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In the lucky bag of Cyril Belshaw's *Melanesian Shell Ornaments* or the recent *Principles of the United Nations Organisation*, both of which were heterosexual enough, if not lively enough, for inclusion in the evening programmes. But I, like the Good Queen, dislike being addressed as if I were a public meeting, and I tend to prefer those Monday mornings when Joan Airey's delightful "Letter from Britain" comes to hand. Since, however, Miss Airey continues to be an erratic correspondent I find myself filling in with items such as "The Story of Mary Jane" (August 23), wherein an anonymous speaker chronicled the life of a pseudonymous heroine of the recent war. This could, and should, have been warmly human and deeply moving, but the reader's attempt to ram home the moral, the tendency to preach rather than let the story speak for itself ("Mary Jane says that if all women banded together they could prevent another war") made me almost nostalgic for the cultured impersonality of Mr. Belshaw.

Keats as Contemporaries Saw Him

LET me plead for a wider hearing for *Mr. and Mrs. Abbey's Difficulties* than an unadvertised broadcast on a Sunday morning can give it, and an opportunity for more concentrated listening than is possible at the family breakfast table. *Mr. and Mrs. Abbey's Difficulties* is that very rare thing, a biography written from the outside. Mr. and Mrs. Abbey were the guardians of John and Fanny Keats, and this BBC play (based on an essay by E. M. Forster) is an attempt, and a dramatically effective one, to see the young man as he probably appeared to the solid taxpayer, the sound businessman, and the respectable matron. This is the story of a young man who was a failure. Offered a career as a surgeon, he declined it, preferring to write verses which his guardian found as hard to decipher as prescriptions and as worthless when deciphered. So amoral was he that Mrs. Abbey thought it advisable to forbid his own sister to communicate with him. He got himself allegedly betrothed to an unsuitable female (his landlady's daughter) called Fanny Brawne. He died in poverty at the age of 26. This depressing narrative (which to the unprepared listener might be mistaken for a satire on 19th Century guardianship) is occasionally irradiated with the beauty (unbearable because of the context) of the poet's own lines. "Bright star, Were I as steadfast as thou art" comes at a moment of intense poignancy, and a passage from *Adonais* points a bitter moral to the conclusion.

Too Much Agony

AFTER my constant eulogies of BBC productions, it is disappointing to have to say that I found one of them not up to the usual high standard. It was an ambitious rendering into radio of J. M. Synge's Irish play *Riders to the Sea*. I came to the conclusion that it failed, for me, just on account of the very quality which should have been its principal attraction—its Irishness. For this, surely, the BBC was not to blame; the fault must have been in the play itself. It is many years since I read

SHORTWAVE HIGHLIGHTS

Radio Australia Programmes

BECAUSE of Australia's proximity and the high power of its shortwave transmitters, reception of Radio Australia's stations is consistently very good, thus enabling listeners to hear with ease many interesting programmes dealing mainly with Australian activities.

Programmes to North and South America (9.45 a.m.-11.15 a.m.): VLA8 (11.76 mc/s., 25.55 metres), VLC (15.20, 19.74). Forces Programme No. 2 to the Pacific and Japan (3.0 p.m.-4.0 p.m. Monday to Friday, 2.0 p.m.-4.0 p.m. Saturday and Sunday): VLC9 (17.84, 16.82), VLG11 (15.21, 19.72), VLA6 (15.20, 19.74). Sports Transmission (Saturdays only—3.15 p.m.-7.30 p.m.): VLB5 (21.54, 13.93), VLG11 (15.21, 19.72). Programme to North America and South Africa (4.30 p.m.-5.45 p.m.): VLA5 (15.32, 19.59), VLC9 (17.84, 16.82). Programme to the British Isles and Europe (7.0 p.m.-8.15 p.m.): VLA6 (15.20, 19.74), VLB3 (11.76, 25.51). Forces Programme No. 3, Pacific and Japan (8.30 p.m.-11.30 p.m.): VLA6 (15.20, 19.74), VLB3 (11.76, 25.51). General Pacific Transmission (8.55 p.m.-11.45 p.m.): VLC4 (15.32, 19.59).

Headlines in the Programmes: Australian Scene (7.15 p.m., Monday, VLB3), Canberra Report (8.0 p.m., Tuesday, VLB3), Re-establishment Newsletter (8.45 p.m., Tuesday, VLB3), Australia Day by Day (9.15 p.m., Tuesday, VLB3), Background to Australia (7.15 p.m., Wednesday, VLB3), Australian Sporting Diary (8.0 p.m., Wednesday, VLB3), Tuesday at 8.30 p.m. (9.30 p.m., Tuesday, VLB3), Service Concert Hall (9.10 p.m., Monday to Saturday, VLB3), Australia To-day (7.15 p.m., Thursday, VLA6), Racing Acceptances (9.0 p.m., Thursday, VLG3), N.Z. Sporting Diary (9.23 p.m., Friday, VLG3), Review of Economic News (8.0 p.m., Friday, VLB3), Australian Radio Reel (7.45 p.m., Saturday, VLB3).

anything by Synge, but I seem to recall that I once thought him a dramatist of power and beauty. After hearing this radio presentation of one of his plays, I can't agree altogether with my former findings. *Riders to the Sea* is set on an island off the Irish coast, and from beginning to end it is just one long banshee wail. It has more deaths than *Hamlet*, but Synge is not Shakespeare, and his killing off of eight (or was it nine?) stalwart men, including an old woman's six healthy sons, gave an effect of agony piled on too thickly. When this series of death by misadventure is told in the thickest of Irish accents and the most "poetic" of circumlocutory Irish dialogue, one is forcibly reminded that unrelieved gloom, unless stage-managed by a genius of the first rank, sometimes tends to produce an effect the opposite of that intended—a desire to laugh unfortunately succeeds the initial pity and horror. With this play the BBC company struggled manfully. But how could even the players take seriously such things as the old woman's complaint about the difficulty of living without the support of her sons, and her remark that they would now have to exist on a bit of bread—"Or maybe a morsel of fish, and it stinking!"

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