

The Elder Poet

THE NZBS production of T. S. Eliot's *The Elder Statesman* (1YC) was my first acquaintance with the play. In a good presentation, marred just slightly for me by the mixture of English and New Zealand accents, the work seemed to me to be the most straightforward and perhaps the most portentous of Eliot's dramas so far—a morality in which a politician is faced with the personal failures of his life and comes to a greater understanding of himself and a selfless love through the mocking

accusations of two figures from his past. There is less poetry here, too, than in the earlier plays, although Eliot's exploitation of the formal utterance of English upper-class speech and his controlling rhythms give the dialogue a shape very pleasing to the ear. I should think the work might, in fact, be better on radio than on the stage, because of its static character and the rather obvious pointing of the moral at the end. Be that as it may, Antony Groser was moving and dominant as Lord Claverton, and Dorothy Munro credible and sympathetic as his daughter. In this context, however, Davina Whitehouse, as the "matron" of the convalescent home was rather too broad, almost as if, in the midst of people doing a stately gavotte, someone were to insist upon dancing an Irish jig.

Dramatic Disasters

BRUCE STEWART'S *It's a Tough Business* (1YA) was a very slight and unsatisfactory affair. It seemed to me reminiscent of stories from the old Sydney *Bulletin*, with its backblocks types, its strolling players, and other features just one remove from *On Our Selection*. A couple of out-of-work actors persuade a stage-struck barman to invest his savings in a disastrous theatrical production, and end up serving beer in his place. Mr Stewart might have got something out of this had his dialogue sounded not quite so amateurish and padded, and had the play been better done. But, whether it was the piece itself, or something else, the NZBS cast made a pretty poor fist of this one. Even Laurence Hepworth, saddled with

the improbable part of an "I say, laddie" type of Thespian, could breathe little life into the moth-eaten character. But the sound effects, especially of the sheep which wreck the performance, were pleasant.
—J.C.R.

Into the Fray

SOME months have passed since I last heard *Leave It to the Girls*. Since then the panel has changed, but the programme still misses. The new panel sounds less genial than the old, and none too compatible in temperament, opinion, or outlook. Perhaps the search should have been widened to get the panel absolutely right for this sort of programme. But much of the failure of *Leave It to the Girls* seems to lie in the questions to be answered rather than with the girls themselves. One cause of the programme's not entertaining us more is possibly our copying the Australian original too closely (a course which I, for one, did not advocate in suggesting some form of *My Word* of our own). It was a mistake to continue the programme beyond the ready supply of stimulating and adequate questions likely to provoke discussion. None of the four questions in the latest session really allowed much scope for sound advice or amusing comment. The programme organisers might be wiser to scrap a recording that does not come up to expectations and try again. It is not always possible for such a panel to be at the top of its form but it would be better if the listener only heard it at its best.

In the Family

TWO members of the Alley family have given me good listening this week. "In Coffee Bars" (2YA) introduced Ruth Alley's series of talks on *Working One's Way*. Such stories, part of the staple fare of women's sessions all over the country these days, demand a high degree of personality in the speaker, or experiences strange indeed, if they are to score with the listener. As befitted a former, would-be "Sarah Bernhardt of the Antipodes," Miss Alley revealed a sly delight in the quirks of character and situation around her while she worked. From Station 2YC came the long poem, *Lament of the Soldier's Wife*, a translation by Rewi Alley from an 18th century Vietnamese poet. Read well and with quiet sympathy by Anh Dolphin, the verses evoked an exotic eastern world background to the simple timeless grief of a woman for her husband gone to the wars. Throughout its shifting moods, the lament, with its wealth of imagery drawn from nature, heightened the expression of personal grief and bitterness by the studied contrast of its changing scenes. We could do with more recordings of this kind from the NZBS.
—N.L.M.

Dochter of the Chorch

I FOUND the first scene of the Cambridge, Massachusetts production of *Saint Joan* (Showcase) almost wholly strange and jarring: the characters all spoke in strong Irish, and Siobhan McKenna's Joan had the tang of the peat bogs. Yet this, I found, was an initial impression only, quickly dispelled as the play proceeded. If Sybil Thorndike could give us a Lancashire Maid, not only get away with it, but lay it down as the authoritative accent for the part,
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