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*THE CYPRESS TREES IN "THE STARRY NIGHT":  
A SYMBOLIC SELF-PORTRAIT OF VINCENT VAN GOGH*

Jessica Caldarone

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Vincent van Gogh was born in 1853 in the Netherlands. His experience with the art world began when he started working for his uncle's art firm at the age of seventeen.<sup>1</sup> Along with his brother Theo, Van Gogh was employed by the Goupil House in The Hague, the Netherlands, which dealt with French and Dutch art of the time.<sup>2</sup> However, the influence of Van Gogh's father, a Protestant pastor, led Van Gogh to leave the firm to pursue studies in theology and missionary work.<sup>3</sup> Because he did not display the appropriate qualities necessary for a missionary, Van Gogh was let go from his evangelical work,<sup>4</sup> which then led to his decision to become an artist. Nonetheless, he never abandoned his curiosity about religion while he furthered his artistic training.<sup>5</sup> Van Gogh was also haunted by episodes of illness, characterized by periods of lucidity and incapacity, which would reoccur throughout his lifetime, and in May of 1889, he voluntarily entered the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole in Saint-Rémy, France.<sup>6</sup> It was during his stay at this mental hospital that he painted *The Starry Night* (1889).<sup>7</sup> This piece has been the subject of countless interpretations, especially in regard to Van Gogh's mental status and religious interest. But what exactly lies behind the luminescent stars and rolling landscape? By conducting a formal analysis of the cypress trees in *The Starry Night*, as well as comparing it to formal analyses of the cypress trees in his paintings *Cypresses* (1889) and *Wheat Field with Cypresses* (1889), it can be concluded that the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* are inconsistent with the rest of the painting as well as with his other depictions of cypress trees. Thus, the pair of cypress trees in *The Starry Night* requires explanation. It is my reading that the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* are a symbolic self-portrait of Vincent van Gogh.

Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (fig. 1) is an oil painting depicting a landscape and a town at night. All of the components of the paintings are formed by distinct brushstrokes through use of a painterly technique in which colors and tones rather than lines and contour

define forms. A glowing crescent moon is depicted in the top right-hand corner, while the stars swirl through the sky. The rolling hills below echo the motion of the swirling stars. Towards the bottom and to the right of the canvas is the small town, Saint-Rémy, which is the town that housed the mental hospital in which Van Gogh sought treatment.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the painting is not an accurate depiction of the town and its landscape. It has a basis in observation, but also was worked from Van Gogh's imagination.<sup>9</sup> A resolutely vertical pair of cypress trees is depicted in the foreground on the left side of the canvas. The basic palette of this painting includes blues, yellows, browns, and greens. In his letters to his brother Theo, Van Gogh never reflected upon this particular painting, but only alluded to it in a letter dating from June 19, 1889, "Finally, I have a landscape with olive trees and also a new study of a starry sky."<sup>10</sup>

The cypress trees here will be described as a pair of cypress trees, although some scholars have interpreted the cypress trees as numerous. Albert J. Lubin claims in his book *Stranger on the Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh*, "Paired cypresses are not common, but Vincent's personal vision led him to paint many of them, such as cypress couples standing side by side in *The Drawbridge* or overlapping in *Wheatfield with Cypresses*."<sup>11</sup> It is important to understand the cypress trees as a pair since this is uncharacteristic of cypress trees, yet Van Gogh often coupled the trees.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, H.R. Graetz asserts in *The Symbolic Language of Vincent van Gogh* that, "If one seeks to understand why his works have such a strong effect, one may find a guide in the stars, suns, moons, lights, candles, houses, fields, trees, flowers, and many other forms and objects which by virtue of their particular composition, become striking symbols in his portraits or figure studies, landscapes or still lifes."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, through such symbols one can begin to understand the artist, Vincent van Gogh.

Immediately, the cypress trees stand out from the rest of the painting in brushstroke, color, and form. The brushstrokes that form the cypress trees are crude and elongated with some brushstrokes unbroken. It appears as though Van Gogh is using fewer marks to describe the forms effectively. This execution of the cypress trees is different from the rest of the painting, for the sky and town are made up of many shorter, and for the most part horizontal, brushstrokes. The cool palette of the cypress trees includes the colors of dark green, brown, and violet.<sup>14</sup> Van Gogh writes to Theo that the green of cypress trees “has a quality of such distinction.”<sup>15</sup> The cypress trees also have immense verticality that serves as a bridge between the landscape and the sky,<sup>16</sup> although the viewer cannot see where the cypress trees are rooted in the ground. The branches of the cypress trees appear as flames of fire.<sup>17</sup> A marked difference in brushstrokes and palette separates the cypress trees from the rest of the painting, and their verticality seems to be in opposition to the horizontality of the painting. One exception to the painting’s horizontality is the diminutive vertical church spire in the center of the composition.<sup>18</sup> In viewing the painting as a whole, the declamatory colors and verticality of the cypress trees point to an ulterior meaning.

A formal comparison can be made between the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* and Van Gogh’s other paintings that include cypress trees. It is speculated that in June of 1889, Van Gogh painted two paintings that also include cypress trees: *Cypresses* (1889) and *Wheat Field with Cypresses* (1889). In *Cypresses*, there are two distinct cypress trees that extend beyond the canvas (fig. 2). The pair of trees emerges from the grass and flowers beneath them with hills in the background. The brushstrokes used to create the form of the cypress trees are short and stylized in their curling motion. Yellows, browns, and sap greens compose the cypress trees in this painting, constituting a warm palette. While on the left side of the composition and not central, the cypress trees are the main focus of the painting due to their height and absence of any

other items of interest. In *Wheat Field with Cypresses*, there is also a distinct pair of cypress trees (fig. 3). These cypress trees appear further back in the picture plane than the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* and *Cypresses*. These vertical trees also emerge from the earth with mountains in the background. Van Gogh painted these cypress trees with a quite short and choppy brushstroke. The palette of the cypress trees in *Wheat Field with Cypresses* is very similar to the palette of *Cypresses*. Sap green seems to be the primary color, yet browns are also evident. The similarities in the way Van Gogh painted the cypress trees in each of these paintings are limited and dependent upon the object itself. They include duality and verticality.

Through formal comparison of the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* to the cypress trees in the other works of Van Gogh, all assumed to have been painted within June 1889, the distinctness of the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* is even more evident. There possibly can be two distinct cypress trees rooted in the ground seen in *Cypresses* (fig. 2) and *Wheat Field with Cypresses* (fig. 3). However, the two cypress trees in *The Starry Night* (fig. 1) seem to be fused into one tree and are not shown as emerging from the earth. Another difference is in terms of palette and the palette's harmony with the rest of the painting. While the palettes of the three paintings generally consist of the same colors (greens and browns), the palette of the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* is much darker relative to the rest of the painting. Both *Cypresses* and *Wheat Field with Cypresses* have warmer versions of the green and brown colors used in the cypress trees while the addition of yellow also warms the cypress trees. However, the darkening of the greens and browns as well as the introduction of violet to the color palette of the cypress trees create a cooler and darker effect in *The Starry Night*. This difference in palette is mainly due to the fact that *The Starry Night* is a nocturnal scene, whereas the other two paintings are daytime scenes. In the night scene of *The Starry Night*, the cypress trees seem to be represented

as much too dark in the context of the rest of the night scene. This extreme darkness further isolates the cypress trees from the rest of the picture. While the cypress tree by nature is dark, there is no sense of isolation in *Cypresses* and *Wheat Field with Cypresses*. The palette of the cypress trees in these two particular paintings is consistent with the rest of the paintings' palettes and the brushwork creates an even weave of mark across the paintings' surfaces. This inconsistency of palette and brushwork further the distinct nature of the cypress trees in *The Starry Night*.

The drastic opposition of the vertical cypress trees in *The Starry Night* with the horizontality of the rest of the painting could serve as an emblem of the life of Van Gogh as a man who stood apart from society and the art world. During his stay in Saint-Rémy, he was isolated from the world. Aside from writing letters to his friends and family members, especially to his brother Theo, Van Gogh was cut off from a familiar world. In addition, he was a Dutchman who lived in a French hospital that gave him no contact with art or artists.<sup>19</sup> Saint-Rémy, a town in the South of France, was far from the artistic activity in Paris. The discussion of contemporary artists in his correspondence with his brother Theo seems to be his only contact with the art world. In their correspondence, the brothers discuss current exhibits and what artists are doing in their work. In June 1889, Theo wrote to Van Gogh about his exclusion from an exhibit.<sup>20</sup> Theo writes, "As you know, there is an exhibition at a café à l'exposition where Gauguin and some others (Schuffenecker) are exhibiting pictures. At first I had said you would exhibit some things too, but they assumed an air of being such tremendous fellows that it made one sick."<sup>21</sup> Sven Loevgren suggests in *The Genesis of Modernism: Seurat, Gauguin, Van Gogh, & French Symbolism in the 1880's*, that while Van Gogh's response to such news was reserved,

he probably felt upset.<sup>22</sup> Could this letter in June of 1889 have contributed to the depiction of the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* as excluded from the activity of rest of the painting?

His isolation was furthered by his own illness as well as by the fact that he was surrounded by severely ill mental patients.<sup>23</sup> But in his isolation he produced, among other works, the widely acclaimed painting, *The Starry Night*. His isolation undoubtedly impacted the creation of this painting. The tall and dark cypress trees loom over the town of Saint-Rémy, watching over the town almost wistfully and from afar. They do not in any way participate in the joyous swirls of the night's stars. Van Gogh's illness surely prevented him from participating in the joyous environment, and he may be seen to have rendered himself symbolically as separate from – outside of – the joyous energy of the night sky and the calm of the village below.

The two cypress trees can thus be seen not only as emblematic of Vincent van Gogh, but as a potential self-representation. If so, what can then be assumed about the presence of two cypress trees, one larger than the other? Does it communicate a subconscious representation of two personalities? While in Paris, Van Gogh's use of absinthe may possibly have been a huge contributing factor to the onset of otherwise latent illness.<sup>24</sup> While it also may have served as self-medication, Van Gogh's use of absinthe continued in Arles, France and this is where his illness developed “and reached psychotic dimension for the first time before the end of 1888.”<sup>25</sup> Van Gogh's loneliness in Arles led to the founding of a studio where Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin worked together. The pair of artists, however, did not necessarily get along, and by December, their relationship had grown very tense.<sup>26</sup> In December 1888, Van Gogh mutilated his left ear, which ultimately set off his psychological crises.<sup>27</sup> Following this incident, the residents of Arles petitioned to have Van Gogh admitted to a mental hospital,<sup>28</sup> and he was later



admitted to a hospital in Arles where Dr. Felix Rey diagnosed him with the condition of epilepsy.<sup>29</sup> According to Anne Woods, M.D., a pediatric neurologist, epilepsy was still considered a form of insanity during Van Gogh's time and was often associated with intense religious experience.<sup>30</sup> Dr. Rey treated Van Gogh with potassium bromide,<sup>31</sup> a treatment still prescribed until recently.<sup>32</sup> It is still unknown today from what Van Gogh suffered. Possible diagnoses include epilepsy, acute intermittent porphyria (AIP), alcoholism,<sup>33</sup> bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia,<sup>34</sup> among others.

Van Gogh willingly committed himself to the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole in Saint-Rémy, France in May 1889, where the director of the facility, Dr. Peyron, noted soon after Van Gogh's admittance that:

...having been treated in the hospital [in Arles, the patient] is suffering from acute mania with hallucinations of sight and hearing which have caused him to mutilate himself by cutting off his right ear. At present he seems to have recovered his reason, but he does not feel that he possesses the strength and the courage to live independently and has voluntarily asked to be admitted to this institution. As a result of the preceding it is my opinion that M. van Gogh is subject to epileptic fits at very infrequent intervals, and that it is advisable to keep him under prolonged observation in this establishment.<sup>35</sup>

Dr. Peyron, however, did not continue to treat Van Gogh with potassium bromide.<sup>36</sup> During his stay, Van Gogh experienced three psychotic episodes which felt religious for him.<sup>37</sup> He also attempted suicide. Often after an episode, Van Gogh would be described as rational.<sup>38</sup> On May 16, 1890, Van Gogh was discharged from the hospital at Saint-Rémy. The following is Dr. Peyron's final observation of Vincent van Gogh:

The patient, though calm most of the time, he [sic] has had several attacks during his stay in the establishment which have lasted from two weeks to one month. During these attacks the patient was subject to frightful terrors and tried several times to poison himself, either by swallowing the paints which he used for his work or by drinking kerosene which he managed to steal from the attendant while the latter refilled his lamps. His last fit broke out after a trip to Arles, and lasted about two months. Between his attacks the patient was perfectly quiet and

devoted himself with ardor to his painting. Today he is asking release to live in the North of France, hoping that its climate will be favorable.<sup>39</sup>

Van Gogh was deemed cured upon his release. Yet, on July 27, 1890, Vincent van Gogh once again attempted suicide and later died from this attempt on July 29, 1890.

Within this context of the history of Van Gogh's illness, the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* are an apt symbol for Van Gogh's struggle with psychotic episodes at Saint-Rémy. As a symbol, the larger cypress tree can be seen to represent Van Gogh during his episodes of illness, while the smaller cypress tree suggests Van Gogh while he is lucid. The fact that the two cypress trees are painted similarly unifies rationality and irrationality in the person of Van Gogh. Even more compelling, Van Gogh's own siblings took notice of the two sides of his nature, as his brother Theo writes to their younger sister, in a letter cited by Dietrich Blumer, M.D. in "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh":

It seems as if he were two persons: one, marvelously gifted, tender and refined, the other egotistic and hard hearted. They present themselves in turns, so that one hears him talk first in one way, then in the other, and always with arguments on both sides. It is a pity that he is his own enemy, for he makes life hard for others but also for himself.<sup>40</sup>

These mental polarities and differences in personality make up Vincent van Gogh, as the two cypress trees, while painted similarly in color and brushstroke and fused into one, also diverge at a point of separation.

While in Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh did paint direct portraits of himself. *Self-Portrait With Palette* (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.) and *Self-Portrait* (Musée de Orsay, Paris) were painted in August/September 1889, a few months after the completion of *The Starry Night* in June. *Self-Portrait with Palette* was painted immediately after Van Gogh had suffered from an episode of illness.<sup>41</sup> He describes this particular portrait in a letter to Theo: "One I began the day I got up; I was thin and pale as a ghost. It is dark violet-blue and the head whitish with

yellow hair, so it has a color effect.”<sup>42</sup> He has depicted himself in his painter’s smock, holding a palette.<sup>43</sup> Formally, this painting can be compared to the cypress trees in *The Starry Night*. Like the cypress trees, the head stands out from its context, due to shifts in brushstroke. The color palette is also very similar to that of the cypress trees in *The Starry Night*. *Self-Portrait* represents Van Gogh in a jacket and waistcoat.<sup>44</sup> In this second portrait, the brushstrokes make an even weave across the surface. This portrait has been seen as “a successor to the previous portrait, an attempt to show the improvement in his health.”<sup>45</sup> In a letter to Theo, Van Gogh references a story of a man who suffered from a nervous condition and Van Gogh suggests that the cure to such an ailment is work:

Some days ago I was reading in the *Figaro* the story of a Russian writer who suffered all his life from a nervous disease which he finally died of, and which brought on terrible attacks from time to time. And what’s to be done? There is no cure, or if there is one, it is working zealously.<sup>46</sup>

These particular self-portraits, which were executed as Van Gogh was recovering from an episode of illness, should reflect Van Gogh’s suggestion that working can cure his illness.<sup>47</sup> If so, the cypress trees in *The Starry Night*, painted soon after Van Gogh’s arrival at Saint-Rémy, might then be seen as Van Gogh working through his illness. Also, the differences in execution of these two particular self-portraits may once again reiterate the bifurcated personality of the artist.

The pair of cypress trees in *The Starry Night* also communicates Van Gogh’s relationship with his brother, Theo. The volumes of letters they wrote to each other are evidence of the strong relationship between the two. For example, Theo writes a letter of encouragement to Van Gogh:

In your last letter you wrote me that we were brothers for more than one reason. This is what I feel too, and though my heart is not as sensitive as yours, I can

enter at times into your feeling of being smothered by so many thoughts that cannot be resolved. Never lose courage, and remember how much I want you.<sup>48</sup>

While Van Gogh was in the hospital in Saint-Rémy and isolated from his brother, many changes were taking place in Theo's life. On April 17, 1889, just before Vincent van Gogh admitted himself to Saint-Rémy, Theo and Johanna Gesina Bonger married in Amsterdam and on January 31, 1890, Theo and Jo welcomed a son, Vincent Willem van Gogh.<sup>49</sup> Due to his illness, Van Gogh was not present for either event in Theo's life. Van Gogh was also extremely dependent upon Theo for his very survival. In his article "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," Dietrich Blumer, M.D. cites a letter Van Gogh wrote to Theo, "And without your friendship I would be driven to suicide without pangs of conscience – and as cowardly as I am, I would finally do it."<sup>50</sup> Theo would provide Van Gogh with the materials he needed to work and would also promote his brother's art throughout the art world. Theo wrote to Van Gogh, "I have invited quite a number of people to see your pictures, the Pissarros, Father Tanguy, Verenskiold..."<sup>51</sup> It is interesting to note that Theo van Gogh died only six months after Vincent committed suicide.<sup>52</sup>

Could the pair of cypress trees in *The Starry Night* formally communicate Vincent and Theo van Gogh? Theo was Van Gogh's younger brother. Yet Theo really functioned as the "older" brother. The two cypress trees, fused yet pulling apart, reflect Vincent and Theo always connected through their blood line, but also pulling apart due to where they are in their lives. It is tempting to see the pulling apart of the cypress trees as representative of this brotherly relationship being threatened by new developments in Theo's life. Certainly, objects as symbolic of humans were not foreign to Van Gogh. Albert J. Lubin in *Stanger on the Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh* writes:

Other objects were also turned into symbolic human couples, with one partner touching or merging with the other. Vincent drew a pair of cottages, fully conscious of his intent: "The subject struck me very much. Those two half-

mouldered cottages under one and the same thatched roof reminded me of an old couple, worn with age, who have grown into one being, are seen leaning on each other. For you see there are two cottages and a double chimney.”<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, Sven Loevgren in his book *The Genesis of Modernism: Seurat, Gauguin, Van Gogh & French Symbolism in the 1880's*, points out that there is a correlation between Van Gogh's attacks and Theo's life changes: “It was no coincidence that Vincent cut off his ear when he heard that Théo had gone to Holland to marry Johanna Bonger. He had a new serious seizure at Saint-Rémy when Jo wrote to tell him that she was expecting a child.”<sup>54</sup> Vincent would no longer be the sole focus for Theo anymore, for Theo had become a husband and father. Supportive of this reading of the cypress trees as representative of Vincent and Theo van Gogh, H.R. Graetz suggests in *The Symbolism of Vincent van Gogh* a similar reading of Van Gogh's *Two Sunflowers* (1888) and *Two Shoes* (1886) as reflective of the brothers' relationship.<sup>55</sup> “If one compares the ‘Two Shoes,’ done at the beginning of his stay in Paris, with the ‘Two Sunflowers’ one sees in them a reflection of Vincent's positive and negative feelings toward Theo.”<sup>56</sup>

Outside of metaphor, cypress trees exist in the landscape of Saint-Rémy and they certainly intrigued Van Gogh. In a letter he wrote to his brother, Van Gogh describes his deep interest in the cypress trees of the landscape around him:

The cypresses are always occupying my thoughts, I should like to make something of them like the canvases of the sunflowers, because it astonishes me that they have not yet been done as I see them. It is as beautiful of [sic] line and proportion of an Egyptian obelisk. And the green quality is of such distinction. It is a splash of *black* in a sunny landscape, but it [sic] one of the most interesting black notes, and the most difficult to hit of exactly that I can imagine.<sup>57</sup>

Van Gogh's comparison of sunflowers to cypress trees is very interesting due to the symbolic meaning cypress trees carry. Cypress trees were traditionally connected with death, as many Mediterranean countries planted cypress trees in cemeteries because they were thought of as

evocative of immortality.<sup>58</sup> Sunflowers, on the other hand, were a symbol of life.<sup>59</sup> Even formally, the dark cypress tree is in opposition to the bright sunflower.<sup>60</sup> Van Gogh took notice of this opposition; he wrote to Theo in February 1890, “When I had done those sunflowers, I looked for the contrast and yet the equivalent, and I said – It is the cypress.”<sup>61</sup> Assuming that Van Gogh was aware of the symbolism of the cypress tree, it can be said that he wanted to treat a symbol of death as he had treated a symbol of life. This interest in cypress trees parallels Van Gogh’s increasing obsession with death. In February 1888, Van Gogh writes Theo about the afterlife and this interest is not forgotten by the time he paints *The Starry Night*. In that particular letter he writes:

Whence comes it that in the present instance of our uncle’s death, the face of the deceased was calm, peaceful, and grave, whereas it is a fact that he was rarely that way while living, either in youth or age? I have often observed a similar effect as I looked on the dead as though to question them. And for me this is *one* proof, though not the most serious, of a life beyond the grave.<sup>62</sup>

Van Gogh’s suicide attempts while in Saint-Rémy may be linked to his interest in the cypress tree, suggesting not only the peace he might find in death, but immortality in the afterlife, as well.

Van Gogh, in the letter to Theo dating from February 1890, likened the cypress tree to the Egyptian obelisk, which served as a connection between heaven and earth.<sup>63</sup> While the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* are not grounded, they span the height of the canvas, connecting the earth with the sky. The verticality of the cypress trees is echoed by the church spire, also symbolic of the link that religion provides between heaven and earth, in the center of the composition.<sup>64</sup> The church spire is the only other vertical element of *The Starry Night* and is reflective of Van Gogh’s religious background. However, because of the diminutive nature of

the church spire, it may be more appropriate to suggest that while Van Gogh is longing for immortality and perhaps an escape from his suffering, he may not find it in religion.

It is my assertion that the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* are representative, consciously or unconsciously, of Van Gogh's life at the time in which he painted this painting. The foundation of this assertion rests in the observation of the cypress trees as formally inconsistent with the rest of the painting. Not only is this pair of cypress trees inconsistent with this particular painting, but this pair of cypress trees is also inconsistent with Van Gogh's rendering of cypress trees in *Cypresses* and *Wheat Field with Cypresses*, two paintings that were presumably executed in the same month as *The Starry Night*. A marked difference in their palette along with their extreme vertical nature distinguishes the cypress trees from the rest of *The Starry Night*, requiring an explanation. It is with this observation that the cypress trees in *The Starry Night* can be understood as Van Gogh's symbolic self-representation. At this point in his life, Van Gogh was isolated from his friends, family, and the artistic community just as the cypress trees stand apart from the town below. Like them, he was only able to look out at the world from a point apart, the hospital in Saint-Rémy, rather than participate in it. The pair of cypress trees also reflects Van Gogh's illness during 1889. The trees appear tortured and tormented, as was Van Gogh himself, overwhelmed with illness during the last two years of his life. The cypress trees further suggest the duality of his temperament, that of lucid and ill, rational and irrational. They also may express his relationship to his brother, Theo. The cypress trees could be said to represent the fused interdependence between the two brothers, and their ultimate separation. Finally, the cypress tree symbolizes death. As a man who attempted suicide during his stay in the hospital in Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh was naturally attracted to this symbol. They connect the earth and sky as they span the height of the canvas, and their verticality is

echoed by the church spire, a religious symbol, in the center of the painting. These elements point to Van Gogh's contemplation of death and the desire for relief in an afterlife and immortality. Thus, behind the luminescent stars and rolling landscape of *The Starry Night*, I read the revealing symbolic self-portrait of Vincent van Gogh shortly before his suicide, manifested in the cypress trees.



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<sup>1</sup> Richard Thomson, *Vincent van Gogh: The Starry Night* (New York: Museum of Modern Art: Distributed in the United States and Canada by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2008), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Pach, *Vincent Van Gogh, 1853-1890. A Study of the Artist and His Work in Relation to His Times* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Thomson, *Vincent van Gogh: The Starry Night*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Alyson Stein, ed., *Van Gogh. A Retrospective* (New York: Park Lane, distributed by Crown Publishers, Inc., 1986), 47.

<sup>5</sup> Thomson, *Vincent van Gogh: The Starry Night*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Lauren Soth, "Van Gogh's Agony," *Art Bulletin* 68 (June 1986): 303-304.

<sup>9</sup> Soth, "Van Gogh's Agony," 303.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, vol. 3 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 2000), 182.

<sup>11</sup> Albert J. Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1972), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> H.R. Graetz, *The Symbolic Language of Vincent van Gogh* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Thomson, *Vincent van Gogh: The Starry Night*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 185.

<sup>16</sup> Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, "Vincent van Gogh's Paintings of Olive Trees and Cypresses from St.-Rémy," *Art Bulletin* 75 (December 1993): 658.

<sup>17</sup> Thomson, *Vincent van Gogh: The Starry Night*, 30-31.

<sup>18</sup> Jirat-Wasiutyński, "Vincent van Gogh's Paintings of Olive Trees and Cypresses from St.-Rémy," 661.

<sup>19</sup> Thomson, *Vincent van Gogh: The Starry Night*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Sven Loevgren, *The Genesis of Modernism: Seurat, Gauguin, Van Gogh & French Symbolism in the 1880's* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 186.

<sup>21</sup> Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 544.

<sup>22</sup> Loevgren, *The Genesis of Modernism: Seurat, Gauguin, Van Gogh & French Symbolism in the 1880's*, 187.

<sup>23</sup> Thomson, *Vincent van Gogh: The Starry Night*, 3, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Dietrich Blumer, M.D., "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 159 (April 2002): 520.

<sup>25</sup> Blumer, "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," 520.

<sup>26</sup> Sjraar van Heugten, Louis van Tilbough, and Evert van Uiter, *Vincent van Gogh: Paintings*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 1990), 31.

<sup>27</sup> Thomson, *Vincent van Gogh: The Starry Night*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Stein, *Van Gogh. A Retrospective*, 132-133.

<sup>29</sup> Blumer, "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," 521.

<sup>30</sup> Anne Woods, M.D., email interview by Deborah Johnson, Ph.D., October 13, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Blumer, "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," 521.

<sup>32</sup> Woods, interview.

<sup>33</sup> Thomson, *Vincent van Gogh: The Starry Night*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Blumer, "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," 525.

<sup>35</sup> Ronald Pickvance, *Van Gogh in Saint-Rémy and Auvers*, exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 26.

<sup>36</sup> Blumer, "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," 521.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Pickvance, *Van Gogh in Saint-Rémy and Auvers*, 73.

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- <sup>40</sup> Blumer, "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," 520.
- <sup>41</sup> Van Heugten, Van Tilbough, and Van Uitert, *Vincent van Gogh: Paintings*, 226.
- <sup>42</sup> Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 201-202.
- <sup>43</sup> Van Heugten, Van Tilbough, and Van Uitert, *Vincent van Gogh: Paintings*, 226.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 204.
- <sup>47</sup> Pickvance, *Van Gogh in Saint-Rémy and Auvers*, 42.
- <sup>48</sup> Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 549.
- <sup>49</sup> Van Heugten, Van Tilbough, and Van Uitert, *Vincent van Gogh: Paintings*, 31-32.
- <sup>50</sup> Blumer, "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," 521.
- <sup>51</sup> Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 546.
- <sup>52</sup> Van Heugten, Van Tilbough, and Van Uitert, *Vincent van Gogh: Paintings*, 32.
- <sup>53</sup> Lubin, *Stanger on the Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh*, 9.
- <sup>54</sup> Loevgren, *The Genesis of Modernism: Seurat, Gauguin, Van Gogh & French Symbolism in the 1880's*, 183.
- <sup>55</sup> Graetz, *The Symbolic Language of Vincent van Gogh*, 64.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 185.
- <sup>58</sup> Jirat-Wasiutyński, "Vincent van Gogh's Paintings of Olive Trees and Cypresses from St.-Rémy," 657.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>61</sup> Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 253.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>63</sup> Jirat-Wasiutyński, "Vincent van Gogh's Paintings of Olive Trees and Cypresses from St.-Rémy," 657.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 661.



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Figure 1. Gogh, Vincent van (1853-1890). The Starry Night. Saint Rémy, June 1889. Oil on canvas, 29 x 36 ¼" (73.7 x 92.1 cm). Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.



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Figure 2. Gogh, Vincent van (1853-1890). Cypresses. 1889. Oil on canvas, 36  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 29  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (93.4 x 74 cm). Rogers Fund, 1949 (49.30). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.



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Figure 3. Gogh, Vincent van (1853-1890). Wheat Field with Cypresses. 1889. Oil on canvas, 28  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 36  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (73 x 93.4 cm). Purchase, The Annenberg Foundation Gift, 1993 (1993.132). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

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