



"OWLS DO CRY"

Sir,—Somewhere between Mr Hall and Mr Vogt (though a little closer to Mr Hall) there exists a standpoint which discriminating readers of *Owls Do Cry* may find more acceptable than either review or counter-review. For though the novel is a good deal more mature and finished than Mr Hall would concede, it is also considerably less perfect than Mr Vogt, in another of his disastrous enthusiasms, would admit. It probably is the best novel yet written by a New Zealander—though this statement is a bit like claiming to have the largest dam in the Southern Hemisphere: there's a great quantity of ocean in the Southern and a large number of dams in the Northern Hemisphere. The book does possess qualities which our fiction, that thin pastel line running from Katherine Mansfield to Mr Sargeson and Mr Courage, has markedly lacked; energy, breadth, vehemence, a willingness to risk loss of decorum by letting out all the stops. Greatly as we can admire Miss Frame's contemporaries, their voices, though truly tuned, are reedy and anaemic. Just as Mr Sargeson has the greater conscious artistry, so has Miss Frame the more rare gifts of energy and scope. In *Owls Do Cry* there is a blessed lack of the decent reticences of contemporary New Zealand fiction.

All this can be said while retaining one's critical faculties intact. Not all is perfect. There are the clumsy bad-verse, bad-prose passages in italics, which interrupt the narrative without offering much illuminating comment upon it. There is the dreadful refrain, "Sings Daphne from the dead room" (accompanied, perhaps, by Mr Glover on his old guitar). There is the excessive symbolic and narrative weight borne by an accidental death by burning, and the subsequent erection of a house on the spot, to be occupied by the victim's sister. Mr Vogt should know that there is a difference between an accident in real life and in fiction. In the former case we must believe it happened because we either saw it or reliable people told us about it; in the latter case we have only the author's word for it and we have a right to suspect her of contrivance if it fits too neatly into her symbolic structure. *Macbeth* would hardly be a great tragedy if *Macbeth* had just happened to murder Duncan. There is, again, a similar strain put upon the "oven-and-pikelet" symbol; symbols not already charged with significance in the world at large may show signs of incongruity under strain, as this one does.

Mr Hall did well to indicate flaws in an important book. His interpretation of the epilogue was a sad error, but Mr Turner has said all that is needed. And if, in his penultimate paragraph, Mr Vogt means that Daphne has found "fulfilment" through "a great love of life," then he shows a profound ignorance both of the symbolism of the book and of certain forms of therapy in com-

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

mon use. But perhaps he does not mean that: it is really difficult to be sure of what he is attempting to convey.

W. H. OLIVER (Christchurch).

DESIGN FOR MUSIC

Sir,—I read Mr Meldrum's article on "Design for Music" with interest, and feel your journal is to be congratulated for the inclusion of such material. There are, however, one or two points either stated or implied in the article which should receive further comment.

Mr Meldrum states that the vibrations of the various instruments falling upon the human ear are translated into music. This is not so—his remark describes merely the hearing of noise or sound. Music only begins when the sounds heard have an organised relationship and hence when the ear picks them up their organised relationship is apprehended through the mind and translated into music.

I am somewhat surprised that Mr Meldrum should apparently feel kindly disposed toward the multi-purpose "concert hall." There is an old aphorism that a "good sight line is a good sound line." If this is true, and I believe it is, then it is a contradiction in terms to describe a multi-purpose hall as a "concert" hall, for with the inevitable flat floor, neither good seeing nor good hearing can result. Surely we should not, on the grounds of economics, keep on repeating mistakes of the past in New Zealand. Hope Bagenal, the eminent English acoustic authority, has some very scathing comments to make on the multi-purpose hall and it is noticeable that cinema promoters have not so far fallen for this fallacy to the extent of advocating flat-floored cinemas. Would Mr Meldrum suggest that sight and sound lines are less important to opera, theatre, and concert-goers than to cinema-goers? In my opinion economic considerations lead to the suggestion of creating a small number of good concert halls as regional cultural centres at nodal positions through the country, so that the country listeners as well as town, can with a comparatively short journey hear the great touring artists and companies perform under proper conditions.

The idea of a dissolved proscenium has had its protagonists for many years. Richard Southern, the English stage expert, has written extensively on this subject and Richard Leacroft in his book on Civic Theatre design, devoted an amount of space to it, so the idea is not a new one. I agree with Mr Meldrum that it is certainly worth endeavouring to get a theatre or hall built, along these lines.

M. B. PATIENCE (Wellington).

SUNTANNED AND CAREFREE

Sir,—I was most intrigued by the editorial "Suntanned and Carefree" in your issue of June 7. It so happens that a copy of the November, 1956, issue of *Réalités* came into my hands from Beatrice Ashton, who now lives in San Francisco. I admired the photographs, and read the text with mounting fury. On the same evening I attended a concert by the Parrenin Quartet at Victoria University College. It proved to be the finest quartet playing I had ever heard. They offered an austere programme which included a Haydn Quartet, the fifth Bartok, and Berg's Lyric Suite. The audience sat in rapt absorption throughout.

The next day I despatched a three-page letter to the Editor of *Réalités*,

fulminating against the "clichés irresponsables," pointing out that "la vie intellectuelle" of this country was quite as lively as in other countries, if less highly organised, and that their celebrated quartet could hardly expect more attentive treatment in Paris itself. I gave a brief digest of operatic, theatrical and musical activities in Wellington over the past year, which, assembled, looked quite impressive. The article was entitled "Les Robinsons du Pacifique." I gave it to a lady to read, and she returned it with these words: "Thank you: very illuminating. And now, if you will excuse me, Miss Robinson is going out to shoot her lunch." This looked hilarious translated into French, so I ended my letter with it. It will be interesting to see if the Editor of *Réalités* is responsive. However, I have fired my little pistol, hoisted my tiny flag, and with your editorial so admirably expressing my point of view, am content.

BRUCE MASON (Wellington).

SALE OF RED POLLS

Sir,—I have been a subscriber to *The Listener* for many years and have read the articles by "Sundowner" with interest and pleasure; but his comments in the May 24 issue on the dispersal sale of Red Polls at Sir Heaton Rhodes's property, Christchurch, are somewhat wide of the mark. I will agree that it was depressing to see such a beautiful place, "and not a soul left to care what followed." I am a breeder of Red Poll cattle, and was a buyer at the sale. I do not think the sale dragged; when buying one buys at the lowest possible price, and does not try to push the sale along with quick bids. I for one value what I bought and do not think that Sir Heaton Rhodes spent his time, money and enthusiasm in vain, for I feel that there is a place in the New Zealand farming economy for the dual purpose Red Poll.

The dispersal sale can mean a strengthening of the breed in New Zealand by new breeders taking up the Red Poll for what it is; a breed that milks very well and yet produces bull calves that will turn into excellent beef.

E. K. DOWLING (Blenheim).

A PLAY FOR AUCKLAND

Sir,—In the light of your correspondent Peter Harcourt's comments on the Southland Centennial play-writing competition and the announcement in *Arts Review* recently from Station 2YC concerning a similar competition sponsored by the Auckland Arts Festival Society, it seems to me that the NZBS has in the past shown clearly how such competitions should be conducted. It seems likely that the Auckland competition will give rise to some dissatisfaction, if not with the results certainly over the conditions.

In the first place, intending authors have to advise the Society of their intention to enter before submitting a play. Presumably, this is in order that the Society can decide whether or not the entrant is a fit and proper person to be allowed to enter! Secondly, while there are no restrictions on the character of the play, it must be "good theatre," a description which is undefined and one which I feel certain is open to many different interpretations. The winner is to receive ten per cent of the gross takings of the production of the play at the Auckland Festival next year. No theatre is indicated in which the production will be given, nor the number of performances, so no pos-

sible return can thus be estimated. Further, this is no more in effect than what submission of a play by any playwright to an agent or management can achieve, more or less. But any other management, accepting the play and putting it into production, would expect it to run longer than a season at the Auckland Festival, so that the author would stand to receive considerably more than he could possibly receive from Auckland. It seems to me the Auckland Festival is getting a play "on the cheap."

Finally, the author is asked to submit four typewritten copies of the play, the cost of which could possibly amount to more than his reward should he win! Also, why should four copies have to be submitted when there are only three judges announced? But then, I notice that the judges do not have the final decision. The final decision on production rests with the executive of the Festival Society. Thus the judges might discover a fine play, the executive reject the idea of producing it, and so the author get nothing after all!

The radio play competitions organised by the NZBS some years ago were models which such organisations might well follow. Moreover, they gave satisfaction to competitors and listeners alike.

MARGARET MACDONALD (Wellington).

(A copy of this letter was sent to Mr W. Laird Thomson, Managing Secretary of the Auckland Festival Society, who has replied as follows: "The conditions of the competition have been drawn to suit the particular requirements of the Auckland Festival. If the winning play is successful in an Auckland presentation, it is likely that production will follow elsewhere. If, as has been the case with some other plays given their original production in the overseas Dominions, it is followed by production in, say, England and America, then the successful author would receive a far better return for his efforts than he would if a straight out monetary prize were offered without any guarantee of production. The only reason why the Executive of the Auckland Festival Society reserves to itself the right to decide on production is because the Executive is finally responsible for the financial outcome of the Festival, and cannot afford to risk too large a sum on a production that, while possibly of considerable merit, might not have a sufficiently wide appeal to justify the risks of production."—Ed.)

THE GREAT DETERRENT

Sir,—Deterrents: for the Use Of. Concerning the use of balloons in warfare, a Frenchman, M. Marey-Monge, consoled himself in 1847: "... on the principle that the more deadly the means of destruction the less the possibility of war is to be feared."

JIM HENDERSON (Eastbourne).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

P. B. Daly (New Plymouth): Rather strong comment from one who has not read the book.
W.B.B. (Auckland): The suggestion in your last sentence would be more reasonable if more BBC productions were available.

Interested Listener (Wellington): (1) Soon. Performers have had to be nominated and engaged and must study and rehearse the works before dates can be fixed. (2) Other works, we hope, in due course, too.

J. Munk (Avondale): A letter will be sent to you if your request can be met.

Ulysses: Sorry; we cannot depart from the use of a place name after the signature.

