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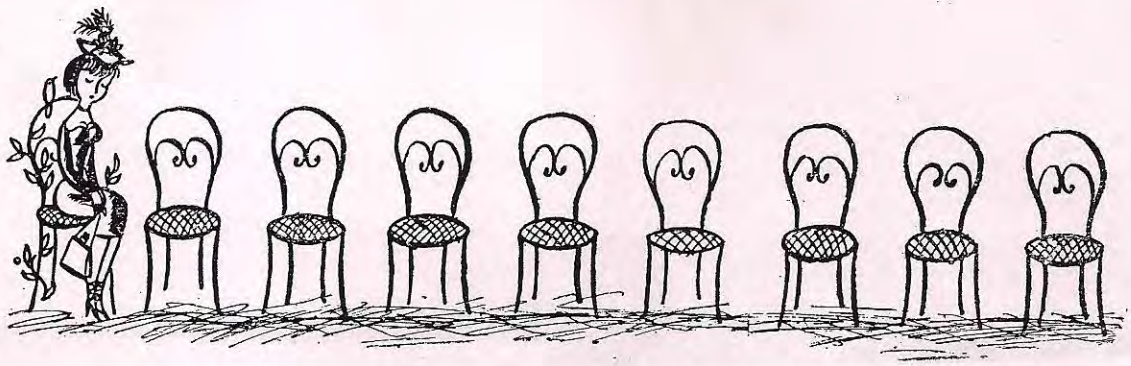

Introduction

The past year has provided two endearing works of art, both French, that seem to me to have much the same quality of delicious and inconsequential charm. One is Jacques Tati's film *M. Hulot's Holiday,* that droll piece of poetry in mime that tells us all we ever need to know, as in a hilarious dream, about a holiday at the coast of Northern France. The other is *Les Amoureux de Peynet.*

Our age is an anxious one. It has been, artistically, a bony, steely, wiry, unbending time, in which the application of the word charm to a work of art has been tantamount to damning it in all serious eyes for ever. Music similarly has been miserably afraid to enchant us; literature, with the world and the war on its conscience, has been terrified of happiness and the candid attempt to make us laugh. We have been prone to make a fetish of plays with buried spiritual meanings and have been fed—I now suggest to the teeth—with films and literature in which no act or word, however gross, is spared.

We sorely need a change from this, and it is largely the graphic artists, not always necessarily cartoonists, who have done something towards providing it. Osbert Lancaster, Emett, and

Ronald Searle have not been afraid of joy; and Peynet, the most joyous of them all, has not been afraid of the sin of being sentimental.

Peynet was born in 1908, and in the years before the war was already contributing caricatures to *Le Rire, France Dimanche, Ici Paris,* and other French newspapers. It was, however, not until after the war, in our still grimmer age of anxiety, that he evolved *Les Amoureux,* his intimate and inimitable lovers. They are undoubtedly the nicest lovers in the world.

Where else in the world is there a girl who knits perfect love while her lover holds her wool in the shape of a heart? Where else does the hurdy-gurdy provide beds—and oh! such French ones!—instead of rocket ships and racing cars? Where else does a girl's underwear unravel itself in the form of railway trains or provide a muff for hands grown cold in winter parks? Where else do the tears of love make garlands, and the garlands of autumn make tresses of hair? And where else, pray, does the *soutien-gorge* provide proud biceps for an adoring husband? Nowhere, of course, except in Peynet.

A glance at these pages will at once convince the reader that no introduction to Peynet would possibly be complete without some further reference to his tenderest *motif*. His lovers have been described as "still half in their childhood, for ever astonished by the sight of the world and by their love"; the girl, *La Fiancée* has been called a "candid little girl who has lost her virtue without quite understanding how." She and her poet love, with his long hair, stiff collar and bowler hat, live in an allegorical world in which all objects are theirs for amorous manipulation and where the bosom is the crowning means of love's delight.

Just as the lovers themselves are quite the nicest lovers in the world, so are these the nicest bosoms. Is there anything nicer

than the scene of tender detachment on the park seat, when a lover nurses the apples of his delight?

These objects, like some other parts of *La Fiancée's* enchanting anatomy, are constantly being revealed for us with grave and tender delight. The heart is similarly laid bare for us and sometimes, since love is poor, is also seen to be weeping and made of gold. Music comes out of the tops of her stockings. Confiture of cherries hangs from her ears. Poverty takes away the seat of her skirt but never her dignity. All this, let it be emphasised, is in perfect taste.

Poets, as our heroine remarks, are not as other men, even though they ought to realise that midnight is a reasonable enough hour to come to bed. And Peynet, without doubt is a poet. His world of lovers, of parks, of birds, of cherrytime, of daisy-chains, and daisy clocks, of harps that are prisons and bosoms that are symbols is intensely lyrical. It is also intensely French. We in England have nothing like it—or at least we hadn't until, thank Heaven and Kaye Webb, this incomparable book appeared.

H. E. BATES