

tempt to capture the stormy story of the acting Booths as it was told in the colorful biography "Prince of Players," by Eleanor Ruggles. Moss Hart, who revealed his lively feeling for players and show business in "A Star Is Born" and his own play "Light Up the Sky," wrote the story for the screen, Philip Dunne (who is, absolutely incidentally, the son of Finley Peter Dunne) directed, and Richard Burton, a British actor of great color and interest, has been given his first decent screen opportunity as Edwin Booth.

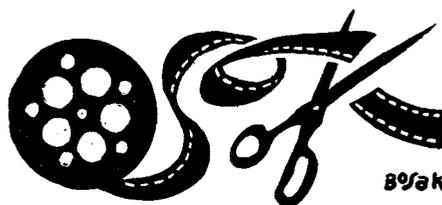
The result is interesting, more for the fragments of century-ago theatre than for the tragic drama of the man, which, by the way, was not truly encompassed in the book. Since the leading players of a hundred years ago appeared almost exclusively in the plays of Shakespeare Hart has taken the occasion to make up whole bolts of the film from his distinguished predecessor's lines. There is a good chunk of "Richard III" as it is played before an unruly mob in a Western mining camp, there are three scenes from Booth's London "Hamlet," including Burton's lucid reading of the soliloquy, there are snips of "Lear," "Henry IV," and "The Taming of the Shrew." In addition Hart has cleverly placed Master Will's speeches in the characters' mouths to express their offstage thoughts, and his diligent culling from the collected works has provided lines that really ring.

In particular Hart has made a brilliantly original use of Shakespeare in a delightful re-playing of the balcony scene from "Romeo." The lines become the first words of their own love and life together, the meanings movingly reshaped by the realities of the scene in the shabby courtyard.

Less successful than these dramatic moments are the story lines of the piece, the regeneration of Booth by the devotion of his wife, the counterpoint of John Wilkes Booth and his insane deed (presented here as the result of an envious wish to play upon a greater stage than his successful brother treads), the final gesture by Edwin to the dignity of his own profession.

Whatever its dramatic flaws, "Prince of Players" is worthwhile because it reiterates the striking truth that one of the great screenwriters turns out to be that irrepressible fellow from Stratford.

—LEE ROGOW.



## The Writer's Wars

By JAMES MICHENER, *the traveling author of "Tales of the South Pacific," who here records why authors—a peaceful race—so often write of war, and of his satisfaction with what Hollywood did to his last novel.*

WHEN the Nobel Prize committee elected Ernest Hemingway to the world's highest literary honor it brought to our attention once more the problem of war and the arts.

The problem is this: Why does war, which sane men hate, serve repeatedly as the theme for some of the world's most humane works of art?

The world's first epic, the "Iliad," not only reports an exceedingly wasteful war but it also establishes those norms of compassion by which we judge all subsequent literature. Hector's death is an almost insupportable tragedy, the fall of Achilles is one of the basest scenes in war, old Priam's grief is terrifying. Real men and women people the "Iliad."

Our national sense of honor springs in large part from those imaginary histories which rose around the battles engaged in by Roland and Robin Hood. Two other make-believe wars were of fundamental importance in molding the Anglo-Saxon mind: King Arthur's war against the forces of evil and Milton's angels in their battle against the forces of hell.

But it has been in tales of actual warfare that our greatest writers have brought us to a consideration of human problems. Tolstoy in "War and Peace" and more particularly in "Sevastopol" explained minutely the characteristics of human behavior in war. It was confused, deathly, ironic, and largely meaningless. Stendhal, in "The Red and the Black," did the same. Almost every writing nation has provided some novelist who has added to the account, our own Stephen Crane being one of the best.

In this distinguished company Ernest Hemingway has become a master. His "A Farewell to Arms" and "For Whom the Bell Tolls" are among the great accounts of war.

Yet it would be ridiculous for the Nobel committee to select novels about war for a prize whose fundamental *raison d'être* is peace. Consequently, the Nobel committee went out of its way to stipulate that the award was being given primarily for "The Old Man and the Sea."

But what is this noble story but an account of men once more at war?

Now he fights a great fish and his own weakness precisely as Captain Ahab does in "Moby Dick," precisely as Pilgrim struggled in "Pilgrim's Progress."

This is what perplexes a writer when he tries to consider the nature of man and war. More than most people—for honest writers insist upon serving at the front—he discovers that everyone engaged in war despises it as a waste of energy, time, and money: yet each against his will becomes emotionally involved in the horrible complications. That is why men think so deeply about war.

THESE confusions and contradictions hit me very hard when I served along the front in Korea, and particularly when I flew bombing missions with a group of naval pilots from one of our carriers in the Sea of Japan. They were engaged in a war nobody wanted, that few supported, and all deplored. Yet they were being killed by Russian bullets or frozen to death in a most cruel sea.

In a short novel, "The Bridges at Toko-ri," I tried to report what I saw. Now, it is my habit never to interrupt or inspect the work of anyone translating a story of mine into a different medium. I figure that dramatists, screenwriters, and television experts know their jobs and require no assistance from me.

But in the case of "The Bridges of Toko-ri" this procedure was difficult to follow. Many hundreds of men in Korea, other hundreds of parents who had lost sons in Korea, had written to me about this novel. I knew all the defects in the book. I also knew that it reported truthfully one of America's strangest wars. I wondered if Hollywood would keep to that truth.

I was working in Tokyo while the movie was being shot there. I kept getting tantalizing bits of information about it. Navy friends said it was very good. Then isolated still shots from the movie began appearing in our leading magazines and as far as I could judge Paramount was making a real effort to retain the values of my novel. Finally a friend in Japan sent me a Japanese fan magazine (William Holden, the star of the picture, is an important man in Japan because of the things he has done as a private citizen to help that country) and I saw about twenty pages of pictures. The other night I saw the movie, and it was better than I dreamed it could be. The great and terrible tragedy of war had come through.



## The Show Must Go

I WAS chatting with a television critic the other day about a comedy program and he made a sage observation which I would like to pass on to whomever it concerns for whatever it's worth.

But first let's do a flashback.

It's Friday. The cast of a comedy show is getting together for the first reading of the script. Before they get down to the actual reading there are the usual introductions of the guest stars to the regular cast accompanied by a lot of light banter and gossip about other stars and other shows and the usual exchange of funny stories about show business. In this atmosphere of gaiety and good fellowship the director announces: "Well, so much for comedy, now let's start reading the script."

On this low note the reading commences. Everybody laughs up everybody else's jokes, hoping for a little reciprocity when their lines come along, and when the reading is over everybody is quite sure this is going to be an excruciatingly funny show.

Saturday. The cast assembles about noon and they're put on their feet to begin acting out the comical lines with which they are now a little more familiar. Comes lunch and a break. They have gone over the same lines several times and there begin to be heard slight murmurings among the guest stars and the rest of the cast. The jokes which seemed so fresh and bright only yesterday now seem to have lost their sparkle. Complaints are duly entered.

Sunday. By now the cast works without script, being prompted now and then from the sidelines by the script girl. And when the jokes they had complained about come along they are handed the substitute jokes they were promised. Each substitute is loudly acclaimed as a masterpiece of humor and the day continues going over and over the script until the entire show has been rehearsed.

Monday. More of the same. The tedious business of going over and over the same lines now begins to take its toll. One of the guest stars objects to a substitute joke into which she has read something she hadn't seen before and which had never been intended from the start, but which she is sure everyone will take the wrong way. That joke is out and one of the players suggests a joke to take its place—it's an old joke but always gets a laugh. So it becomes part of the

script. Another player thinks a joke he has is too smart, and since everyone knows that the television audience has the mentality of a twelve-year-old everyone agrees the joke should be taken out and a more obvious one substituted, which the sound man supplies this time, explaining he didn't make it up but he has heard it on several shows he's worked and it always goes big. By this time it's open season.

Tuesday. This is the day the show is rehearsed in front of the orchestra. This is the crucial test, because there is obviously a feeling among actors that musicians are representative of the twelve-year-old minds that watch television. Reaction from the orchestra is carefully checked and double-checked by every star on the show down to the lowliest stooge.

"The trombonist didn't laugh at the engagement joke. . . . The third violinist didn't get the routine about Hollywood at all. . . . The leader only laughed once when somebody misread a joke. . . . The pianist slept through the whole reading. . . ." And so on.

So some new old jokes are interspersed throughout and the players go home to rest up and rehearse the new old jokes and are told to show up the next morning at eight o'clock.

Wednesday. This is the day of the show. A new audience is now on hand—cameramen, floor managers, electricians, stagehands, costumers, the chorus girls, and miscellaneous hangers-on. The show is rehearsed piecemeal. Scene by scene is gone over slowly and torturously, line repeated again and again, so that camera angles may be arranged and re-arranged. The new members of the working audience are carefully watched for their reaction to the jokes. Some of the old new jokes are put back in place of the new old jokes, and some new, new old jokes find their way into the show before the long day is over.

That night the program goes on the air, after a chaotic six days of making sure the comedy will be down to the level of still another audience which will come to the theatre that evening to laugh up the show so the audience at home will know it's funny.

So as I was saying earlier I chatted with a television critic about a comedy show. His sage observation was:

"Those jokes were fifty years old."

He told me he was seven.

—GOODMAN ACE.

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