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## Miscellany

### A MIDLAND PORTRAIT

TWENTY years ago a fat, solemn gentleman with a half-bald head and very light almost straw-coloured hair and eyelashes, and a face that reminded one generally of a mangel-wurzel, used to come at fairly frequent intervals to visit my grandfather, often as much as twice a week, and nearly always on Sundays. His name was Quintus.

It was in winter that he came to see us most. In summer, as I shall explain directly, he was otherwise and more charmingly engaged. Although he was a very large man, weighing anything from fourteen to sixteen stone or from ten to twelve score if weighed as they weigh pigs, he had very short legs, which sagged spongily up and down with a regular motion in his wide trousers as he walked, as though he were doing a heavy dance to the tune played by his large brown boots, which let out prolonged dry squeaks at every step he took.

My grandmother at that time was a sufferer from asthma, a devilish complaint which often sent her to bed very early on winter evenings, so that when Quintus arrived my grandfather and I would nearly always be alone downstairs, playing a game of dominoes and roasting potatoes under the fire and eating the hot potatoes as we played. Coming up the garden-path with the slow sedateness of a man squeaking down a church-aisle, he would knock heavily on the door, open it a crack and call "Anybody about?" and then come in, sitting on the chair nearest the door as though he were an unbidden guest. He would then take a large red and white-spotted handkerchief from his behind-pocket, remove his bowler hat and proceed to wipe the sweat from his vast mangel-wurzel face, breathing in short spasmodic gasps as he did so.

Finally when he was at rest he would replace the handkerchief in his behind-pocket, lean back in his chair, gaze at my grandfather with a kind of melancholy expectation, and say in a profound bass:

"Well, boss, how is she?"

He had a perpetual habit of referring to my grandfather as boss, though they had been friends since boyhood. My grandfather would reply:

"She's easier, Quint, she's easier."

"Ah?"

"A lot easier."

"Ah? She worrit me, boss, she worrit me."

"She worrit me. But she's a lot easier."

"Last Sunday," Quintus would say, "I couldn't forgit her. I couldn't git her out o' me mind. Does she eat anything?"

"Eats like a thatcher."

"Ah! That's better beer. That's more like it."

They would be words of wonder and relief, delivered with extreme earnestness, and there would be a long silence between the two men, a silence as though of blessed thankfulness.

It took me, a small boy, a very long time to realise that this conversation and the portentous silence which followed it did not concern my grandmother and her almost perpetual sufferings from asthma. It did not occur to me until the conversation became less secretive that it concerned not her and her sufferings but my grandfather's prize sow and her pregnancy.

"When?" Quintus would say, "dy'e count she'll come due?"

"I count about next Thursday."

"By God, she's a good gal!" Quintus would burst out suddenly, "God A'mighty, she's a good gal!"

That sow was, in fact, for Quintus and my grandfather, the wonder of all the world. I do not know, now, how many times she conceived and brought forth, but it was an astounding number. But what was most astonishing was not the number

of her conceptions but the number of pigs in each of her litters. She had begun by modestly bringing forth ten or twelve and then gradually, with maturity and practice, had delivered fourteen or fifteen, and then sixteen, twice, and then seventeen, twice, and then eighteen, and then to the colossal jubilation of Quintus and my grandfather there came a time when she delivered nineteen.

Finally there was a period of almost drunken speculation when my grandfather and Quintus hoped that, by the grace of God, she would deliver twenty. They spoke of her for many weeks with an almost ecstatic tenderness, leaning over her sty-rails to scratch her scaled back, affectionately smooth her hoary bristles and gaze into her pink eyes with a kind of expectant rapture. If she were to have twenty, God A'mighty, if she were to have twenty! If they had been religious men at all, I believe they would have prayed for that prodigious delivery.

But it never happened. She was finished. She brought forth what seemed to Quintus and my grandfather a paltry litter of fourteen or fifteen, then a wretched litter of ten or twelve, and finally they had her slaughtered.

At the time of the cutting up of the carcase Quintus was a frequent visitor. No longer able to ask after the welfare of the sow, he would sit there and discuss with affection and enthusiasm the promise of her bacon and sample the taste of her once noble and now collared head. She seemed to him as admirable in death as she had been in life. Had my grandfather a mite o' liver to spare, or a jowl, or a taste o' the chitterlings? It was as though he wanted these things as a souvenir of her fruitfulness. Long afterwards, when the sow herself had become a kind of mythical wonder, I would see him, in some pause of the conversation, turn his mild fat face towards the kitchen ceiling and his eyes would rest on the muslined hams and the bacon sides glistening with salt as though with a powder of fine diamonds, and an expression of reminiscent beatitude would come over his face, as though he were reflecting on her wonder and her charm and her mortality.

It was clear that he worshipped her. Indeed, I believe he worshipped not only her but the race of pigs in its entirety. It may be that my memory is poor, but I never remember him talking of anything but pigs—pigs and pig-keeping, sows and stores, litters and the promise of litters. It did not occur to me until long afterwards that with his fat body and his mild fair-lashed eyes and solid fleshiness he was rather like some charming old sow himself.

But I should wrong him very much if I seemed to suggest that he had no other affections. I have said that he came to see us most often in winter, and that in summer he had other and more delightful pursuits.

Not that we never saw him in summer. We saw him, in fact, very often, engaged in that charming occupation which kept him from continuing the visits of wintertime.

He would be engaged, on those summer evenings, down the quite meadow-lanes where there was no traffic, in taking his hens for their evening walk. Very slow and deliberate and dignified, he would walk towards the river, and his three hens, like three small white dogs, would follow him, clucking with happiness. He would proceed at great leisure, between the high honey-suckled hedges, as far as the river. There he would pause and gaze at the water, the hens would pause and gaze at the water, too, and finally they would all return.

The sow and the hens have long since gone, but Quintus remains. He has suffered a common Midland fate: he is a countryman living in a town. And, seeing him sometimes as he proceeds with ponderous deliberation through the streets of the industrial town in which he now lives, his large wooden swill-buckets heavy on his sway-tree, I marvel not that he is still alive or that he still keeps and worships pigs but that he has not changed at all.

His face has become if anything more like an earthy beetroot than the mangel-wurzel I imagine it to have been, the tame white hens have been replaced by a small tame absurd

white dog, and his hair is no longer so thick and no longer corn-coloured, but white. Otherwise he seems to me not to have changed an atom from the figure I used to know.

And, indeed, if he had changed it would make no difference to me. For I like to think of him as I knew him a long time ago: not as the countryman living in the town, nor even as the man who worships pigs, but as the man who expressed his love of living things by taking his hens for gentle and solemn constitutional on the summer evenings of a quieter age.

H. E. BATES

## HONORÉ DAUMIER

THAT Daumier may be rightly claimed one of the finest draughtsmen the world has ever known is clearly evident in the exhibition of his works now on view in Paris. Having met with such success, his paintings and drawings have been transferred from the Orangerie Museum to the Bibliothèque Nationale—where they are now shown with the Lithographs, Engravings and Sculpture—and the entire exhibition prolonged until July.

Emerson said it was better to create than to criticise. Daumier did both. He created his criticisms, he lithographed his caricatures. And Daumier was a great caricaturist because he was the perfect combination of a master draughtsman and psychologist; Baudelaire, in praise of his great friend, ranked him with Molière as an erudite observer of human nature. He both sympathised and worked in conjunction with Balzac in illustrating his complete works, some examples of which may now be seen at the Bibliothèque Nationale. What two greater collaborators, indeed, for the recording of the history, life, and character of a country and its people!

The importance of Daumier's lithographic work has been underestimated, for it was this that later taught him the power of the pen—as seen in his astounding pen, wash, and water-colour drawings. The many lithographs at this exhibition are not only instructive for the study of Daumier's art, but also for the appreciation of his wit and humour, and recension of the history of his time, which, curiously enough, has many a parallel with the present political conditions in France. His political caricatures are undoubtedly the finest examples of his art of lithography. Wonderful in draughtsmanship, conception, and implication are the famous "Celui-là on peut le mettre en liberté," "Le Ventre Législatif," "Enfoncé Lafayette," and "La Rue Transnonain." Few indeed are the works of art in black and white which, for sheer artistry, can rival this last-named masterpiece.

Satire is Daumier's *tour de force*. This is not surprising considering his own fervent political and philosophical views, and the fact that he was working in the service of Charles Phillipon, editor of *La Caricature*, who, it is said, set himself up as personal enemy of the King. We wonder at the amazing impertinence of these two when we consider such condemning victimisation of the unhappy Louis Philippe, as in the "Gros Cupide, va!" "Dieu, ai-je aimé cet être-là?" and "Nous sommes tous d'honnêtes gens" lithographs. Eventually Daumier exceeded all daring and published his famous "Gargantua." The King could stand much—he was himself supposed to be among the first to laugh at the personal pear allegory—but this was the limit. So Daumier was locked up for his impudence in Ste. Pélagie prison for six months. Nothing daunted, however, he worked in his confinement, and there actually produced one of his finest lithographs, entitled "Souvenir de Ste. Pélagie."

By this time Daumier himself had evidently had enough of political and regal satire for, on his release, he turned principally to the caricature of the Bourgeois and Gens de Justice. His wit and humour seem to have sharpened during his term of imprisonment. In "Le Beau Narcisse," "L'Amateur de Melons," and "Croyant Papercevoir" extreme ridicule and persiflage have replaced irony and hate.

It is curious that Ingres, that great scientist of drawing,

as opposed to Daumier, the dynamic simplifier of line, should have made a remark so fitting to Honoré. "A great artist can always get the colour that suits his drawing," he said. But we may further agree with Baudelaire in stating that so expert was Daumier in his lithographic art that he induced colour in his prints by his most able handling of contrasts, values, and light and shade.

In visiting the former Orangerie Museum section we see how Daumier, at the age of forty, turned his talent to drawing and painting.

His drawings of *Amateurs* and *Avocats* form the gem of the collection. The British masters, Hogarth and Rowlandson, have been aptly compared with Daumier; through them, at least, we have gained a ready appreciation of his art. For in the same way are we attracted to his pictures by a fascinating subject. It is the scene that first draws our attention; later we experience the double satisfaction in noting its masterly treatment and technique. Thus it is in that masterpiece, "Après l'Audience," that we are at once captivated by the satire of two barristers in a court scene. Although the absurd preciosity of these figures and the fixed stolid expression of the public make a caricature of the picture—a buffoonery of court episode—we realise it to be, at the same time, a very great work of art, if only in the dramatic and tense atmosphere produced by a hard cold light, and the gripping effect given by a grey-blue wash. Was ever atmosphere more ably conveyed with such elimination of line and simplicity of wash? As for the grinning barristers, his fine pen has furrowed their knavish features and ridiculed their gesture.

Although Daumier painted a few masterpieces—inspired for the most part by the Flemish and Dutch masters—he seemed always to be seeking a definite formula for his brush as he had for his pen. Thus, he would vary his technique from intricate glazing and study of tonal value to thin smearing of colour or veritable palette-knife modelling in paint.

It has been truly said that Daumier, like Delacroix, his great contemporary and admirer, showed of what great or little importance colour may be in painting. Many of his canvases are mere studies in browns and blacks; others are examples of intricate chiaroscuro—gleaned from his early study of Rembrandt's art—and colour composition, showing the influence of the Flemish and Venetian schools. That *chef-d'œuvre*, "Les Curieux devant l'Étalage," well illustrates these latter qualities. In a word, he was a scientist of values and that, as Corot remarked, means everything in painting.

But the genius of Daumier lies in his superb draughtsmanship. He never sketched from nature, he drew from memory. This it was that always guaranteed him an amazing surety of line.

After a life of hardship, Daumier died at Valmondois, unrecognised, save by his few faithful and equally talented friends, as one of the greatest of French artists.

ALEXANDER WATT

## VISUAL MUSIC

I BELIEVE that the art of ballet is still in its infancy, but I recognise the fact there are a number of literary and musical people who seem impervious to its appeal through the lack of the particular visual sensibility to which the art of the ballet is addressed. We know that the three arts of poetry, music and painting require a specific development of the sensibility to words, sounds and forms beyond that ordinary sensibility with which everyone who is not physically deficient or abnormal possesses. It is only when the sensibility reaches a certain degree of development that we can pass from practical experience into artistic experience.

It is possible that every art makes a mixed sensory appeal and that it is only the degree of domination of any one sense that provides a separating point or focus; but it is certain that ballet makes a mixed appeal to the eye and to the ear, as opera does. A designer I know admitted to me that he dis-