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## Radio Review

# THE MALADY LINGERS ON

**COUNTRY DOCTOR**, which occupies a rather incongruous place in 1YA's *Feminine Viewpoint*, fascinates, like other soap operas, by its unbelievable obviousness. There is a sort of horrible satisfaction in anticipating the next move of each character, the next twist in the plot, the next line of dialogue even, all the time hoping that the too plainly foreseen will not happen. But it always does. Has anybody, I wonder, ever written a soap-opera which burlesques this extraordinary genre—a soap-opera to end all soap-operas? The difficulty, I suppose, is that no matter how absurd the plot, how banal the dialogue, how oracle-like the characters, it could hardly out-do the original type. I remember James Thurber listening to scores of soap-operas to obtain material for one of his funniest pieces. Lacking his courage, I catch *Country Doctor* only while waiting for much less mindless *Feminine Viewpoint* features. I had thought that, when this session began some years ago, soap-operas were a thing of the past from 1YA; but, since more substantial serials are apparently hard to find, the malady lingers on.

## Unsurpassed Performance

I HAVE heard no better BBC World Theatre performance than that of Margaret Leighton as Natalya Petrovna in Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*. Gladys Young and Fay Compton have equalled but surely not surpassed her. From the languid boredom of the opening to the confused sadness of the end, through the high comedy of the conversations with Beliyev, the tutor for whose affections Natalya is a rival of her ward, Miss Leighton gave such a convincing and nicely-shaded portrayal that she over-shadowed even the exceptional competence of the others. I had not heard this play before; and the first thing that struck me was how like Chekhov it was, until, as the comedy developed, I realised that the mood was that of *A House of Gentlefolk* rather than of *The Cherry Orchard*, with less pity and lyricism than Chekhov, but still with a subtly-evoked atmosphere of its own. What admirable radio plays these Russian plays make—such good talk, such human insight, and such an admirable shape, which the ear picks out like the form of a sonata. And, in this case, the delicately-mannered playing of the cast seemed to me perfection itself.

—J.C.R.

## Death of a Poet

WHEN we say that no one is indispensable we may well ask to what, or to whom, for the death of certain people leaves a gap in the human landscape that neither wreaths nor laurels can cover. That the untimely death of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas was felt in this way is testified to by the ease with which the NZBS commissioned four New Zealand poets to speak on the man and his work. Nevertheless, it was a

mistake to ask Messrs. Curnow, Joseph, Baxter and Glover to cram all they knew or felt into a bare half hour programme. The speaker, knowing his time limit, packs his information together too tightly for the listener who cannot return, as in the case of the printed word, to sift the meaning more closely. Moreover, unless the programme is extraordinarily well planned it will lack the natural unity which the single speaker imposes on his material, and it will overlap to no purpose. Words ill constructed are words thrown to the wind, and it was unfortunate that this session on a young poet, not as well known as he will become, could scarcely be called memorable.

## At the Keyboard

MY idea of a radio critic's paradise is to find myself by chance absorbed in a programme. This is what happened on a recent Sunday when, from 3YC, I heard a piece of music played on something like a harpsichord. On checking with *The Listener* I discovered that the instrument was like a harpsichord; was, in fact, a piano. It was the unique quality of the touch which had deceived me. The music was "Theme and Variations on an Arab Air," and the player was again Ernest Jenner: this being the second time my attention has been inadvertently captured by his playing. Just as a recorder can sound like a penny whistle or breath of the soul itself, depending upon the knowledge and mastery of he who plays it, so too the piano responds to the man at the keyboard. If I cannot describe the precision and delicacy of Kouguell's air, this was because it was shortly overlaid by Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, played by the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra. This was so alive and sinuous, so consistently rich in timbre, and so precisely disciplined, that I listened and marvelled, marvelled and listened till the deeper music of winter came to an end.

—Westcliff

## Listener at Sea

AFTER listening to the first two of the four talks in the series *The Count and Captain Williams*, I find I am still a little puzzled by the rambling and at times incomprehensible method in which the story is told. It is, I suppose, the natural form of reminiscence, but the scripts were written by Kathleen Newick, though much of them are in Captain Williams's own words, and one might have expected in the editing more help for the listener. At times one is hardly certain whether the action is taking place on the Seeadler, an island, or the Manila, and the sequence of events is almost always in doubt. The voice, unlike punctuation marks, does not give full warning of parentheses or digressions, and Captain Williams's method of telling a story and then remarking, "But I am running ahead of myself, and must go back to..." ends in confusion for the listener. The material in these talks is good, and the narration interesting, but they are difficult to follow.

## Music from the Ballet

ON Monday evenings, 4YC is now presenting a series of programmes entitled *Ballerina*, in which Margot Fonteyn introduces her own choice from the

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