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THE ESSENCE OF THE CONTRACT

SPRING, abnormally early, is spreading northwards in Russia: between Moscow and the Sea of Azov the whole front is reported to be already affected by thaw. These conditions are calculated to give the German armies a temporary respite. After nearly four months of an uninterrupted offensive the Russians have advanced a long way from their original bases; with mud now impeding the system of cross-country transport which they utilised with such astonishing effect during the winter campaign, they must rely more for maintenance of their forward supplies on a railway system which the retreating enemy must have seriously damaged; and troop movements off the roads must become slow and difficult, with the defence enjoying the balance of advantage. This does not mean that operations in Russia are wholly suspended; hard fighting continues on much of the front, and there is still scope this month for locally important moves north of Moscow (as witness the Russians' recapture of Demyansk and Rzhev) or even, if some frost recurs, between Bryansk and Kursk. What it does mean in all probability is that the great offensive in the Ukraine has lost its impetus; for the next month slow Russian progress at best can be reasonably expected. Thus winter ends with the German armies in South Russia heavily defeated and forced to yield all last year's territorial gains, but—despite enormous losses of German and satellite men and material—not yet routed or broken. In fact, on the most crucial sector of that front, between the Dnieper and the Donetz, where a fortnight ago the Russian advance raised hopes that the German forces in the Donbas might be encircled or flung across the Dnieper, the Germans have apparently counter-attacked and regained ground with the aid—so Moscow asserts with emphasis—of powerful reinforcements from the West.

The arrival of these reinforcements, whose strength is put by Moscow at no less than thirty divisions, transferred from France and Germany, is bound to raise in Russian minds the question of the extent to which Anglo-American forces have so far made good the Roosevelt-Churchill pledge that everything possible would be done to take some of the weight off the armies of the U.S.S.R. The Russians, with less than justice to us, think less than we do in terms of naval warfare or "strategic" bombing, and much more in terms of land forces. What, they will ask, has been the effect so far of Anglo-American operations in North Africa? The answer, as they see it, is one which they will hardly regard as satisfactory. General Eisenhower's landing resulted first in the German occupation of Vichy France, but that move seems to have been effected by spreading out more thinly the forces already in France; some more garrison troops have no doubt been brought into France from Germany, but there have been no reports of divisions being recalled from Russia for the purpose. Nor does it seem likely that when the Germans made their next move—the establishment of a bridgehead in Tunisia—it was necessary or possible for them to draw on the Eastern Front for the purpose. Apart from reinforcements which would presumably in any case have been sent to Rommel, there has been no suggestion that the additional force, German and Italian, despatched to oppose General Eisenhower exceeds, say, half-a-dozen divisions. Finally, the Russians will argue, though the Allies have now been in North Africa for four months, the ineffectiveness from Moscow's standpoint of this still somewhat remote "second front" can be judged from the fact that the enemy has felt able to transfer from the West to the East since December well over 250,000 men.

If we reply that we have on our hands an intensified U-boat campaign, that we are putting great and costly efforts into bombing German submarine bases and industrial centres, that the enemy has doubtless been compelled to replace from elsewhere part at least of the divisions moved eastwards from France, and that in one way and another we are containing a high proportion of the *Luftwaffe*, the Russians will still be unconvinced that our contribution is either adequate or, equally important, synchronised to meet their needs. Indeed, if we view the situation dispassionately, we shall find it difficult to deny that in their strategic plans the Western democracies are ignoring one essential factor—Time. In Washington there is still much talk of an eleven million army, without explanation of how to use this colossal force; in any case only a small part of it could be transported or supplied overseas before 1944 or 1945. The question remains whether the democracies can afford to fight a long war while the Soviet Union, rather naturally, wishes to fight a short one.

When the Russians launched their great offensive last November, it was obvious that the cardinal objective for Britain and the U.S.A. should be to prevent the enemy's reinforcing the Eastern Front at the moment when, for climatic reasons or from increasing exhaustion, the Russian attack had reached its peak. That objective we have failed to achieve. Recriminations are now beside the point. But other moments in future time are clearly discernible when it will be of supreme importance that Germany should not be allowed to concentrate a disproportionate share of her strength on the Eastern Front alone. There will be the critical phase in April when the ground in Russia dries. Then a threat to the German rear would be of inestimable value to Russia; otherwise the Germans, for all their losses, may put up a formidable defence or even endeavour to forestall Russian offensive plans by destructive blows on limited sections of the front. There will be the still more critical phase in late summer when operations reach their seasonal point of culmination before the autumn rains. It is imperative that at any rate before the second of those critical moments Germany should be forced to cope with a real two-front war. For they will be moments of crisis in which not the survival of the U.S.S.R. (which is assured), nor merely Anglo-Russian relations (which are crucial), but the whole future of enslaved Europe will be at stake.

Delay in landing on the Continent may be due to technical difficulties, but its results are far-reaching and destructive of our proclaimed purpose of democratic liberation. Ideology blends with technical argument. In North Africa criticism extends to more than delay in dislodging the Germans. Reports suggest that what is actually taking place

uttered in the same breath the tenderest sentiments and violent cynicisms would strike others as mad. This is the technical weakness of the play. It is so grave a one that it relegates *Days Without End* to the list of Eugene O'Neill's failures. At moments it has power, even real dramatic force, and it is rather fascinating, but it is a failure. In *The Great God Brown*, which I have neither seen nor read, I am told he tried to present a double personality by providing the actor with a mask, which from time to time he put in front of his face and spoke through. Eugene O'Neill has always been intensely interested in the problems of personality. Both these plays preceded *Strange Interlude*, which is an extremely interesting drama in which the dialogue is composed of what the characters say to each other and what they think to themselves. That, oddly enough, came off.

The acting at the Mercury Theatre is quiet and naturalistic. It is apt, perhaps, to degenerate at times into mere behaviour, but Mr. Trevor does rise to the exaltation of his surrender at the end and Mr. van Gyseghem achieved an uncanny, acrid bitterness. DESMOND MACCARTHY

DRAWINGS AND DRAWINGS

To the Victorian public, which had not been put wise to everything by aerial schoolmasters, it was a constant source of surprise and irritation that a highly wrought piece by Vicat Cole or their favourite, Sir John Gilbert, should be called a drawing as though it were no more than a pencilled outline of a naked girl by Ingres or Raphael. And, indeed, this practice of calling elaborate watercolours (e.g., the Birket Fosters at Agnew's) drawings is rather silly: why not call them watercolours *tout court*? For even when we have got rid of such intruders there remains diversity enough, as a visit to current exhibitions—one at Agnew's, another in the Victoria and Albert Museum—will prove.

A group of Constables at Agnew's and some Gainsboroughs in the Witt collection, now on view at South Kensington, show us two great colourists using the lead pencil to render a painter's vision. The object of emotion is atmosphere, tone, movement, light, "the lisp of leaves and ripple of rain"; the means of expression is imposed by circumstance—the artist happens to be in the country with a sketch-book in his pocket: the rendering could hardly be more colourful, in the proper sense of that maltreated word, if he had carried his paint-box as well. For instance, there is at Agnew's a watercolour of Flatford, by Constable, a thing of enchanting beauty, and it is only a little paradoxical to argue that a pencil drawing of Dedham, hanging on the same wall, is as full of colour. The effect of these sixteen sketches grouped together is enough to set talking a little wildly a hardened admirer even: God forbid that I should so much as suspect the great Bond Street house of naughtiness, but why have four bits of dry-rotted nonsense been stuck into this array of liveliness and loveliness, unless it be to call sly attention, not to the greatness of Constable, but to the arid ineptitude of Birket Foster? To make amends, let me congratulate the firm on having unearthed a small but unconventional talent. Manifestly Nos. 4, 8, 76, 80 are from the same hand; the name of the artist is not known; presumably he worked in Devonshire, and I surmise he was not a professional.

Having distinguished between watercolours and drawings, and picked out from the latter those painter's sketches which express a colourist's feelings, we may consider a distinction with which most gallery-goers are familiar—the difference between drawings in the tradition of the Italian Renaissance and drawings in the tradition of Rembrandt. Five-and-twenty years ago critics would have called it the difference between calligraphic and plastic drawing; but even then these names seemed to me misleading. For one thing, the greatest European draughtsmen—Raphael, Holbein, Ingres—are at once calligraphic and plastic: indeed their greatness appears in their ability to render by sheer sensibility of outline the plastic values enclosed. To express content by contour is the supreme triumph. The stumbling-block is Rembrandt, who seems to have been positively scared of a continuous line, and is for ever breaking in on his contour with crossings, dots and tangents in order to indicate stresses and directions. He suggests outlines; he never, or hardly ever, defines them. He achieves plasticity certainly; but so do Raphael and Ingres. He is an Impressionist; and I see no harm in admitting that, while he possessed some qualities that Raphael lacked, he lacked some that Raphael possessed.

The ideal calligrapher would resemble a pianist, who has no need to look at the keyboard, in that he would keep his eye on the object of emotion and make a gesture which expressed that emotion without bothering about the paper. Such perfect detachment is, of course, an ideal; but certain modern draughtsmen—Matisse, Modigliani—have come surprisingly near attaining it. The calligrapher trusts his sense of rhythm and his skill, and if the former be sure and strong and the latter made perfect by practice these will carry him through. Unluckily, to keep his eye on the object, to feel its significance, and to make a gesture to match that feeling is a feat beyond the powers of any student who does not happen to possess genius. So, for three hundred years and more, art-masters, following as they believed the tradition of the Italian renaissance, have taught their pupils to keep their eyes on the drawing-board, and have given them a recipe for constructing concatenations of elegant curves which shall correspond more or less with the common man's notion of a naked body. Thus did the art-masters give us "the grand manner." To make matters worse, the Renaissance had furnished them with an excuse. The Italians of the fifteenth century were much preoccupied with anatomy, and obviously the student who is striving after anatomical correctness must often be drawing not what he sees but what he knows. The door is ajar for the professor to walk in and instruct his pupils neither to look nor to feel but to be correct. The grand manner has become the *Prix de Rome* style.

Of this style let us hope there are no examples in the exhibitions under review, though Le Brun (Witt collection) might not unfairly be called "the grand old art-master," and the Rossetti head at Agnew's is not academic only because any teacher worth his salt would have destroyed it. Painterlike sketching is, as we have seen, gloriously represented by Gainsborough and Constable: also, at South Kensington, are two drawings by Claude and one by Poussin, but these, though admirable, are not quite in the manner. None of the greatest calligraphers is represented; neither is Rembrandt; four little things by Keene, at Agnew's, must do their best for the honour of Impressionism. As for the grand Italian style, Guercino was no giant, but that amateur must be hard to please who cannot enjoy the choice examples of his calligraphy from Sir Robert Witt's collection. As for abuse of the manner, the descent into emptiness, no Spartan could desire a helot in much worse case than Romney. Besides, there is a thing by Copley.

CLIVE BELL

JUDGING DISTANCES

A Poem from the Forces

Not only how far away, but the way that you say it
Is very important. Perhaps you may never get
The knack of judging a distance, but at least you know
How to report on a landscape: the central sector,
The right of arc, and that, which we had last Tuesday.
And at least you know.

That maps are of time, not place, so far as the army
Happens to be concerned—the reason being,
Is one which need not delay us. Again, you know
There are three kinds of tree, three only, the fir and the poplar,
And those which have bushy tops to; and lastly
That things only seem to be things.

A barn is not called a barn, to put it more plainly,
Or a field in the distance, where sheep may be safely grazing.
You must never be over-sure. You must say, when reporting:
At five o'clock in the central sector is a dozen
Of what appear to be animals; whatever you do,
Don't call the bleeders *sheep*.

I am sure that's quite clear; and suppose, for the sake of example,
The one at the end, asleep, endeavours to tell us
What he sees over there to the west, and how far away,
After first having come to attention. There to the west,
On the fields of summer the sun and the shadows bestow
Vestments of purple and gold.

The still white dwellings are like a mirage in the heat,
And under the swaying elms a man and a woman
Lie gently together. Which is, perhaps, only to say
That there is a row of houses to the left of arc,
And that under some poplars a pair of what appear to be humans
Appear to be loving.

Well that, for an answer, is what we might rightly call
Moderately satisfactory only, the reason being,
Is that two things have been omitted, and those are important.
The human beings, now: in what direction are they,
And how far away, would you say, and do not forget
There may be dead ground in between.

There may be dead ground in between; and I may not have got
The knack of judging a distance; I will only venture
A guess that perhaps between me and the apparent lovers,
Who, incidentally, appear by now to have finished,
At seven o'clock from the houses, is roughly a distance
Of about one year and a half.

HENRY REED

THE MOVIES

"Once Upon a Honeymoon," at the Odeon
"Star Spangled Rhythm," at the Plaza

I never expected to dislike a film with Ginger Rogers in it, but even the Ginger-struck will find *Once Upon a Honeymoon* hard to swallow. Miss Rogers, you see, with an English accent and calling herself Bute-Smith, is engaged in Vienna to a Baron who organises Hitler's *coups* in the capitals of Europe. Wherever she goes a country falls. Blithely engaged in Vienna, married in Prague, separated in Warsaw (Cary Grant intervening), divorced in Paris, and so—all Europe being by now in flames—back to the States. Miss Rogers ends up politically conscious and matrimonially set fair, but this education of a nit-wit is made all the more distressing by Miss Rogers's variable charm and the jauntiness of the director. Sentimental farce which would have been very agreeable in other circumstances, is interleaved here with news-reel shots of the war, the march into Vienna, the battering of Warsaw, Hitler staring up at the Eiffel Tower; and there is a wrench every time the film switches from story to background and back again. One agonising moment, when the director is inspired to "reverence" by his theme, depicts hero and heroine in a concentration camp for the Jews; a sad and serious pose is held in a studio setting and someone sings a dirge off-stage. The tastelessness of *Once Upon a Honeymoon* is emphasised in the Odeon programme by the grim news-reel of the German surrender in Stalingrad.

Star Spangled Rhythm is a musical that sets out to do for Paramount what *The Reluctant Dragon* did for Disney, Inc. But the material isn't so thrilling, and we are let in for a good deal of tedious star-worship and a story with more horse-laughs than fun in