

“Vincent – Starry, Starry Night” by Don Mclean, 1971

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxHnRfhDmrk>

This is a song written by the American folk singer [Don Mclean](#) as a tribute to Vincent van Gogh. It is very moving and captures well the beauty and tragedy of [van Gogh's](#) life – and perhaps everybody's life in some way: the fine line between normality and insanity, and between genius and insanity in the case of van Gogh. This version on Youtube is quite beautiful, mixing pictures by the artist and also the words of the song. The song was part of Don Mclean's *American Pie* album, a masterpiece of American folk music.

<p>Starry, starry night Paint your palette blue and grey Look out on a summer's day With eyes that know the darkness in my soul Shadows on the hills Sketch the trees and the daffodils Catch the breeze and the winter chills In colors on the snowy linen land</p> <p>Now I understand What you tried to say to me And how you suffered for your sanity And how you tried to set them free They would not listen, they did not know how Perhaps they'll listen now</p> <p>Starry, starry night Flaming flowers that brightly blaze Swirling clouds in violet haze Reflect in Vincent's eyes of China blue Colors changing hue Morning fields of amber grain Weathered faces lined in pain Are soothed beneath the artist's loving hand</p> <p>Now I understand What you tried to say to me And how you suffered for your sanity And how you tried to set them free They would not listen, they did not know how Perhaps they'll listen now.</p> <p>For they could not love you But still your love was true And when no hope was left in sight On that starry, starry night You took your life, as lovers often do But I could have told you, Vincent This world was never meant for one As beautiful as you.</p>	<p>Starry night = nuit étoilée</p> <p>Daffodils = jonquilles Winter chills = frissons d'hiver Snowy linen land = la terre de lin enneigée</p> <p>Sanity = santé mentale Set them free = les libérer (people who did not understand van Gogh's work at the time, the beauty of life and nature?)</p> <p>Flaming flowers = fleurs flamboyantes Brightly blaze = flamber vivement China blue = bleu de Chine Hue = teint</p> <p>Weathered faces = des visages usés par le temps (dehors) Adoucis par la main de l'artiste aimante</p> <p>For = car</p> <p>In sight = en vue</p>
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<p>Starry, starry night Portraits hung in empty halls Frameless heads on nameless walls With eyes that watch the world and can't forget Like the strangers that you've met The ragged men in ragged clothes The silver thorn; a bloody rose Lie crushed and broken on the virgin snow</p> <p>Now I think I know What you tried to say to me And how you suffered for your sanity And how you tried to set them free They would not listen, they're not listening still Perhaps they never will.</p>	<p>Frameless heads = têtes sans cadres Nameless = sans nom</p> <p>Rag = chiffon ; ragged = en lambeaux Silver thorn = épine d'argent</p>
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In the film "Lust for Life" (1956), Kirk Douglas gives a very powerful, brilliant interpretation of van Gogh. This beautiful video with magnificent shots from the film uses the song again:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgVEauqFTOU>

In this scene, van Gogh thanks his brother for helping him. He says he feels the force growing within him daily. He tells Theo that what he is doing is new. He is painting the labourers in the fields; a man digging. He says the old Masters never painted work, because it is hard, so hard to draw.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9mRRm906KU&list=PLvo6hCrYK975N2V9uWa98Qyj6K8oSuogb>

In this scene, a depressed van Gogh tells his brother he has never found anything to do, anywhere, that he has made one bad start after another. He thought he was doing God's work (as a priest), but that was the worst failure of all. He then says that there is something in him, that he is good for something. Theo accuses Vincent of being an idler (un oisif). Vincent says he is idle in spite of himself (malgré lui). "I want nothing but to work" (je ne veux rien sauf travailler), "only I can't. I'm in a cage, a cage of shame (honte), of self-doubt and failure... I'm caged, I'm alone".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXCj48oK3wg&list=PLvo6hCrYK975N2V9uWa98Qyj6K8oSuogb&index=2>

The scene shows well how mentally disturbed van Gogh was, unable to overcome his desperation and self-hate.

An interview with Don Mclean given on an Irish TV channel (RTE) is available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHJH-NQnyrc>