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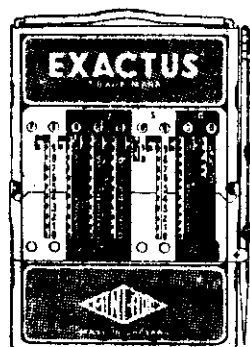
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## RADIO REVIEW

# First Publication

RADIO has given us of late a fair measure of poetry, from Chaucer to Auden, but 1YC's recent presentation of A. R. D. Fairburn's long poem, *To a Friend in the Wilderness*, was distinctly unusual. For one thing the poem is, as yet, unprinted; its first public appearance on the air takes us back to the days when reading aloud to a large audience was the normal means of publication. For another, a poem, especially of such scope, from one of our most distinguished writers, is a major event. It is also interesting that the author, a consistent and often testy critic of many aspects of New Zealand radio, should have chosen this method of breaking his longish poetic silence.

I hope that this recording will be re-broadcast soon and often, for its length and subject-matter, the vigorous lyrical presentation of a humanist credo in terms of New Zealand living, demand close attention and familiarity. Mr. Fairburn has things to say which no other of our poets has, and a very individual way of saying them; and this work was conspicuously finger-printed. Most poems we hear on the air we have read, or we follow with the text or we look up afterwards. In this case, the whole piece came fresh and unclogged by memory or divided attention, as a sharp and clear experience, claiming all the listener's concentration.

To my ear, it displayed the lyrical, the philosophical and the satirical Fairburn; the landscapes were alive, vivid with creative observation of fields, sea-change, birds and trees, and with idiosyncratic imagery, which pricked the imagination. On first hearing, the catalogues of pet hates jarred a little, and such phrases as "uneconomic gorse" suggested an incomplete reconciliation of Fairburn the lyrical humanist and Fairburn the social commentator, but only a study of the text or further hearings could confirm this.

The poem was superbly read by William Austin, who brings perfect control and authority to almost everything he does. At the same time, I thought that the form of the poem, a verse-letter with quotations from letters, to which it replies, might have been clearer had two voices been used; although this does not quite solve the problem. As it was, comprehension tended to lag behind the switch of point of view.

Is it too optimistic to see in this broadcast the beginning of a new relationship between New Zealand poets and the radio? In Britain, such well-known poets as Roy Campbell, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender do not disdain to write poems and verse-plays especially for broadcasting. In this country, our poets are read occasionally on the radio, but this is the first occasion on which I remember hearing an unpublished work. In view of the small return a serious poet can expect for his writings in New Zealand (indeed, if he can expect any return) could not the NZBS actively encourage the writing of poetry for broadcasting initially, even to the extent of running an occasional well-rewarded competition? Not that such a competition would be likely

to produce a masterpiece, but if poets had the assurance of a cordial hearing for substantial work, publicity of a thoughtful kind, and the certainty of a reasonable broadcast fee, this might go some way to assist the publication of good verse by poets who have, despite the Literary Fund, run their heads against the brick wall of finance. This is not to imply that the mere writing of verse needs to be encouraged, as already it is one of our major if least remunerative industries.

It is only fair to add that A. R. D. Fairburn's poem was not written especially for broadcasting. It also offered no suggestion at all of what was implied by an announcer, giving an announcement earlier in the day, when he called it "To a Mind in the Wilderness!"

—J.C.R.

## Planned Readings

ONCE or twice I have been submerged beneath the sheer mass of disjointed material that has been broadcast during a 15-minute poetry reading session. Station 3YC's new series which began with "What is Man?" suggests an approach to poetry which gives order and purpose to a short anthology. In eliciting the answer to their question the producers ranged from Psalm VIII to "We are the Music Makers." Like a thread carrying beads of many colours and shapes the main idea gave the many pieces of poetry and prose a cogency they would otherwise have lacked. Surely, too, the force of the question engages the mind instead of letting the unmoored listener slip on the tide of empty sound and feeling. Interesting contrasts or comparisons can be made—for example, the almost Biblical sentiment of Pope's "being darkly wise, and rudely great," so unusually like Psalm VIII's being, "a little lower than the angels." A greater range of voices would improve an already good programme, and also more strongly suggest the content of some of the excerpts. For certain portions, notably the extracts from Plato and Milton, much older voices would have made a fitting contrast with the younger voices which read A. W. O'Shaughnessy's "We are the Music Makers" and portions of Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man."

## People's Poet

DURING smoko a plumber recounted a ribald yarn he had heard on the radio, but the other workmen laughed him to scorn. Outraged by the way his truthfulness was questioned he refused to discuss the story further. Later a fellow workman heard Chaucer's "The Reeve's Tale" from a YA station and realised to what the plumber had listened. That mankind enjoys ribaldry is nothing new, but it is interesting to observe that this plumber had listened without (a) noticing it was poetry, (b) uneasiness over unusual turns of speech, (c) any idea that he was hearing a "classic." Further, his interest was captured long before Chaucer spiced the tale. Casually tuning in to 3YC recently I had a similar experience, being

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