LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

"THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK"

Sir,—T. S. Eliot's new play *The Confidential Clerk* was reviewed very harshly in *The Listener* of April 23. A reviewer is, of course, entitled to his ideas, but so also is an author, and it ill behoves a critic to dismiss a play because apparently he cannot be bothered with unravelling its symbolic meaning.

When dealing with a writer of T. S. Eliot's calibre one is bound to search for a deeper or symbolic meaning under the surface of an apparently trivial action. Such a search would pay dividends, particularly in the case of *The Confidential Clerk*, because, as a Polish writer in exile, Tymon Terlecki, aptly defined it, Eliot's last play is a mouse trap set for the public (and it would seem for some reviewers, too) similar to that set by Hamlet for King Claudius. The intricacies of this trap cannot be discussed here in any detail but there can be little doubt that there are two realities in this supposed farce, and that its characters are shown not only in their conventional setting, but also, by subtle implication, in their sometimes embarrassing inner nakedness. The unobtrusive hidden verse form of the dialogue which displeases your reviewer is only one of the many disguises of this artful play. Even a moral is there, concealed, and yet recognisable. More pessimistic than *The Cocktail Party*, the farce is an indictment of a society whose members have lost faith in the higher values of life, in themselves, and in their fellow beings, and feel, therefore, unhappy and lonely. But even if all these features were a figment of imagination of some "esoteric critics" there still would be some merit in Eliot's new creation, which is an ennobled poetic version of such a lowbrow literary genre as is farce.

The stage success of the play which puzzles your reviewer might have been due to its technical brilliance, to the talent of the producer (E. M. Browne) and to the excellent performances of Margaret Leighton and Denholm Elliott. It could also be that the spectators did not remain entirely impervious to the deeper meaning of Eliot's work.

L. HARTMAN (Wellington).

POETRY IN NEW ZEALAND

Sir,—My grouch against Mr. J. C. Reid's review of the *Poetry Year Book* is less tetchy than Mr. Robert Thompson's in a recent issue. I did not use any suspect imagery, and the term "spasmodic," though not applied to me, I would accept as a not inappropriate label to my slender gift. I would quarrel however with the term "Georgian" with which I and two female colleagues were summarily despatched. Were we being praised or gently reviled? So much of contemporary aesthetic writing is fuzzed about with these threadbare counters, that I find myself floundering in it. I take it that we are writing poems in a style which recalls a group of poets who published immediately before the first world war. And so what? Did our poems give Mr. Reid any pleasure? For that surely was our aim. Or did he loathe them? We do not know. From my ivory tower (vintage 1912) I ask Mr. Reid in future critical appraisals to state squarely what he likes, and what he hates, and why.

BRUCE MASON (Wellington).

Sir,—The stock reaction of certain of our poets to criticism of their work is to diagnose neurosis in the critic. Mr. Reid, whom Mr. Thompson suspects of "a preoccupation at repressed levels," is not the first to be told as much. I don't know whether Mr. Reid is neurotic or not, nor does Mr. Thompson, nor, possibly, does Mr. Reid himself. The question is not only irrelevant to a consideration of whether his views are right or wrong; it precludes any discussion at all, except at the infantile "You are" "I am not" level. No one will deny that a person's opinions are more often formed irrationally than logically, but that cuts both ways and it is no help at all to start Freud-slinging. What matters is not why an opinion is held, but whether it is true. "It is better to answer a man's opinions than to question his right to express them," as you remind another correspondent.

DENNIS McELDOWNEY (Upper Hutt).

LATE LECTURES

Sir,—Why is it that so many interesting lectures are put on so late at night that it becomes a weariness waiting for them? The Toynbee lectures are timed for 10.0 p.m. on Saturdays, much too late for comfortable listening. A few days ago a very excellent appreciation of Walter de la Mare was to be given by V. Sackville-West. This was timed for 10.30 p.m. I listened in at that time and found a dreary opera, the story of which has been given ad nauseam, still in full swing. As there was also a pianoforte item coming between this and the appreciation, I gave it up. Are we all supposed to be music-lovers that so much music is given morning, noon and night? The music of the spoken word, and the thought provided by good lectures are much more appreciated by many people—but not at 10.30 p.m.

D.B. (Otaki).

CONTROL OF ATOMIC ENERGY

Sir,—In order to prove that the Soviet Government was willing to give up its right of veto in July, 1946, Mr. Ferguson quotes an extract from a speech made by Vyshinsky more than three years later, in November, 1949. He could hardly, I suppose, have quoted from the speech made by Gromyko in 1946, for Gromyko made it perfectly clear that the Soviet Government had no intention of either allowing any inspection of Soviet atomic plants or surrendering its veto.

In 1946 the only nation with atomic weapons was the United States. Gromyko proposed that all atomic stockpiles should be immediately destroyed. Had this proposal been accepted, the Soviet Government would almost certainly have occupied the rest of Europe, for the Western Powers, demobilised and exhausted, could have offered little resistance to the Soviet forces, which had been kept on a war footing. Sir Winston Churchill has expressed the view that Western Europe owes its freedom to American possession of the atomic bomb, and few will disagree with him, except Reds and fellow-travellers.

G.H.D. (Greenmeadows).

EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

Sir,—It was very interesting and informative to hear and later read Dr. Turbott's health broadcast concerning alchohol. The considerable amount of new knowledge about alcohol, as about other things, that scientific investigation has brought to light in the last 25 years should be brought to the knowledge of the public and the medium of the wireless is one way in which this can be done. There is no doubt that very few people are aware of the scientific results of the consumption of alcohol, its action as a narcotic depressant, and its particular importance these days when considering the incidence of liquor in road accidents. It is good to see that the dissemination of this information, for many years done only by temperance societies, has now been taken up on a national scale.

N. A. REYNOLDS (Auckland).

WAR IN INDO-CHINA

Sir,—Following the remarks of Mr. Cronin in *Lookout*, as reported in *The Listener*, I would like to mention a point that is obscured in almost all radio references to the war in Viet Nam. I refer to the status of the Vietminh forces under the leadership of Ho Chi Min. They are frequently referred to as "rebels." The term is used by people who must—or certainly should—know better.

During the Second World War, after the abdication of the French authorities in Indo-China (Viet Nam), a national movement under Ho Chi Min, a Communist, reconquered most of the country from the Japanese. A Government was established which was functioning efficiently when the French came on the scene again. This Government was recognised by the French Government in 1946 in a formal agreement which was subsequently ratified. An election was held under conditions of universal and secret franchise and the Vietminh, or national patriotic party, was elected with a very substantial majority. This Government, which introduced many reforms, functioned for some months with French acquiescence and then a dispute broke out which led to the French bombarding a coastal town. From then the war spread.

It must be remembered that the French established themselves in Indo-China, within the memory of men now living, by acts of aggression. They can only bolster up their own rule and that of the playboy Emperor Bao Dai, whom they brought back from the Paris nightclubs, by the use of North Africans, Senegalese and the ex-Nazi soldiers who form a substantial part of their Foreign Legion. Without these mercenary troops, the Bao Dai regime would not last six weeks.

This is not a matter in which New Zealand should interfere. Let us support the proposal for an immediate ceasefire and settlement by negotiation.

SID SCOTT (Auckland).

"PASSING ON"

Sir,—Strangely, your versatile contributor "Sundowner" appears to think it very amusing for the death of a loved one to be referred to as "passing" or "passing away." "Passed away where?" he is "tempted to ask." He need not go far for the answer. It is to be found in that Book which is the acknowledged guide of our Queen and of millions of her subjects. In that Book (described in the Coronation Service as the most precious thing this world affords) we have these words in Saint Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (the quotation is from the Bishop of London's The New Testament Letters paraphrased, published by the Oxford Press): "I know that when the time comes for me to fold up this feeble tent and steal away I shall have a home with God, a house built without hands, eternal in heaven." "Passed on?" Why not, "Sundowner?" There is no death.

A. H. REED (Dunedin).

A VIOLIN CONCERTO

Sir,—From a report in a local paper I see that, at a band concert to be held in Wellington on May 22, "Mr. Warwick Braithwaite, conductor of the National Orchestra, will conduct the band in Mendelssohn's violin concerto, with Mr. Ken Smith playing the solo violin part on the cornet."

I realise that so little worthwhile music has been written for his instrument, that the cornet player must rely on transcriptions if he is to appear as a soloist. There is, however, a limit to the distance the bootmaker should put between himself and his last. I am sorry that Mr. Braithwaite has lent the weight of his reputation to a performance which, however it may demonstrate the virtuosity of Mr. Smith, will remain an error of musical taste. D.A.R. (Auckland).

(This letter was shown to Mr. Braithwaite, who replies as follows: "In the hub of the Empire, in the centre of the world's music; that is, in London, before an audience of 7000 people, Mr. Ken Smith, possibly the finest performer on the cornet, played Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto arranged by himself for the cornet, and was acclaimed by that vast audience as a master on his instrument. Your correspondent is quite correct when he remarks that so little worthwhile music has been written for the cornet, and it is to Mr. Ken Smith's eternal credit that he has done so much to make the cornet repertoire both interesting and more extensive than ever before. That I have lent the weight of my reputation to this performance, will be one of the highlights of my career, as I admire Mr. Ken Smith with all my heart and I hope he will continue to demonstrate his virtuosity in a like manner many times in the future."—Ed.)

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Jumbo (Masterton).— (1) An Australian feature, produced by George Edwards; author unnamed. No record of book publication. (2) Ailsa Graham (Agnes), Queenie Ashton (Mrs. Jerrolds), John Carabon (Birkett), Tom Farley (Mr. Phillip), Lorna Bingham (Mrs. Phillip), George Edwards (Haggett and Mr. Jerrolds), Warren Barry (Fred), Hazel Hollander (Thelma).

N. Kelly (Tokomaru). — Correspondence closed.

Peppercorn (Timaru).—Yes, tickled; thanks.

Averil Lowden (New Plymouth).—(1) 7.0 to 10.45 p.m. daily (10.0 p.m. Sunday). (2) Apply to the Officer in Charge, Radio New Zealand, P.O. Box 2396, Wellington. (3) Well in Australia, Japan; widely in U.S.A. and Scandinavia; irregularly, elsewhere.

April Fool (Ruawai). — (1) Thanks. Inquiries will be made and whatever is necessary done. (2) The rearrangement necessarily accompanied the extension of hours.

Skipper W. Francis (Dunedin).—The recording proved not to be so good as had been hoped, when auditioned; but no decision against using it has yet been taken. It may yet be used. Thanks for your appreciation.

Helen Wilson (Eastbourne).—The level is carefully controlled in recording and transmission. The variation you describe is attributable to no one cause, but generally to a combination of several. The frequencies of music and speech are different, and the listener's ear can be startled by the difference, on a sudden change from one to the other. This is so especially if, for example, he has adjusted the level of his receiving set to hear a spoken programme clearly anywhere in a room or above the noise of movement and occupation. That the level of sound is above normal, though convenient, will be sharply demonstrated when music displaces speech.

Interested (Wellington).—There are copyright difficulties; they have been published in book form.

F. K. Adams (New Plymouth).—This is the second time round; the series was presented some months ago at 8.15 p.m.

Dens Sana (Wanganui). — Cannot reprint that one; but see page 18.

R.J.T. (Auckland).—Afraid justice could not be done to that subject in the space available.

Unbeliever (Nelson).—Correspondence closed.