture, and color.
- What do these two paintings have in common? Think of subject matter: the humble moments of rural life. What are the differences?



Vincent van Gogh, *First Steps, after Millet*, 1890. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of George N. and Helen M. Richard, 1964



Jean-François Millet, *First Steps*, ca. 1858–66. The Cleveland Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Thomas H. Jones Sr.



3. Compare *Tarascon Stagecoach* with Alfred Sisley's impressionistic painting *River View* of 1889.

You can view a high-res image of this painting on the Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation's website at http://www.pearlmancollection.org/files/artwork/L1988-62-16_0.jpg

Alfred Sisley, *River View*, 1889. The Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation, on long-term loan to the Princeton University Art Museum

- *What are the subjects of these two paintings?*
- *Which characteristics of the environment did each artist communicate? Think of season, time of day, weather.*
- *Which elements of painting (e.g., color, line, shape, texture, light and dark, perspective) did each artist use to communicate these characteristics?*
- *Where do you think you (the viewer) are?*
- *What differences and similarities do you notice between these two paintings?*
- *Which elements of painting do you think Van Gogh learned from Impressionism, and which elements of Impressionism did he reject? Look at his use of color and line, as well as the types of brushstrokes he used.*

During your visit

- What shapes, lines, and colors do you see in the painting?
- Describe the different ways Van Gogh applied the paint. How do the different kinds of brushstrokes convey different textures?
- How would you characterize this painting: is it a landscape? A portrait? Both?
- Imagine that you are about to take a ride on this stagecoach. What sounds can you hear? What can you smell, touch, or even taste?

After your visit

1. Have your students create their own presentations of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist landscape paintings, using works from the Art Museum's online collection, the Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation website, or Google Art Project. Compare and contrast the ways in which the artists of your chosen works composed their landscapes and used color, light, shadow, line, and texture to communicate something about the environment, season, or weather.

2. Read some of Van Gogh's letters, all of which are available, translated, at <http://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/>. See the Art in Context section of this resource for a letter Van Gogh wrote to his brother, Theo, about *Tarascon Stagecoach* (in French with an English translation).



Andō Hiroshige, *The Yahagi Bridge at Okazaki*, from the series *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, ca. 1834. Princeton University Art Museum, bequest of Elaine King in memory of her husband, Col. Herbert G. King, class of 1922

3. Van Gogh was inspired by Japanese woodblock prints and their use of strong black lines, saturated colors, and off-center compositions. Compare and contrast *Tarascon Stagecoach* with an example of Japanese woodblock prints, such as Andō Hiroshige's *The Yahagi Bridge at Okazaki* (left), from the series *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* of about 1834 (<http://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/18926>).

Creative writing exercises:

1. Have the students look closely at the painting. What nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs emerge? Think about colors, brushstrokes, light, shadow, subject, weather, time of day, and time of year. Have the students write poems inspired by the painting and the feelings that it evokes.

2. Ask the students to imagine that they are the stagecoach, about to set off on a journey. What would the view be like? What would they see, hear, smell, taste, and feel? Ask them to write a descriptive piece from this perspective. You may also want to ask them to read an excerpt from Alphonse Daudet's novel *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1872), which served as an inspiration for Van Gogh's painting and tells the story of the stagecoach from its own point of view. See the Art in Context section of this resource for the text (in French with an English translation)

Vocabulaire en français (French vocabulary words)

atelier (m.): workshop or studio

cadre (m.): frame

croquis (m.): sketch

dessin (m.): drawing

diligence (f.): stagecoach

empâtement (m.): impasto (a thick layer of paint that sits on top of the canvas)

en plein air: outdoors

exposition (f.): exhibition

hachures (f.): hatching

huile (f.): oil (painting)

oeuvre (m.): work

paysage (m.): landscape

peintre (m.): painter

peindre: to paint

pointillé (m.): technique of painting with a succession of dots

pinceau (m.): paintbrush

tableau (m.): a painting

tache (f.): mark or smudge

toile (f.): canvas

voiture (f.): carriage (of a stagecoach)

les mots-clés de l'analyse picturale (keywords for formal analysis)

complémentaire: complementary

contrastée par: contrasted by

couleur (m.): color

équilibre (m.): balance

espace (m.): space

fond (m.): background

forme (f.): shape

ligne (f.): line

lumière (f.): light

masse (f.): mass

motif (m.): pattern

noir (m.): dark (n.); to describe a color as dark: foncé, e.g. vert foncé

ombre (f.): shadow

perspective (f.): perspective

premier plan (m.): foreground

Vincent's letter to Theo

Van Gogh's copious illustrated letters to his brother, Theo, and others, full of details about his life and art, were published posthumously and have contributed both to his fame and to biographical readings of his work. In a letter to Theo dated October 13, 1888, excerpted below, Van Gogh discusses the inspiration for *Tarascon Stagecoach*. He added a sketch of the composition at the bottom of the page, which has been reproduced online as part of a new edition of Van Gogh's letters.

See Vincent van Gogh: *The Letters*. Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2009.

<http://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let703/letter.html>

Mon cher Theo,

je n'avais tout à fait osé espérer aussi tôt ton nouveau mandat de 50 francs dont je te remercie beaucoup.

J'ai beaucoup de frais et cela me chagrîne bien quelquefois lorsque de plus en plus je m'aperçois que la peinture est un métier qui probablement est exercé par des gens excessivement pauvres puisqu'il coûte beaucoup d'argent.

Mais l'automne continue encore à être d'un beau! quel drôle de pays que cette patrie de Tartarin. Oui je suis content de mon sort; c'est pas un pays superbe et sublime, ce n'est que du Daumier bien vivant. As tu déjà relu les Tartarin, ah ne l'oublie pas! Te rappelles tu dans Tartarin la complainte de la vieille diligence de Tarascon—cette admirable page.—Eh bien je viens de la peindre cette voiture rouge et verte dans la cour de l'auberge.—Tu verras.

Ce croquis hatif t'en donne la composition.

avant plan simple de sable gris.

fond aussi très simple, murailles roses et jaunes avec fenetres à persiennes vertes, coin de ciel bleu.

Les deux voitures tres colorées, vert, rouge, roues jaune, noir, bleu, orangé. Toile de 30 toujours. Les voitures sont peintes à la Monticelli, avec des empâtements. Tu avais dans le temps un bien beau Claude Monet représentant 4 barques colorées sur une plage. Eh bien c'est ici des voitures mais la composition est dans le même genre. . . .

Translation

My dear Theo,

I had hardly dared hope so soon for your new 50-franc money order, for which I thank you very much.

I have many expenses, and it sometimes distresses me greatly when I increasingly come to realize that painting is a craft that is probably practiced by extremely poor people, since it costs a lot of money.

But the autumn still continues to be so fine! What a funny part of the country, this homeland of Tartarin's! Yes, I'm happy with my lot; it isn't a superb and sublime country, it's all something out of Daumier come to life. Have you re-read the Tartarins yet? Ah, don't forget to! Do you remember in Tartarin the lament of the old Tarascon diligence—that wonderful page? Well, I've just painted that red and green carriage in the yard of the inn. You'll see.

This hasty croquis gives you its composition.

Simple foreground of gray sand.

Background very simple, too, pink and yellow walls with windows with green louvred shutters, corner of blue sky.

The two carriages very colorful: green, red, wheels yellow, black, blue, orange. A no. 30 canvas once again. The carriages are painted in the style of Monticelli, with impastos. You once had a very beautiful Claude Monet, of 4 colorful boats on a beach. Well, here it's carriages, but the composition is of the same kind.

Tartarin de Tarascon

Describing his painting *Tarascon Stagecoach* in a letter to his brother, Theo, Van Gogh evoked Alphonse Daudet's novel *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1872), in which an old stagecoach from Provence, now being used in the French colonies in North Africa, reminisces about its glory days on the Tarascon-Nîmes route; Van Gogh wrote that he had painted that coach.

From Alphonse Daudet, *Aventures prodigieuses de Tartarin de Tarascon*. 2nd edition. Paris: E. Dentu, 1875.

Troisième episode, premier chapitre: Les diligences déportées.

C'était une vieille diligence d'autrefois, capitonnée à l'ancienne mode de drap gros bleu tout fané, avec ces énormes pompons de laine rêche qui, après quelques heures de route, finissent par vous faire des moxas dans le dos . . . Tartarin de Tarascon avait un coin de la rotonde; il s'y installa de son mieux, et en attendant de respirer les émanations musquées des grands félins d'Afrique, le héros dut se contenter de cette bonne vieille odeur de diligence, bizarrement composée de mille odeurs, hommes, chevaux, femmes et cuir, victuailles et paille moisie.

Il y avait de tout un peu dans cette rotonde. Un trappiste, des marchands juifs, deux cocottes qui rejoignaient leur corps—le troisième hussards—un photographe d'Orléansville . . . Mais, si charmante et variée que fut la compagnie, le Tarasconnais n'était pas en train de causer et resta là tout pensif, le bras passé dans la brassière, avec ses carabines entre ses genoux . . . Son départ précipité, les yeux noirs de Baïa, la terrible chasse qu'il allait entreprendre, tout cela lui troublait la cervelle, sans compter qu'avec son bon air patriarcal, cette diligence européenne, retrouvée en pleine Afrique, lui rappelait vaguement le Tarascon de sa jeunesse, des courses dans la banlieue, de petits dîners au bord du Rhône, une foule de souvenirs . . .

Peu à peu la nuit tomba. Le conducteur alluma ses lanternes . . . La diligence rouillée sautait en criant sur ses vieux ressorts; les chevaux trottaient, les grelots tintaient . . . De temps en temps, là-haut, sous la bâche de l'impériale, un terrible bruit de ferraille . . . C'était le matériel de guerre.

Tartarin de Tarascon, aux trois quarts assoupi, resta un moment à regarder les voyageurs comiquement secoués par les cahots, et dansant devant lui comme des ombres falotes, puis ses yeux s'obscurcirent, sa pensée se voila, et il n'entendit plus que très vaguement geindre l'essieu des roues, et les flancs de la diligence qui se plaignaient . . .

Subitement, une voix, une voix de vieille fée, enrouée, cassée, fêlée, appela le Tarasconnais par son nom:

– Monsieur Tartarin! monsieur Tartarin!

– Qui m'appelle?

– C'est moi, monsieur Tartarin; vous ne me reconnaissez pas ? . . . Je suis la vieille diligence qui faisait—il y a vingt ans—le service de Tarascon à Nîmes . . . Que de fois je vous ai portés, vous et vos amis, quand vous alliez chasser les casquettes du côté de Jonquières ou de Bellegarde! . . . Je ne vous ai pas remis d'abord, à cause de votre bonnet de *Teur* et du corps que vous avez pris; mais sitôt que vous vous êtes mis à ronfler, coquin de bon sort! je vous ai reconnu tout de suite.

– C'est bon ! c'est bon! fit le Tarasconnais un peu vexé. Puis, se radoucissant:

– Mais enfin, ma pauvre vieille, qu'est-ce que vous êtes venue faire ici?

– Ah ! mon bon monsieur Tartarin, je n'y suis pas venue de mon plein gré, je vous assure . . . Une fois que le chemin de fer de Beaucaire a été fini, ils ne m'ont plus trouvée bonne à rien et ils m'ont envoyée en Afrique . . . Et je ne suis pas la seule! presque toutes les diligences de France ont été déportées comme moi. On nous trouvait trop réactionnaires, et maintenant nous voilà toutes ici à mener une vie de galère . . . C'est ce qu'en France vous appelez les chemins de fer algériens.

Ici la vieille diligence poussa un long soupir; puis elle reprit:

– Ah! monsieur Tartarin, que je le regrette, mon beau Tarascon! C'était alors le bon temps pour moi, le temps de la jeunesse! Il fallait me voir partir le matin, lavée à grande eau et toute luisante avec mes roues vernissées à neuf, mes lanternes qui semblaient deux soleils et ma bâche toujours frottée d'huile! C'est ça qui était beau quand le postillon faisait claquer son fouet sur l'air de: *Lagadigadeou, la Tarasque! la Tarasque!* et que le conducteur, son piston en bandoulière, sa casquette brodée sur l'oreille, jetant d'un tour de bras son petit chien, toujours furieux, sur la bâche de l'impériale, s'élançait lui-même là-haut, en criant: "Allume ! allume!" Alors mes quatre chevaux s'ébranlaient au bruit des grelots, des aboiements, des fanfares, les fenêtres s'ouvraient, et tout Tarascon regardait avec orgueil la diligence détalier sur la grande route royale.

"Quelle belle route, monsieur Tartarin, large, bien entretenue, avec ses bornes kilométriques, ses petits tas de pierre régulièrement espacés, et de droite et de gauche ses jolies plaines d'oliviers et de vignes . . . Puis, des auberges tous les dix pas, des relais toutes les cinq minutes . . . Et mes voyageurs, quels braves gens ! des maires et des curés qui allaient à Nîmes voir leur préfet ou leur évêque, de bons taffetassiers qui revenaient du *Mazet* bien honnêtement, des collégiens en vacances, des paysans en blouse brodée, tous frais rasés du matin, et là-haut, sur l'impériale, vous tous, messieurs les chasseurs de casquettes, qui étiez toujours de si bonne humeur, et qui chantiez si bien chacun *la vôtre*, le soir, aux étoiles, en revenant! . . ."

“Maintenant, c’est une autre histoire . . . Dieu sait les gens que je charrie! un tas de mécréants venus je ne sais d’où, qui me remplissent de vermine, des nègres, des bédouins, des soudards, des aventuriers de tous les pays, des colons en guenilles qui m’empestent de leurs pipes, et tout cela parlant un langage auquel Dieu le père ne comprendrait rien . . . Et puis vous voyez comme on me traite! Jamais brossée, jamais lavée. On me plaint le cambouis de mes essieux . . . Au lieu de mes gros bons chevaux tranquilles d’autrefois, de petits chevaux arabes qui ont le diable au corps, se battent, se mordent, dansent en courant comme des chèvres, et me brisent mes brancards à coups de pieds . . . Aïe! . . . aïe! . . . tenez! Voilà que cela commence . . . Et les routes! Par ici, c’est encore supportable, parce que nous sommes près du gouvernement; mais là-bas, plus rien, pas de chemin du tout. On va comme on peut, à travers monts et plaines, dans les palmiers nains, dans les lentisques . . . Pas un seul relais fixe. On arrête au caprice du conducteur, tantôt dans une ferme, tantôt dans une autre.”

“Quelquefois ce polisson-là me fait faire un détour de deux lieues pour aller chez un ami boire l’absinthe ou *le champoreau* . . . Après quoi, fouette, postillon! Il faut rattraper le temps perdu. Le soleil cuit, la poussière brûle. Fouette toujours! On accroche, on verse! Fouette plus fort! On passe des rivières à la nage, on s’enrhume, on se mouille, on se noie . . . Fouette! fouette! fouette! . . . Puis le soir, toute ruisselante,—c’est cela qui est bon à mon âge, avec mes rhumatismes !—il me faut coucher à la belle étoile, dans une cour de caravansérail ouverte à tous les vents. La nuit, des chacals, des hyènes viennent flairer mes caissons, et les maraudeurs qui craignent la rosée se mettent au chaud dans mes compartiments . . . Voilà la vie que je mène, mon pauvre monsieur Tartarin, et je la mènerai jusqu’au jour où, brûlée par le soleil, pourrie par les nuits humides, je tomberai—ne pouvant plus faire autrement—sur un coin de méchante route, où les Arabes feront bouillir leur couscous avec les débris de ma vieille carcasse . . .

– Blidah! Blidah! fit le conducteur en ouvrant la portière.

Translation

It was an ancient, old-fashioned stagecoach, upholstered in the old way in heavy blue cloth, very faded, and with enormous pom-poms, which after a few hours on the road dug uncomfortably into one's back. Tartarin had an inside seat, where he installed himself as best he could, and where, instead of the musky scent of the great cats, he could savor the ripe perfume of the coach, compounded of a thousand odors of men, women, horses, leather, food, and damp straw.

The other passengers on the coach were a mixed lot. A Trappist monk, some Jewish merchants, two Cocottes, returning to their unit, the third Hussars, and a photographer from Orleansville.

No matter how charming and varied the company, Tartarin did not feel like chatting and remained silent, his arm hooked into the arm-strap and his weaponry between his knees. . . . His hurried departure, the dark eyes of Baia, the dangerous chase on which he was about to engage, these thoughts troubled his mind, and also there was something about this venerable stagecoach, now domiciled in Africa, which recalled to him vaguely the Tarascon of his youth. Trips to the country. Dinners by the banks of the Rhône, a host of memories.

Little by little it grew dark. The guard lit the lanterns. The old coach swayed and squeaked on its worn springs. The horses trotted, the bells on their harness jingling, and from time to time there sounded the clash of ironmongery from Tartarin's arms chest on the top of the coach.

Sleepily, Tartarin contemplated his fellow passengers as they danced before his eyes, shaken by the jolting of the coach, then his eyes closed and he heard no more, except vaguely, the rumble of the axles and the groaning of the coach sides. . . .

Suddenly, an ancient female voice, rough, hoarse and cracked, called the Tarasconais by name: "Monsieur Tartarin! . . . Monsieur Tartarin!"

"Who is calling me?"

"It is I, Monsieur Tartarin, don't you recognise me? . . . I am the stagecoach which once ran . . . it is now twenty years ago . . . the service from Tarascon to Nîmes. . . . How many times have I carried you and your friends when you went hat shooting over by Joncquières or Bellegarde . . . I didn't recognize you at first because of your bonnet and the amount of weight you have put on, but as soon as you began to snore, you old rascal, I knew you right away."

"Bon! . . . Bon!," replied Tartarin, somewhat vexed, but then softening, he added: "But now, my poor old lady, what are you doing here?"

"Ah! My dear M. Tartarin, I did not come here of my own free will I can promise you. Once the railway reached Beaucaire no one could find a use for me so I was shipped off to Africa . . . and I am not the only one, nearly all the stagecoaches in France have been deported like me; we were found too old-fashioned and now here we all are, leading a life of slavery." Here the old coach gave a long sigh, then she went on: "I can't tell you monsieur Tartarin how much I miss my lovely Tarascon. These were good times for me, the time of my youth. You should have seen me leaving in the morning, freshly washed and polished, with new varnish on my wheels, my lamps shining like suns and my tarpaulin newly dressed with oil. How grand it was when the postillion cracked his whip and sang out, 'Lagadigadeou, la Tarasque, la Tarasque' and the guard, with his ticket-punch slung on its bandolier and his braided cap tipped over one ear, chucked his little yapping dog onto the tarpaulin of the coach-roof and scrambled up himself crying 'Let's go! . . . Let's go!' Then my four horses would start off with a jingle of bells, barking and fanfares. Windows would open and all Tarascon would watch with pride the stagecoach setting off along the king's highway.

What a fine road it was, Monsieur Tartarin, wide and well kept, with its kilometer markers, its heaps of roadmender's stones at regular intervals, and to right and left vineyards and pretty groves of olive trees. Then inns every few yards, post-houses every five minutes . . . and my travelers! What fine folk! . . . Mayors and curés going to Nimes to see their Prefect or Bishop, honest workmen, students on holiday, peasants in embroidered smocks, all freshly shaved that morning, and up on top, all of you hat shooters, who were always in such good form and who sang so well to the stars as we returned home in the evening.

Now it is a different story . . . God knows the sort of people I carry. A load of miscreants from goodness knows where, who infest me with vermin. Negroes, Bedouins, rascals and adventurers from every country, colonists who stink me out with their pipes, and all of them talking a language which even our Heavenly Father couldn't understand. . . . And then you see how they treat me. Never brushed. Never washed. They grudge me the grease for my axles, and instead of the fine big, quiet horses which I used to have, they give me little Arab horses which have the devil in them, fighting, biting, dancing about and running like goats, breaking my shafts with kicks. Aie! . . . Aie! They are at it again now. . . . And the roads! It's still all right here, because we are near Government House, but out there, nothing! No road of any sort. One goes as best one can over hill and dale through dwarf palms and mastic trees. Not a single fixed stop. One pulls up at wherever the guard fancies, sometimes at

one farm, sometimes at another. Sometimes this rogue takes me on a detour of two leagues just so that he can go and drink with a friend. After that it's 'Whip up postillion, we must make up for lost time.' The sun burns. The dust chokes . . . Whip! . . . Whip! We crash. We tip over. More whip. We swim across rivers, we are cold, soaked and half drowned . . . Whip! . . . Whip! . . . Whip! Then in the evening, dripping wet . . . that's good for me at my age . . . I have to bed down in the yard of some caravan halt, exposed to all the winds. At night jackals and hyenas come to sniff at my lockers and creatures which fear the dawn hide in my compartments. That's the life I lead, monsieur Tartarin, and I shall lead until the day when, scorched by sun and rotted by humid nights, I shall fall at some corner of this beastly road, where Arabs will boil their cous-cous on the remains of my old carcass."

"Blidah! . . . Blidah!" Shouted the guard, opening the coach door.

Educational programs during *Cézanne and the Modern: Masterpieces of European Art from the Pearlman Collection* have been underwritten by the Heart of Neiman Marcus Foundation.

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