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RADIO REVIEW

Reflections in a Mirror

UNTIL we get television, art is likely to remain one of the least discussable things on the air; and it would seem at first as if the absence of "exhibits" would be an insuperable difficulty. The series by Eric Westbrook, *Mirror of the Age*, now being heard from 1YC, is an interesting demonstration of how, in skilled hands, the difficulty can be overcome. Twentieth-century art is discussed in ten-year sections, manageable but not over-rigid. Examples chosen are easily graspable, supplemented by quotations and a sparing use of anecdote. And while the discussion remains on general lines, it is kept concrete by lucid analysis—as in the account of the phases of cubism, or in the distinction between dadaist anarchy and surrealist creativity. Not the least interesting feature of the talks has been that they place British painting in proper perspective, adopting a typical policy of compromise, not free from "the bane of good taste," but producing a few figures of striking originality, notably Wyndham Lewis. As the title suggests, art is not treated as an isolated activity, and the series becomes in effect a sketch of the cultural history of our time.

The Poet's Own Voice

I SEEM to remember reading somewhere that an old cylindrical record was once rediscovered, of Tennyson reading his own poetry. But when the anxious investigators put it on the machine, all that emerged was a muffled and melodious booming. Tennyson was unfortunate in being a little too soon: for the recent activity of the British Council in sponsoring recordings, and the enterprise of the Library of Congress, make it likely that major poets will, from now on, be accurately and permanently recorded. The possible effect of this on the "speakability" of verse is incalculable. Now, poets are not always good readers: some (like Dylan Thomas) are, some are not. But as T. S. Eliot points out in the note to his recording of the *Quartets*, although the poet's reading may be neither effective nor even final, it at least helps us to know how the poem sounded to him. The BBC recording of *Ash Wednesday* (heard again from 1YC) is just as good a demonstration of this as the well-known *Quartets*. Regarded simply as reading, it may be inferior to that of Robert Speaight (the ideal interpreter of Eliot); but as a kind of spoken document, it is invaluable. —M.K.J.

Up in the Air

THE BBC feature *Portrait of an Air Stewardess* made me feel grateful for being so firmly grounded. Probably not since the days when tweenies underwent the relentless grooming process into upper housemaid beneath the coldly critical eye of the butler has the ideal of service received so much respectful attention. Of course, the whole

thing had the accustomed BBC hallmark of authenticity. Many of us have experienced something like that initial interview with the Board, with its foredoomed attempt to put the candidate at her ease, and the question about reasons for seeking this particular work (though we were doubtless spared such inquiries as, "Are you inclined to put on weight, Miss Protheroe?" or "Have you seen the cosmetic specialist yet?" which strike one as verging on the ungentlemanly). Miss Protheroe, a successful candidate, read most of the programme in soft, gently fluted accents doubtless approved by both the BBC and the BOAC; but this, to me, made the feature aurally as well as ideologically trying.

Larger Than Life

LAST year's *Enter a Murderer*, this year's *Opening Night*, and now Lester Powell's new BBC thriller *The Hidden Motive* are good arguments for the theatre as a background for radio skulduggery. Broadcast thrillers have to be more vivid and less complex than written ones, the characters must be more firmly outlined—and there ready to hand is the theatre, where everybody is by nature larger than life. Actors, great or ham, are heaven-sent suspects. Unpredictable—you never know where you are with them. Highly strung—their most suspicious actions can later on, without suspicion of cheating, be put down to nerves rather than guilt. And if it turns out that your most sympathetic character is the guilty party it all redounds to the credit of an author who told you he was a very good actor. Moreover, if the author has a sneaking desire to educate his listeners as well as over-stimulate them, he can always do as Lester Powell did and have his dick attend a rehearsal of some classic agreeably familiar to an audience who, if not well-read, are probably constant listeners. —M.B.

The Welsh Character

THE BBC have followed up their programme on the Scots with "Who Are the Welsh?" heard lately from 3YC. One supposes that there will be no programme on the English. This would be in keeping with a national temperament which, even according to its rivals, conquers by permeation and assumption rather than by aggressiveness. The Welsh were "original inhabitants of Britain," we were reminded. I suddenly remembered a book of Welsh folk lore I bought recently called "*British Goblins*." "Who are the Welsh?" I married a member of the race some time back but am still in the dark, even although I see what these informed gentlemen mean by "Puritans" and "Latins"—an original turbulent Latin passion curbed and overlaid by a Methodist puritan tradition: somewhat unpredictable and volcanic! But seriously, these panels tend to exalt virtues without noticing their obverse side. Whole-hearted intensity so admirable in one who is "facing fearful odds" may in other circumstances be a fanaticism ready to see annihilating mountains in the least of molehills. However, the panel did take into account that narrowness which is the other and more crippling side of the word loyalty, and there was an interesting bid for translating Welsh feeling



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