



## TV AND RADIO

## Watch Wallace!

**F**REEDOM'S crack is sounding four nights a week at eleven P.M. on Dumont, and the ideological strain is felt in the innermost network councils. Practised TV bookies are placing bets for and against a general contagion. Mike Wallace, a personable, ex-Chicago news-announcer, is the Patrick Henry, and the interview program "Nightbeat" is his clarion. Before Wallace rebelled he gave loyal network service as a personality-entertainer-panelist on evening and afternoon happy-small-talk and trivia programs. Then his heresy hit him. He felt impelled to talk on the air about things that interested him off it.

Once, on an afternoon network discussion program, he mentioned atheism and nudism. His mail was intense. The carpet he was called upon was soft, but he was firmly informed that "It just wouldn't do to investigate such subjects on a show like yours." Mike Wallace finally quit the captive mind. Last fall, after two years of self-imposed TV exile, he found his revolutionary opportunity on Channel 5. The station's new, competitive-minded management permitted him to develop the antithesis of the conventional interview show. "Nightbeat" eschews public conversation in public. Its formula is a pseudo-private conversation in public. Two guests, usually well known in the celebrity category of "the power elite," are each given almost thirty minutes of individual attention accompanied by what is probably the greatest amount of discussion liberty ever afforded public figures on the air. Ethel Waters on a recent program, for example, volunteered earnestly that she was born of her mother's rape by her father. A fashionable hatter on an earlier program admitted candidly that homosexuality was to be found in wearing apparel and the publisher of *Confidential*, the scandal magazine, bared himself to the waist before the camera to prove that he had been shot in South America.

Sensation is not the only sauce served up by the guests of "Nightbeat," however. William Buckley, the Milton of McCarthyism, elucidated his conservative position quite effectively on a recent program; Don Newcombe has appeared on the show, talking entertainingly about his misunderstood life as a pitcher; and Elsa Maxwell has enlivened an hour with in-

timate reflections on international cafe society. "Nightbeat's" range of subjects is catholic. Host Wallace and producer Ted Yates, who directs special events for Dumont, employ the showman's eye when they choose their guests. Two staff researchers carefully comb the record of upcoming guests for past actions or statements that invite challenge. The host attempts to follow a line of questions which he has prepared, but he will take off precipitately in any direction that his honest curiosity or sense of calculated excitement lead him.

Alert and well informed, a friendly but relentless examiner, Mike Wallace sits in a darkened studio with his back to the camera and lets his guests confess at will. The compulsions which bring guests to "Nightbeat's" hot seat are varied. Some have books to plug, others creeds to publicize. Still others seem to need, like drug-addicts, an incessant dosage of prestige and esteem. "Nightbeat" pays no fee. Its rewards are great, however, in the literate, sophisticated, metropolitan New York circles. These days on Madison Avenue the morning talk is commonly about last night's "Nightbeat."

A dean among television talkers, a veteran of years of network discussion, wistfully said to Mike Wallace: "I wish I could discuss on the air

the things you talk about on your program." It is not exclusively the controversial aspect of "Nightbeat" which excites the pros, however. They remember the pathetic brazenness of radio's "Court of Human Relations." They have seen and heard the masked revealers of TV's filmed series, "Confidential." But these programs and others like them have been pitched at the great, multi-based audience of TV—they have been "angled down." The effectiveness of "Nightbeat" is that Mike Wallace talks on his own level to guests who reply in kind. The ephemeral snobbery of "Person to Person" pales by comparison. Diminished, too, in "Nightbeat's" vigorous light, is the often stuffy stature of "Conversations with Elder Statesmen," which forgets that the great men it approaches gained their reputations by being human.

"Nightbeat" will remain locally on Dumont until June 1957. Two of the major networks are negotiating for Wallace's services after that. One network has offered Wallace a year's guaranteed exposure in a good evening hour—sustaining if need be, sponsored if possible. There's the rub. The program has enjoyed three local New York sponsors—Heirloom Bibles, Sealy Mattress, and Chase Manhattan Bank. Can "Nightbeat" be projected, however, across the nation to rural and suburban TV audiences? Can its liberty of subject and freedom of expression be tolerated by national advertisers whose TV doctrine is "Please all—offend no one?" The heresy of "Nightbeat"—like Patrick Henry's—bears watching.

—ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.

## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

## SESQUICENTENNIAL

Here are some cento (patchwork) verses made up of lines from the works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, born in Portland, Maine, on February 27, 1807. Mabel-Ruth Jackson of Tucson, Ariz., asks you to identify the poems from which the lines are taken. Answers on page 32.

Today we make the poet's word our own;  
Words of warning, words of cheer  
By which one heart another heart divines—  
Songs, like legends, strange to hear.

He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote  
To charm, to strengthen and to teach;  
An admiral sailing the high seas of thought—  
Something that is beyond the reach.

You will behold what manner of man he is—  
A sweetness as of home-made bread,  
Of firesides in the silent winter nights—  
Honor and blessings on his head.



## SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

### Of Guillotines and Guilt

**A**LTHOUGH the screen has often been used for propaganda purposes, the film makers generally prefer to conceal whatever point they have in mind under protective layers of "entertainment." "Messages are for Western Union," Hollywood's hardened wisecracks will tell you as they serve up another soggy *soufflé*. To find the cinema in the service of a genuine polemicist is rare indeed; but in "We Are All Murderers" (Kingsley) André Cayatte, a French lawyer turned director, proves that the experience can be genuinely stimulating. It is stimulating because M. Cayatte obviously feels strongly about his subject, capital punishment; and because, with a typically French enthusiasm for fine points, he has invented a fascinating variety of attacks upon a system that he believes to be both morally wrong and socially destructive. Irony is his weapon, and a cool, dissecting rationalism; he scrupulously avoids either sensationalism or sentimentality. As a result, "We Are All Murderers"—like Cayatte's earlier "Justice Is Done"—engages the mind throughout. Happily, Cayatte has the ability to create his intellectual excitement out of scenes and situations conceived with a sure instinct both for drama and the film medium.

Cayatte plays most of his picture in a single cell in the death house of a French prison. Centering his story on a dimwitted murderer with a taste for blood acquired during the days of the Resistance, Cayatte (who wrote the film as well as directed it) introduces an aging doctor wrongly accused of poisoning his wife, a Corsican who can't understand why he has been jailed for a vendetta killing, a man who has beaten his child to death with a poker, and a brutal rapist whose sole desire is to cheat the guillotine by suicide. Cayatte seems to be especially disturbed by the lengths to which officialdom will go to insure a legal execution, while shutting their eyes and their hearts to the conditions that produced the criminals in the first place. And he is forthrightly bitter about the barbaric form of execution still practised in France. Indeed, the film's most searing moments are those detailing the grisly preparations for each beheading.

And yet, for all the gloom that surrounds the subject, "We Are All Murderers" does not emerge as a morbid

film. Cayatte is not concerned with death so much as the preservation of life. And life is clearly a precious thing to him—even the life of a social outcast, even the life of a murderer.

\* \* \*

In marked contrast, there is a new version of "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" (M-G-M). Actually, it is a very good production—handsomely mounted, literate, extremely well acted. But one is constantly aware of it as a staged piece. Each camera position has been carefully chosen, each grouping scrupulously arranged, every hair of each wig in its proper place. "We Are All Murderers" feels like life—or at the very least, like a movie; "The Barretts" feels like sumptuous theatre. If it boasts any special distinction, it is in John Gielgud's icy portrait of the proud, domineering, hypocritical Edward Barrett, the father. He creates menace with the flick of an eye, a curl of the lips, reveals depths of shocking sensuality in a single kiss. Jennifer Jones is an appealing and attractive Elizabeth, while Bill Travers almost achieves the difficult feat of making the audience believe he is the youthful genius, Browning. But even at its best, "The Barretts" is good theatre, not good film.

\* \* \*

This distinction arises even more devastatingly in a new and ambitious film version of "Oedipus Rex" (Kipnis), directed by Tyrone Guthrie and featuring the Shakespearean Festival Players of Stratford, Ont. On the open platform of the Stratford Playhouse, Guthrie's production was a memorable experience. The actors, larger than life in masks and costumes, achieved the epic stature that Sophocles had envisioned. Their movements were stately; their words sang through the masks straight to the senses of each spectator. But Guthrie's production, so right for the stage, proves altogether wrong for the movies. Long-shots from on high repeatedly diminish the characters. The boots serve to hobble the actors, making them not larger than life but strangely insecure of footing under the searching eye of the camera. The truth is that Guthrie has not made a movie of "Oedipus"; he has simply put it on celluloid.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

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