



## "THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"

Sir,—Your contributor "S.F.J." in spreading himself on a criticism of the actors in the New Zealand Players' production of *The Merchant of Venice*, dismissed in half a line its most significant fault, "its overall lack of unity."

*The Merchant of Venice* is one of the most absurd and unreal of Shakespeare's plays. It falls to pieces if it is played as a serious piece of theatre. If we are asked to watch the story, it then looks like what it is—a corny melodrama.

The producer of this play must give to it a fresh flavour, playing down the melodrama (as Mr Trevor does in his one-man production). When the excellent opening of Mr Campion's production deliberately tried to capture the busyness of a seaport, I thought that he was going to do just this. And what a good idea it would have been if it had been played as a merchants' play with all the flavour of maritime business! In this framework the lyrical romantic scenes would have had the added appeal of surprise. But after the opening scene, Mr Campion completely dropped this suggestion and played heavily for the melodrama, giving us a ranting Morocco, a daughter inviting us to applaud her stealing her father's money, a hate-inspired Shylock pointing his knife at a bared bosom (but we knew judgment was coming!) and a Portia dealing out Christian vengeance on the nasty Jew. By playing up the rubbish in the play he kept us from the many good things. On only two occasions, Bassanio's choosing scene, and Act 5, Scene 1, up to Bassanio's entrance, were we allowed to glimpse some of the delights.

The backdrop and the lovely white and gold curtains were beautifully conceived and used, but their effect was partially spoilt by the "bitsy" scenery of the opening act. The simplicity of the casket setting was in good contrast, but why the commode-like stands for the caskets?

Finally, I still continue to hope that one of these days the Players will discover the beauty of Shakespeare's lines.

W. K. McILROY (Feilding).

## DYLAN THOMAS AND SWINBURNE

Sir,—In "Swinlan's" first sentence we run into what I have come to think of as a national characteristic. Regardless of whether a metaphor provides us with a shorter and more effective way of saying something we shall find ourselves in the cactus if we use the "flowery" phrase. In the third sentence we come across another: either we must be for the work or against it. Any admission that our hero is not flawless shows, not that we have tried to be objective, but that we are hastily climbing down. Granting again that clarity is an ideal which Thomas too seldom attained, it would have been as interesting to "Swinlan" as to myself to have read a recent correspondence in the *Times Literary Supplement* wrestling with three tenable interpretations of a G. M. Hopkins poem which I thought was pretty plain sailing. There are also Mr. Smithyman's remarks in the *New Zealand*

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

*Poetry Yearbook*, 1954 (page 88), showing that readers, too, may have their failings.

In one portion our correspondent flounders at the edge of the very old belief that spirit and flesh are symptoms for good and evil. While Augustine might be equal to putting my own case forward in a few well-chosen words, I quite candidly cry off. It is not so much a matter of argument as of faith, and I am of a different persuasion from your correspondent. Lastly, there is a little point which cuts right across the categories of major and minor, and that is whether the work is relevant. Dylan Thomas's work is obviously relevant to a great many people in this generation; one of the reasons for which I tried to give expression to in my last letter.

JOHN SUMMERS (Christchurch).

(This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.)

## NEW ZEALAND SPEECH

Sir,—It has been said that the camera never lies—the same might be said of the tape recorder. Many people receive quite a shock on hearing their own voices for the first time. As I see it there are accents pleasing to some ears, yet distasteful to others. This applies all the world over and is not peculiar to any particular language.

Regarding the English tongue, the BBC has, since its inception over thirty years ago, set a standard of speech. It might be fairly said that voices such as those of R. E. Jeffrey (latterly with British Movietone News), Alvar Liddell and Freddie Grisewood, to mention only a few, were regarded as models of elocution and a joy to listen to. Apart from their freedom from accent, such voices, in common with most BBC announcers, were noted for their rich timbre. Surely Howard Marshall's description of the Coronation ceremony of Queen Elizabeth in Westminster Abbey was as beautiful a piece of elocution as one could wish to hear.

Nevertheless, who would wish to travel from Land's End to John o' Groats or from King's Lynn to Galway Bay and listen to a uniform accent? The diversity of accent and dialect in the old country is truly something to be marvelled at, and part of the British heritage. Colloquial accents and expressions are mostly the prerogative of the plebs, whilst the gentry, no matter where the family seat may be, speak with a nauseating "refined" braying. As one climbs the social ladder, so the brogue gradually disappears as a patrician accent is adopted. This social change of accent is encountered even in New Zealand.

The Cockney and the "Lancashire" are amusing to listen to in film and radio, but their sharpness renders them discordant. The average New Zealand voice resembles the Cockney with its "lawr" and "noaw" for no. This is not surprising when one takes into consideration the large proportion of Londoners who would have made up successive batches of immigrants.

Although we may be indebted to Uncle Sam for introducing some useful spelling reforms in the "mother tongue," yet the nasal American twang is atrocious. Indeed, enough to make Will of Stratford turn in his grave. As Lorenzo put it in *The Merchant of Venice*—"The man that hath no music in himself nor is not moved by concord of sweet sound . . . Let no such man be trusted!" J. C. WEIR (Auckland).

Sir,—Your correspondent P. L. Porter is correct when he states that "there is a definite Australian type and the

original stock from England would, I fancy, be found to be a different shape and stature from their present descendants." A wide range of investigation, undertaken during the early 1930's at the instance of the Australian Munitions Supply Board prior to producing moulds for gas masks, established the fact that there is a marked difference in measurement between the average English and the average Australian face.

He is on less sure ground, however, when he suggests that the influence of environment is present in voice production as it affects New Zealand speech. If this supposition is correct, environment must exercise its influence extremely quickly. In 1892, when he was in New Zealand, Rudyard Kipling wrote a story exclusive to the *Auckland Herald* and *Auckland Weekly News* called "One Lady at Wairakei." In it he refers to "a New Zealand woman who talked about 'ke-ows' and 'bye-bies.'" From the context it is obvious that she was a woman in her early thirties, so that she must have been following a speech pattern formed in the 1860's.

A more likely explanation appears to be that as the great majority of our New Zealand pioneer forebears came from a social stratum which had had little or no opportunity of enjoying either education or culture, there must be some form of Gresham's law governing speech as it does currency, whereby the bad drives out the good. The sage who first said "speech is silver" may have been nearer the truth than even he thought he was.

MOA (Cambridge).

## SPACIOUS EDWARDIAN DAYS

Sir,—Although I enjoyed the NZBS Clara Butt broadcast, the reference to the "Spacious Edwardian Days" of low income taxes and general jollification found no nostalgic echoes with me. I lived those days and remember them as the days of the *Daily News* Sweated Industries Exhibition, of General Booth's "Darkest England" revelations, of Stewart Grey's "Hunger Marches," of the "Save the Children" appeal for the children of the South Wales coal miners. Those were the days of opulence and wretched poverty; of society play boys and human industrial scrap-heaps. In short, days which in these days of an enlightened social consciousness I thank God are no more.

ARTHUR CLARK (Taupaki).

## PERIOD OF SILENT PRAYER

Sir,—The recording used for the Period of Silent Prayer could be changed for something more appropriate, an organist playing a verse of the hymn-tune "Belmont" or "Rockingham," for example, and the chimes dismissed altogether. But why do away with something that is of value for others besides the "dear old souls" Mr. Fairburn mentions? He is right when he says that Christian prayer does not need to have a set starting time so that everyone can get off the mark together (for anybody can pray to God at any time). Still, it is rather comforting to know that other people in this country, who know the real value of prayer, are linked for a short while in intercession and thanksgiving to God. But in explaining these things to Mr. Fairburn perhaps we are just "Not Understood."

N. H. YOUNG (Auckland).

Sir,—Charles Dickens remarked in one of his speeches that "from the remotest periods it has been found impossible to please everybody." The

Broadcasting Service has been reminded of the truth of this saying often enough! Mr. Fairburn describes the weekly call to prayer (he thought it was daily until corrected by you) as "flummery," and the music as "goosey"—whatever that may precisely mean. He adds that the very thought of his great-grandchildren listening to it "unnerves" him. He leaves us in doubt whether it is the "call to prayer" that displeases him, or merely the music. But the call is very brief, and he is not obliged to listen. I don't know whether I am one of those whom he so kindly refers to as "dear old souls." Without wishing to enter into any "anxious defence," may I suggest that prayer being an integral part of the Christian religion, a weekly reminder of the reality of the unseen is commendable, and appreciated by many listeners. A.H.R. (Dunedin).

## ELVIS PRESLEY

Sir,—It has given me great pleasure to find that the captain of an American destroyer has found it a great relief not to hear Elvis Presley on New Zealand radio stations. I feel that he has been very fortunate in his choice of programmes, since "The Pelvis" has a particularly nauseating and suggestive style of "singing." He is quoted as having said that he would give up singing immediately if he were a menace to teenage morals. As this is most definitely the case, there can be no doubt that the time is ripe for his retirement.

ALEX. QUENTON-TURNER (Auckland).

## AUCKLAND NOTEBOOK

Sir,—It hardly does "More Notebook" any credit to champion Cyclops. True, the giant was head and shoulders above his fellows but, like all who suffer monocular vision, though he saw as much as any one else, he had very poor sense of depth and perspective. "Notebook" correspondence would indicate that Cyclops was no myth.

J. A. D. THOMPSON (Timaru).

## "FLASH POINT"

Sir,—May I congratulate the cast of *Flash Point*, the NZBS play presented from 2YA on February 25?

However admirable the theme of the story, did not the details of the plot stretch Admiralty Regulations a little? Is it not a fact that ammunition barges are required to cast off from the wharf at sunset in British ports? In the case of a foreign port, would not the Royal Naval ship concerned be required to anchor at a safe distance from the ammunition barge during the night?

P.O.'s WIFE (Wellington).

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

D.L.B. (Wainuiomata): You really need to say more than that.

L.H.B. (Gisborne): Would like to adopt your suggestion, but the demands of space and layout make it impracticable.

Mrs. M. K. Dodd (Auckland): Thank you. Will pass it on.

I. D. Ely (Wellington): The programmes are broadcast as soon as they are made available.

