

## Women and War

WE were a little surprised when we rang a number of people likely (we thought) to be interested in *The Trojan Women* and found that only five of the first 20 who answered had listened to the broadcast from 2YA last week. We should have realised that 25 per cent. of the possible or even probable listeners to any broadcast is a large proportion and a very large number. It could have meant 100,000 listeners to that play if only one person in each household tuned in had been following the broadcast. No one will suppose that it was as many as that, or half as many, but it could easily have been a quarter as many, and perhaps was. What we should most like to know is how many of the listeners were women. After that we should like to know how many of the women who listened listened to the end, since we should then know whether the agony of those ancient women was communicated. There could hardly be any doubt about it if the broadcast had been in Greek and New Zealand women read and spoke Greek. But the broadcast was a translation into something that for all its brilliance is not quite English, and radio works on our ears only. If women listened to the end it would in many cases be a sign that the struggle to hear and understand all that was said blanketed much of the anguish. To begin with, the record was not quite sharp and clear; but even if it had been, only those who were familiar with the play would grasp all that was happening, and those only with some knowledge of Greek history and mythology would understand all the allusions. The question is whether great art transcends time and place or whether we deceive ourselves when we say that it does. Women have suffered so terribly during the last eight years that even here in New Zealand where so much was escaped Euripides would choke and blind them if they could still hear him. But perhaps they can't.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## "THE TROJAN WOMEN"

Sir,—I am wondering exactly what was the matter with the recording and reproduction of this play. It happens that I am fairly familiar with *The Trojan Women* and in anticipation of a treat I went to the trouble of mugging it up again both in the original and in the Everyman translation. However, when the appointed hour arrived, reproduction was extremely poor, and the voices almost inaudible on account both of their faintness and of a ringing kind of echo as though the performance was being given in a cavern. One knows that at any rate the enunciation of Sybil Thorndike is faultless, so that the cast cannot be held to blame. Anyone who heard her *Medea* here in New Zealand 13 or 14 years ago remembers her deep but clear tones, and must have been deeply disappointed with the almost inaudible Hecuba. If the dramatic efforts of Dad and Dave or Tommy Handley were put over in a similar fashion they would be out of business within a month. It is hardly likely that the NZBS is to blame; more probably the recordings themselves were technically imperfect. In any event the disappointment was unfortunate, since the opportunities of seeing or hearing any of the Euripidean tragedies performed in this part of the world are few indeed. Am I over-critical, or did others experience similar difficulty in following the broadcast? H. W. YOUREN (Napier).

## BROADCAST PLAYS

Sir,—I wish to voice a protest to the NZBS about the decision to broadcast a series of plays from 2YA on Fridays at 8 o'clock. On a Friday evening many thousands of would-be listeners and play-lovers, myself included, have to return to work, while thousands more have to go to town to do their shopping, and so are denied the pleasure of hearing these plays. The importance of these broadcasts has been emphasised by the Director of Broadcasting in *The Listener*, yet they are put on when there are the least number of potential listeners in the country available to listen to them, through no fault of their own. There are six other nights in the week to choose from, any one of which would be eminently more suitable than Friday.

## "DENIED PLAY LISTENER"

(Waimate).

(Though the World Theatre series of plays will be heard from 2YA on Friday evenings, they will—as announced in *The Listener* of August 29—be heard from the other National stations on other nights of the week.—Ed.)

## "GOOD ENGLISH"

Sir,—A good deal of nonsense is being written and published about pronunciation and good English. Educated people know that speech is not a matter of education, but of association. The biggest dunce turned out of Eton speaks beautiful English: it is the only English he knows and has always heard. We deplore the effort to destroy our beautiful dialects and their age-old English words. I knew a gentleman with several letters after his name: his colloquial English was broad Yorkshire. He delighted in it and was unselfconscious; also his broad accent offended neither gentle nor simple. Only his classical words were refined. He was witty and charming and natural and till a big lad lived in a miner's cottage. Early associations are never eradicated. You bend your talk

to be understood in America: you talk "pidgin" in the Pacific, but ever return to the English of your mother's knee.

BACTERIUM (St. Heliers).

## HORACE WALPOLE

Sir,—The talk by Dr. Lewis, Editor of the Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's letters, will have been of the greatest interest to all readers of "England's foremost letter-writer." One wonders why Lady Ossory's portrait found its way to Victoria, and if the one letter in Melbourne library points to the presence of others in Australia. A new edition of Horace Walpole's letters, including the recently-found letters to Lady Ossory, is an event of great importance to all lovers of literature and students of the 18th Century. "Horry" admitted "much love for fame." May his shade rejoice.

E.K.-J. (Remuera).

## "ON OUR OWN"

Sir,—I wonder if some of the correspondents who are discussing the English language in your columns would be kind enough to comment on the use of an expression which causes the writer as much pain as the split infinitive can ever have caused Mr. A. P. Herbert. There was a time when one accepted the use of "on his own," "on our own," "on their own," as colloquialisms used chiefly by the young, but in recent years this phrase has so invaded the language that it may be met—and is so met—anywhere at all, in the Press, in sermons, or in any type of serious literature. How is this to be accounted for? Was there indeed a gap—a vacuum—in our vocabulary such as the gaps which were long ago filled by the French words *fiancée*, *entrée*, *débris*, *tête-à-tête*, and many others? Is the expression an abbreviation of "on his own account" or how did it arise?

Here are examples culled from different authors this week-end:

"Seeing that these principles, left to function on their own. . ."

"Each of my egos had to contest against the other, and become the centre, each on its own, of an ambition to conquer."

L. M. HUNTER BROWN

(Nelson).

## LATE ARRIVALS

Sir,—One should allow the would-be humorist every latitude, but even so L. D. Austin's recent comment on late arrivals appears to me to be lacking in good taste. Indeed, there is a point at which humour becomes offensive, and to attempt to gloss over the selfish, ill-mannered, and quite inexcusable behaviour of a certain section of Mr. Boyd Neel's audiences by suggesting that the conductor was at fault for beginning on time, is perilously near that point.

Mr. Austin's little "joke" apart, however, I would seriously suggest that the majority of folk who do take the trouble to get to recitals on time have some rights to protection from the noisy and objectionable minority who do not. If some folk have not the decency to wait of their own accord until a break in the programme permits them to enter without insulting the conductor and spoiling the pleasure of most of the audience, then by all means close—and lock—the doors right on the tick of time.

The writer of your original article is to be highly commended. It was time there was some public comment on the vulgarity of certain alleged music-lovers.

F. FLEMING (Wellington).

Sir,—The day has gone when the great artists of the world had to cool their heels in draughty corridors waiting the favour of influential patrons. Thank God we realise that those great ones who bring us down fire from heaven are entitled to politeness and respect from their public. If they wish to start punctually, we must be in our places, whether it means cutting a 7 o'clock dinner in London, a 6 o'clock *Abendessen* in Leipzig, or an evening meal in New Zealand. "To-night at 8 o'clock"—punctually—has a great virtue in this country, as it means that the train, tram, or bus traveller can sit in peace to catch the last note, instead of rushing in agitation to miss the last bus.

W.E. (Havelock North).

Sir,—I was astounded to read the unmitigated nonsense in the letter by L. D. Austin. There is one easy remedy for late-comers. As for the argument about the inevitability of lateness because of so many people converging on the one point, look at the picture theatres. People manage to arrive at at these in good and reasonable time. As far as I am concerned, if I were an artist and were treated the way Boyd Neel was in Wellington, it would be the only time. I am surprised at a musician of L. D. Austin's standing subscribing to such views.

E.W.B. (Auckland).

Sir,—Your correspondent L. D. Austin, whose criticism of my recent article on the behaviour of audiences I have just read, may, for all I know, have different reasons for attending concerts than I. I go for the humble purpose of listening to the music I love, and I will do whatever I can to avoid interfering with the efforts of the artist, be he celebrity or beginner, or with the enjoyment of my fellow-members of the audience. I cannot believe that any true music-lover would support Mr. Austin's view that Boyd Neel was "unduly and quite unnecessarily precise" in that he merely attempted (he seldom succeeded) to start his performances at the times at which the public had been informed they would start. The malpractices Mr. Austin seeks to justify are the outcome of lack of respect for the welfare of others, for the artist, and a lukewarm liking for music.

That it is not always easy for everyone to get to the concert hall in time I readily concede. It is not easy to get to the station in time to catch the three o'clock train, but knowing that the train will have gone if one wanders along half-an-hour late, one takes great pains to be there in time. As the traveller is keen to catch his train, so the listener, if he is keen to hear the concert in full, the first item included, can be in his seat early if he wishes. If he cannot be bothered to exert himself he would be well advised to confine his listening to the radio, which he may switch on and off as he pleases, though I hasten to assure him that the Broadcasting Service will despatch no scouts to see whether he is ready to start listening before they permit the performance to begin.

J.M.D.H. (Wellington).