

"TO A JET PILOT"

Sir,—To criticise the parts without taking the whole into due consideration, can always lead to the conclusion that the critic desires, especially if it be a bad one. D. R. Watson, in criticising James Baxter's poem "To a Jet Pilot," has achieved a far better piece of poor criticism than Baxter has of poor poetry.

No critic has the right to state categorically that this is cliché or slang, while that is good English. The English language is continually being enriched and added to from slang and cliché, and the arbitrary boundary between good and bad is not well defined.

Of the various points that D. R. Watson has raised, there are many with which I do not agree, but as these will be only my opinion, which is not authoritative, they will be worth little more than Mr. Watson's. If James Baxter is to be accused of pseudo-intellectualism, it must be fair to accuse D. R. Watson of a rather snobbish conservatism.

D. A. ST. JOHN (New Plymouth).

Sir,—There is not a poem in the English language which could stand up against such criticism as delivered by David R. Watson against James K. Baxter's poem "To a Jet Pilot." The canons of such criticism are purely subjective, in this case, matters of personal prejudice, against which there is no possible appeal to objective standards. Were the critic to read the poem more carefully, he would find many of his rhetorical questions answered in the text.

Mr. Watson's only references to objective standards are made in such meaningless and emotional terms as "conflict between the accepted poetical technique" and "a certain rhythm pertaining only to poetry in the T. S. Eliot style." What this "accepted" style is, and by whom it is "accepted," is left to our imaginations, and from that Mr. Watson wants to lead us to the slaughter of Baxter.

If blind veneration is your critic's chief bugbear, then blind criticism such as his, is mine. Only blind criticism would make obnoxious statements, from such slender proofs, favouring the works of unnamed "genuine artificers" as opposed to the work of the "pseudo-intellectual" "pretentious aspirant." Such adjectives are those favoured by the philistine to express his irritation at those places of the heart and mind where his own enfeebled powers of thought and expression fail to penetrate.

LOUIS JOHNSON (Wellington).

Sir,—David Watson's comments on James K. Baxter's poem made several telling points re pseudo-intellectualism in general among student writers and naive camp followers. Fads dying out elsewhere can still seduce local wits. I have no intention of singling out Baxter—at one time his early efforts revealed a vein of genuine poetry, and no doubt the gift is still there—but it is fatally easy for all with a facile pen to turn out by the yard material compounded of conscious wordiness, smart effects, a sort of feeble propaganda muddled with cynicism and juvenile eroticism. And it is easy to stay in the rut, for the few little literary magazines or the inevitable university pamphlets are as ingenuously pleased by such stuff as coterie in England and the United States were fifteen years ago.

One notices, too, that New Zealand newspapers gush over local poets and cry out for them to be given a chance, but how many local editors actually cede that space? What seems necessary

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

is a serious writers' field, edited by mature minds with a genuine literary standard, wavering neither towards T. S. Eliot or Mrs. Hemans—ready for clear and original work, and not easily taken in by the shallow excitements of the hundred novices who find they can string words together. At one time Charles Marris set the authentic note with *Art in New Zealand*, but since that publication passed away, any jingle can ring the bell. Unfortunately, we have no critics.

CHRISTOPHER (Wellington).

Sir,—I read Mr. Watson's letter criticising James Baxter's poem over three times, and then I awoke to him. May I congratulate him on the neatest piece of satire I have yet read? At first, I was tempted to take the letter seriously and mutter darkly about "deliberate misunderstanding" and "ostentatious middlebrow conservatism," but then I saw that, by pretending to be serious, Mr. Watson had done more to make that school of criticism appear absurd than a whole volume of refutation could do.

I fell to the deceit when I saw that no one would be so pompously self-righteous and obtuse as he was pretending to be. How well he succeeded in impaling the inanities those critics perpetrate, with such neat phrases as: "One cannot condone poetry of this nature. Are we in this country so deep in the mire of pseudo-intellectualism that we are unable to distinguish . . ." This is delightful stuff, and wonderful parody indeed. Of course, we know that the letter had nothing whatever to do with the poem which prompted it (and we realise that Mr. Watson must appreciate Mr. Baxter's poem for the lovely thing that it is) but it does so beautifully take off the Edwardian criticism—to its last conservative and illogical mumble—that we can forgive him for using this poem as an excuse.

The letter, as a parody, has one fault: it overdoes the satire so much that there is a danger that readers may take it seriously. May I caution Mr. Watson against this fault, since he, of course, would not like to be thought serious in his pomposity, I am sure. And as I read over this letter, I am worried in case I have fallen into a similar fault myself.

D.G. (Wellington).

CAUGHT UP IN A DICTIONARY

Sir,—The story by G. R. Gilbert (*Listener*, December 12) reminds me that I was once the proud possessor of a *Webster's International Dictionary*, latest edition (about 1946). I say a "proud possessor" and so I was as I looked at the ornate binding of the bulky indexed volume. The steel engravings, the flags of all nations, the picture of Noah Webster himself—all were there, but so were many words spelled in the American fashion. The first I looked up was "kidnapped," to find it spelled with one "p." There were other examples, also, so I immediately disposed of my *Webster* for twenty shillings less than it cost me.

My *Oxford* will therefore do me until such time as the Amurricans can learn to spell correctly. As to the word "inditement" mentioned by G. R. Gilbert, I prefer the good old-fashioned spelling "indictment," and I suggest that Papa Gilbert knew something when he swapped his *Webster* for a modest pocket *Oxford*. Some considerable time

ago I wrote to the editor of a famous American weekly pointing out many misspellings (in my estimation) in a current issue and including the word "kidnaped." The reply was that correspondence to his paper on this matter was so voluminous that the decision was against publication of such correspondence and pointing out that it was a matter of opinion and that the argument would be never-ending.

JOHN T. DON (Howick).

LANZA AND CARUSO

Sir,—I think your correspondent "Grateful to America" goes much too far when he says that Lanza's voice is the most beautiful the world has ever heard. Has he never heard Gigli, Bjorling, Schipa, Infantino, Schmidt, Kullman, etc.? Gigli particularly has superb control and quality—things Lanza may acquire with experience, but I doubt it unless he stops singing modern songs, the technique is so different from Opera.

To say Lanza is far superior to Caruso is rather stupid. No true comparison can be made, because Caruso's recordings were made when the gramophone was in its infancy; suffice it to say that Caruso's fame was phenomenal and was achieved during the "Golden Age of Opera" without the aid of the cinema or, virtually, gramophone or wireless.

In conclusion, I would suggest your correspondent acquires a few operatic recordings of Gigli and notices how that golden voice can change in mid-note and the ease with which the highest notes are attained—they don't even sound high. But don't let him try to sing the notes himself, lest he strain his epiglottis.

I. G. BEVAN (Auckland).

Sir,—When I read the letter of "Grateful to America" I was surprised at his viewpoint, as many others must have been. How can he dare to compare the voice of Lanza with that of Caruso, and go so far as to say he has a voice superior to Caruso's? There are many singers in the world today with voices which rival Lanza easily. Take Gigli, Bjorling, Schipa, for instance, to name but a few. We can hear Caruso only on pre-electric recording, but even so his voice is that of profound beauty. Perhaps when your correspondent has seen more films like *La Traviata* he will take another outlook on the merits of voices.

OPERA STUDENT (Auckland).

BRAHMS DOUBLE CONCERTO

Sir,—At the concert by the National Orchestra held in the Wellington Town Hall on November 6, the orchestra, assisted by two Australian artists, Ernest Llewellyn, violinist, and John Kennedy, cellist, gave a very fine performance of the Brahms Double Concerto. During the interval it was announced over the air that this was a first performance in New Zealand of the concerto. I wish to question this statement. In 1933 Mr. John Bishop (then conductor of the Wellington Choral Union) organised a Brahms Festival, of four or five concerts lasting about a week, to commemorate the centenary of the master. At the last of these concerts the Double Concerto was performed by a full orchestra under the conductorship of John Bishop, the soloists being Ava Symons, violinist, and George Elwood, cellist. It was a notable occasion, and will be remembered by a number of players who

took part in it—some of whom are present-day members of the National Orchestra.

—EVA W. CRUMP (Wellington).

CHORAL SYMPHONY

Sir,—If Hamilton concerts count in Christchurch or Auckland, and clearly they don't, may I point out to Mr. de Berry, "A.F." and "Before My Time" that the first performance of Beethoven's Choral Symphony in New Zealand took place in Hamilton about 1907 under the conductorship of M. Willaert. Shortly after that somebody invented butterfat and nothing much, musically speaking, has happened here since.

CHAS. S. WARDLE (Hamilton).

"SUNDOWNER" AND ISRAEL

Sir,—I am aware, as Mr. Malton Murray points out, that *Genesis* does not specifically quote any instruction to Cain to make a blood sacrifice. It must be implied, however, to make sense of the story. *The Book of Genesis*, it must be remembered, is an edited account, condensed from a number of earlier sources. Limited by the writing materials available, Moses was obliged to make his account very bare indeed. It is, therefore, essential for the reader to read between the lines.

The Old Testament, in my opinion, reveals not a growth in the idea of God, but a growth in the revelation of God, a revelation necessary because of the continual falling away of the Israelites to the worship of Baal, the god of the plain-dwellers. Baal worship was, by the way, an older religion than the worship of Jehovah.

Once again the conflict is not between shepherding and agriculture, but between the religion of the Israelites and that of their implacable enemies.

Mr. Murray is guilty of a gross misunderstanding of *Hosea* 12: 9. The reference to "tents"—"tabernacles" in the A.V.—is a reference to the booths in which the Israelites lived during the autumn festival, which was a time of great rejoicing. Thus the meaning is that peace and happiness would return, not that a nomadic way of life was favoured.

I trust this will clear up any doubts in Mr. Murray's mind.

D. F. B. EYRES (Nelson).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Swen (Nelson).—Sorry, much too long.
X.Y.Z. (Christchurch).—Sorry, there is no remedy.

A.E.Q. (Nelson).—Sorry; the correspondence has been closed.

2YA *Listener* (Wanganui).—(1) *Meandering*, played by Sidney Torch and his orchestra. (2) Made up two to three weeks, planned four to five weeks, in advance.

E. L. McGrath (Wanganui).—The lapse, which is regretted, occurred because an amendment was not sent to *The Listener*. Nevertheless, the change was notified in station announcements on November 19 and 20. The work is now to be heard on January 19 at 7.15 p.m.

C. J. McKay (Wellington).—The established popularity of this request session rests on the fact that it does range from jazz to grand opera. If it were compartmented, the classical section would be short; the jazz section, ten times as long. Requests run in those proportions. Listeners who prefer a classical programme have the choice of other stations.

E. F. Elphick (Parematu).—The descriptive announcement you disliked was introduced this year in an experimental attempt to overcome the difficulty which arises from the fact that the singing during the first stage of the processionary entry cannot be broadcast effectively, as experience on previous occasions has shown. It is agreed that the experiment was unsuccessful, but it is hoped that it has pointed the way to a successful method in future.