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Dear Curran Fellowship Committee,

I write to thank RSVP and the Curran Fellowship committee for supporting my research for *Van Gogh and the Victorians*, my book-in-progress. A substantial portion of the book discusses how illustrated British periodicals shaped social realism as a transnational movement. Vincent van Gogh's approach to social realism was greatly influenced by his immersion in British visual and literary culture, which he accessed in no small way via the thousands of British periodical images he purchased and painstakingly preserved.

The fellowship allowed me to take a nine-day research trip to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam in March 2016 to study Van Gogh's collection of British periodicals. The collection includes over 1500 prints from illustrated newspapers that Van Gogh and his brother Theo van Gogh collected. Van Gogh prided himself on having "almost the whole *Graphic* complete" by 1883 (Letter 331, 21 March 1883) as well as hundreds of images from *The Illustrated London News*, *The Pictorial World* and other newspapers. This collection provides a wealth of information about British periodicals and how they were collected in a larger European context.

While at the Van Gogh Museum, I explored the artist's periodical collection as well as his letters, sketches he made at the time of individual periodical acquisitions, and paintings that were explicitly influenced by British writers (notably Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Carlyle) and illustrators for British periodicals (particularly Luke Fildes, William Small, Frank Holl, Hubert von Herkomer, Matthew White Ridley, George John Pinwell, Frederick Barnard, Helen Paterson, Frederick Walker, and Félix Elie Régamey). Dickens was an avid reader of Victorian novelists and consumer of British visual culture, and he reflected on the importance of the above writers and artists in more than a hundred of his letters.

My most exciting discovery involved finally being able to determine which prints Van Gogh prized enough to display on his walls. As Van Gogh's personal copies of these images have not been digitized as of yet, this information can only be discerned by looking in person at the edges of the prints he owned. Seeing pinholes and fingerprints in varnish along the edges revealed which images he chose to display. Returning to his letters, I could more clearly perceive how his readings of his favorite Victorian writers coincided with his viewing of these news images. This discovery particularly helped with my research into a series called "Heads of the People from Real Life" that ran in *The Graphic* in the 1870s through the 1880s. Van Gogh purchased images from this series, studying them while recording thoughts on Dickens's novels. At the same time,

he set out to create what he termed his own “Heads of the People” series, a set of portraits that were dually influenced by *The Graphic* series and by Dickens as a literary portraitist. As Van Gogh wrote at the time, “[t]here is no writer, in my opinion, who is so much a painter and black-and-white artist as Dickens” (Letter 315, 5 March 1883), further connecting Dickens with British illustrators in writing, “the English draughtsmen are what Dickens is in the sphere of literature” (Letter 267, 19, September 1882).

At the Van Gogh Museum, I also had the chance to speak to researchers, curators, conservators, and photographers, who generously helped me to understand more fully the collection and its significance for Van Gogh’s work and for nineteenth-century visual culture more widely. I was allowed to take private photographs of select works for my personal research and to request professional photographs and subsequent permission to use these images. As I was delighted to discover throughout this trip, Van Gogh’s collections of illustrated periodicals serve as one of the most extensive collections of Victorian social realist news images available to scholars. Seeing all these works together helped me to perceive patterns that tell a story of portraiture’s changing status in art and letters. In particular, I began to think about the wide array of portraits of sorrowing figures with hidden faces in his collection. I asked myself, what function do these occluded portraits serve? In their treatment of the human face, they express a tension—one heightened by the illustrated ads that ran alongside them—between the individual and the type, between “stock characters” and “stock images” (terms that came into greater usage in the 19th century) and portraiture as an authenticating representation of the self.

My research at the museum into these questions about social realist iconography, portraiture, and periodical culture became the cornerstone for presentations, an article draft, and a book chapter. Soon after the research trip, I delivered a paper based on my research at the Van Gogh Museum at the annual conference for The Northeastern Victorian Studies Association (NVSA). My findings have since been further developed into an article draft on Dickens, Van Gogh, and British news portraits, and a plenary panel talk on “The Occluded Portraits of Dickens and Van Gogh” that I was invited to give at the annual meeting of the Association for Literary Scholars, Critics and Writers (ALSCW) in Washington, DC in October, 2016. The papers and article are part of a larger chapter on Dickens and Van Gogh in my book project, *Van Gogh and the Victorians*, the whole of which has been shaped by my research at the Van Gogh Museum.

Without the Curran Fellowship, I would not have been able to complete this crucial research trip. I am immensely grateful for the generous support of RSVP and look forward to acknowledging the organization in any published work that results from this funded research.

Sincerely and with many thanks,

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