

# Strange Tale From Old China

WHEN a play, an unsolicited contribution from South Africa, arrived at the NBS production studios, it was read, among others, by the producer, Bernard Beeby, who is constantly on the search for new, good material. And he found it good. It had a queer title, *No Re-Becoming*, and was by Mrs. M. Lintner, who uses Margaret Lang as her pen-name. All that is known about her by the NBS is that she lives in Durban; this is the first play received from her. It was rehearsed, produced, background music was fitted, using partly suggestions from the authoress and partly the producer's own ideas. And last week *The Listener* was invited to hear a play-back—radio term for a pre-view.

*No Re-Becoming* is based on an old Chinese story called "The Dream of the South Branch," dating from the T'ang Dynasty—the time of the awakening of the romantic period in Chinese literature. It contains, in implication, much of the philosophy of re-birth and the transmigration of souls, characteristic of both Taoism and Buddhism.

The original title, "The Dream of the South Branch," has passed into the Chinese language and has become an expression equivalent in meaning to

that line of Shakespeare, "The baseless fabric of a vision," according to the introduction of the script.

With the producer, members of the cast, technicians and others connected with the production, we sat in the control room, an atmosphere unglamorous in the morning light, and quite the wrong setting for romance. But even with this initial handicap to overcome, the play was impressive, and we listened in silence for 34 minutes, deeply interested in the quaint and thought-provoking tale, with its philosophical dialogue and speculation.

Initially the atmosphere is suggested by Chinese gongs, bells and flutes, unobtrusively introduced, and the story opens with the main character, an abbot (who is also Prince Ch' Un-Yu, a mandarin of T'ung P'ing) discoursing on Nirvana. By some magic of the senses he finds himself transported thereto, and in a dream-world where everyone lives "happily ever after." In this new world he marries a beautiful princess and spends 20 happy years with her. There is a striking scene in which, to behold his bride, he is commanded to watch the unfolding of the peacock, golden phoenix and crystal curtains while trumpets sound regally

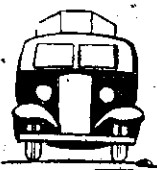
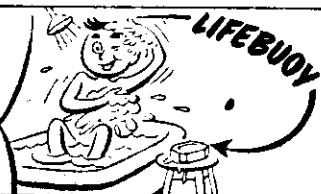
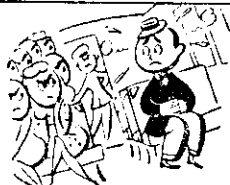
The background orchestration for this and the incidental music throughout is unusually good. The voyager into this world of the mind awakes from his sleep, trance or what you will, profoundly moved by his experiences, which have been compressed into a period of ten minutes. He is twitted by his friends, Liu Tzung Han Tzu, on the effects on the imagination of conversations about physical abstractions, following a good dinner and rice wine. But was it, he asks, a glimpse of a former life or a peep into a future one?

At any rate for our adventurer into metaphysical realms there is no re-becoming. But there is an ingenious climax by way of attempted explanation which listeners may study for themselves if they listen to 2YA at 9.30 p.m. on Sunday, September 22.



Perry photograph  
Bernard Beeby, as Prince Ch' Un-Yu

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