

## TALKING ABOUT BOOKS

Sir,—The time has come, I feel, to question the kind of literary criticism J. C. Reid has been giving us in his series *The Modern European Novel*.

In his two talks on the Modern French novel, Mr. Reid speaks entertainingly of a very large number of books and their writers, and one cannot help but be astonished at the apparent breadth of his reading—for one must assume that he has read and digested all these books. But what real value is there in hearing so many books mentioned in such a short time? I am sure that many listeners to these talks were left, as I was, with only a confused impression of what was said, and with the conviction that the only way to form any valid judgments on such a vast and important subject is to read the novels Mr. Reid mentioned, together with those outstanding ones he omitted to mention, and to form one's own opinion.

I am well aware that the NZBS places a high value on volubility, and no one will deny this quality to Mr. Reid, but considerably more than this is required when a critic approaches such a rich and complex subject.

In spite of Mr. Reid's prodigious industry, and his undoubted ability in some branches of criticism, I feel that the time occupied by these talks would have been better given to some purely creative work. Good New Zealand stories, in particular, are rarely heard on the NZBS, and the practice of broadcasting the same short story (usually imported) at both 1YA and 1YC in the same week seems to me a very poor one.

Those who like foreign novels pre-digested and censored (Mr. Reid can never resist making moral judgments) doubtless already read *Time*, the *New Yorker*, or *New Statesman*.

Let us hear more original work by New Zealand writers and less "middle-men of literature" talking about books.

O. E. MIDDLETON (Patumahoe).

## STANDARD ENGLISH

Sir,—After reading A. R. D. Fairburn's article on speech I am comforted in the knowledge that there are New Zealanders who appreciate the fact that Standard English exists, as distinct from affected speech on the one hand or uncultivated speech on the other.

One thing, however, which does surprise me is the assumption on the part of many New Zealanders, including Mr. Fairburn (if I have not misunderstood him), that the use of Standard English among the educated people of Britain is an indication of class distinction. Standard English is taught throughout the county schools of Britain as well as private schools. If one visits remote places like the Shetland Isles, where a local dialect is spoken which Scots people would probably not be able to understand, the Shetlander will speak to the stranger in Standard English, because he has learnt it at school.

The usual reference to Standard English as southern speech is not strictly true, either, since it is not peculiar to the south. It is more widely spoken in the south by educated people than in the north, but one can meet educated people in Yorkshire or other Northern places who also speak very good Standard English. It is much more true to say that standards of speech in Britain indicate standards of education rather than social position. The New Zealander, or other outsider, visits Britain and discovers that most people in good social positions speak in cultivated accents, whereas most people of the working classes speak in local accents, often ugly accents, and he assumes that class dis-

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

tinction is the reason for it. The real reason for the differing standards of speech lies in the fact that the children of the upper classes all receive a good education, whereas the children from poor homes have to fight harder for it. They must pass examinations and intelligence tests to gain entry into good grammar schools. If, however, they are successful, they will receive a jolly good education, including tuition in Standard English, which fits them to enter professions later on. There is therefore opportunity for children from the poorest working class homes to enter the professional classes if they have sufficient ability and ambition to do so.

This also indicates another fallacy, that the English class system is a "caste" system, as Mr. Fairburn describes it. Many educated Standard English speaking people in London of my own acquaintance have originated from poor working class homes where Cockney or other county accents were spoken. Obviously it is more difficult for a child from a poor home to improve his speech standards when his own family speak badly or carelessly, but it is not impossible; he hears his teachers and school fellows speaking every day and can follow their example. What chance have our children here in New Zealand to learn Standard English, when my own observation tells me that few New Zealand teachers have learnt it themselves? Most of them, including university lecturers, speak in the same ugly accent as the majority of people in this country do.

RUBY S. CLIFT  
(Auckland).

## ENEMY OF FREEDOM

Sir,—G. I. Hitchcock does not understand the meaning of my phrase "run-to-seed liberalism," yet is sure it is not a suitable medium for Communism! Liberalism may once have been a vigorous political growth, but today it is nothing more than a fashionable political attitude adopted by the enlightened but unthinking middle-class intellectual who was recognised, by no less an expert than Lenin, as being the most promising revolutionary material of the future.

If I understand him aright, G. I. Hitchcock has no hatred of the "Communist economic creed," shunning only "the hateful incidentals that go with it." But the Communist economic creed is the logical outcome of the whole Communist philosophy which seeks to reduce man to a status less than animal: to accept one is to accept both, since the one cannot exist without the other. To adopt any part of their economic creed must be to the detriment of a civilisation based on the Christian ethic.

Senator McCarthy was not a "budding dictator" as suggested by R. S. Radford. He was a patriotic American entrusted with the well-nigh impossible task of rooting out Communist infiltrators from a society partly indifferent to the dangers that beset it, partly misinformed about those dangers. The smear-campaigners (Communists and fellow travellers) were quick to recognise a real foe and his downfall may well presage our own.

N. E. DOWNEY  
(Lower Hutt).

## AUCKLAND NOTEBOOK

Sir,—Thanks be that the uninteresting meanderings of your Auckland Notebook have ended. Who cares what those peculiar northerners, as distinct from New Zealanders, wear or eat? But "G. leF. Y." surpassed himself in criti-

cising the summer climate of Christchurch. If he is a renegade native of the Canterbury city, he must have forgotten that in summer Christchurch can be the hottest city in New Zealand for days on end—not just the one day in 30 that he speaks of—when the girls can discard tweeds for summer garb. As for strange sartorial effects, I can recall a purple-haired female wandering down Queen Street, Auckland, on one showery summer day, dressed in bright blue with green hat and wearing pink shoes—and she was so typical of the fantastic styles adopted up there to attract attention, that not a head—except perhaps my own—turned to watch her pass by. But then, where else but Auckland would you see so many sloppy men in creased pants acting as "cantilever" verandah posts; or women offending taste by wearing heavy jewellery with sports clothes and swim suits? As for climate—where else would you find nine months of rain and three of steam? It behoves anybody from that overrated city of mudflats and race meetings casting aspersions at any climate. But then, with the one eye of a Cyclops, what further horizon can any Aucklander see than that between Rangitoto and Western Springs?

CLOSED NOTEBOOK (Wellington).

Sir,—Two little words appeared before G. leF. Y.'s initials in your last issue. Does this really mean "the end" of this delightful series of articles? Oh, no! Please have pity on one exiled from the fair city of Auckland—and one who so looks forward to Auckland Notebook! But if G. leF. Y. has returned to his "native Christchurch," then it only remains for me to thank him for taking me with him around my beloved Auckland, meeting its wonderful people (aliens) and dining at those wonderful restaurants-plus-atmosphere that I know so well. Thank you for bringing a breath of life to me—but G. leF. Y. has left me, with Ezra Pound,

homesick after mine own kind,  
Oh, I know there are folk about me, friendly faces,

But I am homesick after mine own kind.

M.M. (Invercargill).

## THREE TO ONE

Sir,—I reckon that B.E.G.M.'s review of "Three to One" was really superb. It's time these upstart Yankees were put in their place. Imagine a mere American daring to venture an opinion on poetry—or any other really "weighty matter"!

The very least this Moore fellow could have done was disguise his frightful American accent. Why, he should have been asking those three British chaps the questions.

And the way B.E.G.M. parodied the American's pronunciation of "little" was absolutely devastating.

Jolly good show, B.E.G.M. "The Niggers begin at Calais," what?

GUY BARTELL (Auckland).

## THE INTERVENTION

Sir,—It is quite evident from the comments of O. E. Middleton in *The Listener* of February 8 that he considers himself a "clear thinking New Zealander," but his last paragraph clearly indicates his political bias. He is quite entitled to his feelings of remorse over New Zealand's support of Britain's action at Suez on the facts as known to him, but does he know the full facts? His judgment seems to be entirely a superficial one. Could anyone with fair

judgment imagine Sir Anthony Eden as an aggressive warmonger? When history discloses the full account of this action, Mr. Middleton will learn something about statesmanship and the responsibility of a British Prime Minister to endeavour to preserve his country from industrial stagnation through oil for its machinery being unavailable. No remorse is felt by those who can see the full implications of Britain's effort to maintain her status and economic stability. But, of course, there are some petty politicians and ideologists who will always consider their country to be wrong, and particularly those who in this land enjoy its comfortable prosperity. In the same issue Mr. J. Malton Murray writes on this matter with "clear thinking," and wider vision than O. E. Middleton.

NEVILLE MCPHERSON (Gisborne).

## A YEAR IN RETROSPECT

Sir,—I would like to express my appreciation of the broadcast "1956: The Year in Retrospect." A great deal of work must have gone into the building up, and whoever was responsible is to be congratulated on the result. I have only one criticism to make and that is that I felt too much valuable time was given to the "Rock-and-roll" music. Many people feel as I do. We hope there may be more broadcasts as stimulating as "1956: The Year in Retrospect."

S. A. BARNICOAT (Wellington).

## THE WELFARE STATE

Sir,—This series of talks has been interesting and thought-provoking, though I would like to have heard some younger people's views. The last speaker, Mr. H. Miller, thought the Welfare State had a tendency to make life too easy; but is the life of a miner, a timber man or a wharfie ever very easy, let alone secure? Not if judged by insurance rates or injury statistics. Mr. Miller did not make any practical suggestions to cure the apathy. He surely would not wish to do away with pensions, free doctors, compensation for injury. Many people think we have a Socialist State and confuse it with the Welfare State. Mr. Miller did not do this, but he made no mention of the wealthy, and there are some in New Zealand who may also be apathetic towards our national interests and their responsibilities. Admittedly there is a lack of responsibility in workers, but in other sections too. Is it not because the worker is treated as a cog in a wheel? In most cases neither he nor the union to which he belongs is consulted in any way about the work he is doing. Above all he does not feel he is working for the nation, his friends and relatives, but for a man or board of directors and investors he never even sees, and who probably get a big share of the profits from his and his mates' labour. Is it not a change in human relationships that is needed?

K. M. LUCKENS (Tītirangi).

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Arthur Sheat (Auckland): Another correspondent forestalled you (issue February 8). Thanks for suggestion, which will be passed on.

G. Coombes (Patea): 1YA's commentaries on the finals were interrupted only for the Avondale races and the Grand Prix at Ardmore. The Avondale broadcasts were the normal ones; after broadcasting the Ardmore start (12.33-12.50), 1YA crossed every half-hour from 1.15 to 3.45 for not more than eight minutes each time.