



## Sunrise at ASFTA

STRATFORD, CONN.

**A**ll's Well That Ends Well" is a dark comedy which, like "Measure for Measure," is apt to annoy theatregoers who prefer characters to be nobler onstage than they are in real life. Its hero, Bertram, is not only an irresponsible philanderer, but what is worse for contemporary American audiences, an aristocratic snob. Its heroine, Helena, is a girl who forces the man she loves to marry her by trickery and nerve. And its comic, Parolles, is a cowardly braggart, most painfully humiliated.

Why did Shakespeare pick such disenchanting characters, and select for the King of France such an unmentionable ailment as a fistula? Perhaps it was because he had become annoyed with actors and audiences, who were turning his most realistic plays into romantic make-believe. And even in his title he seems to be ridiculing the theatregoer's sentimental insistence upon the arbitrarily happy ending.

Under John Houseman's direction, the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy company has made this unpopular play work by filling it with genuine passion, and allowing the characters to be naïvely unaware—except for brief moments—of the horror of their behavior. Helena convinces herself that she is more concerned with Bertram's welfare than she is with possessing him. Subconsciously she is driven to go after him, but at those times when she suddenly realizes what she is doing she becomes deeply embarrassed and remorseful. Nancy Wickwire, who plays the role, exhibits a remarkable combination of loveliness and practical-mindedness. Bertram, too, is fooling himself. He is a vain unthinking snob without the slightest idea he is being one. It is only later when he sees his pseudo-snobish parasite Parolles exposed that he gets an inkling of how his feeling of natural superiority can blind him to the truth of life around him. John Ragin, who plays Bertram, catches this naturalness nicely and even succeeds in getting our sympathy when we see him caught red-handed in a lie any one of us would have attempted in the same circumstances.

The most moving scene in the play, however, is the one in which a pretty Italian virgin must deceive the married Bertram into an assignation in

which he will believe he is making love to her, but will really be bedding his wife. Barbara Barrie brings to this scene a touching full measure of emotion. Without it detracting from the speed or humor of the action, we are conscious that she is suffering the bittersweet pain of vicarious anticipation of a lovers' tryst and at the same time learning how perfidious the most noble of men can be when they are quail-hunting.

Richard Waring's Parolles serves the play well, and Will Geer makes a humorously blunt foil to him as Lafeu. Hiram Sherman gets great commonsensical fun out of the business of interpreting in a nonsensical foreign language. While I would have preferred a bit more authority and sophistication than Aline MacMahon brought to the Countess of Rousillon, this is a small cavil with a fine production that encourages me more than anything else that has happened during ASFTA's first five-year plan.

**O**UTDOORS in the "grass-eroded" theatre of Central Park, the New York Shakespeare Festival is presenting free performances of "Julius Caesar." And since this presentation has been made possible only through Joseph Papp's determined battle against Park



Commissioner Robert Moses, every audience member feels that his seat symbolizes the victory of vox populi over a modern empire-builder. Fortunately the production continues in the tradition of the New York Shakespeare Festival's previous work. Its director, Stuart Vaughan, has staged the play clearly, simply, and with vigor. And the cast and technical crew give disciplined audible performances, which keep the play from lagging. The crowd scenes are particularly effective and Eldon Elder's costumes and scenery give the play a visual splendor at all times. What the production seems to lack is a strong point

of view about its story. It is content merely to rattle it off as Shakespeare has set it down. John Harkins's Brutus, Donald Madden's Antony, Staats Cotsworth's Caesar, and Ernest Graves's Cassius are all competent performances, but they could do with a bit more color. Rex Everhart's Casca is somewhat more successful in this respect, but one suspects that Mr. Vaughan has in his passion for straight Shakespeare deliberately discouraged the contaminations of personality that might have made the performances more interesting.

—HENRY HEWES.

## Loft

By Marion Strobel

**F**OR a year now he has nested under a peeked roof like a lone sparrow; outside the stone steps, inside the wooden and narrow wind to his loft, to his painting-wall on which, at night, a rigged-up row of bulbs, as big as moons, throw light.

On bright days, paper-blank, they ornament the rafters. The wall, at center, screens them. From the door, visitors get, as they enter, an unabashed view of homemade bathroom, table, bed—what can be said for these has surely already been said.

Moreover it's morning: the grave reticent artist, the winter season, the cold light, are the same. The visitor has reason to fear, once she passes the screen of his painting-wall, the canvases will show her nothing, nothing changed at all.

And fears she'll repeat herself—last year his colors were "fresh as a carousel whirled on canvas—fresh as their fresh paint smell." Boards shift as she waits. The silence is sharp as a shout. He clicks on the lights. Without words turns a canvas about.

In silence turns others: dimensions as large as they were, brush-strokes are fuller. She sees the speed of the strokes, the remembered color; forgets the man at her side as she sees what she sought: color and strokes pounding; his breath, on a canvas, caught.



## Old Secret Agents Never Die

**B**EHIND CLOSED DOORS" is an international espionage film series, which made its debut last season on NBC-TV. Current episodes on the ABC-TV network are repeat performances. Prospects for a fresh sale and new episodes, however, are often good for this kind of film series; and it may be that the show will find a new sponsor in the future. Should this good luck befall its producers, they would be well advised to take a second look at their basic format. Especially Rear Admiral Ellis M. Zacharias (retired). The Admiral, a high-ranking officer in Naval intelligence during World War II, is the series' kingpin: all episodes are billed as real experiences from his files; and he appears (personally, or "by proxy") before the camera, "authorizing" his "aide," the show's leading man, to "reveal this report for the first time."

This is all make-believe, of course: the typical posturing developed by the "documentary-drama" school of entertainment, in which the smell of the real is supposed to give your show that added prestige with audiences, marking your product with the marginal distinction—"authentic." "From the files of" means anything from fully dreamed-up nightmares to giant or dwarf liberties taken with actual events, in order to make viable stories out of them. Television-radio audiences seem to have been so "authorized" by these seals of legitimacy,

that they swallow them wholesale, apparently, to the satisfaction of all concerned. The possible harm done to the maintenance of the integrity of public communications is, if ever considered, brushed off by the advertiser's sophistry that this is an act of "blandishment and not deception" (a subtlety which would have intrigued Socrates).

What qualifies "Behind Closed Doors" for public scrutiny is 1) the fact that Admiral Zacharias, a Naval officer of first-rank quality, service, and authority chooses to put his personal reputation for credibility on third-rate espionage fiction; and 2) the fact that its cloak-and-dagger content is irresponsible in the arena of nuclear supremacy conflict between our country and the Soviet Union. My attention was drawn to this series by a correspondent, Mr. Allen A. Smith, who sent me a carbon copy of a form letter which, presumably, went to other TV critics. I doubt that, as he puts it, "the purpose of this series seems to be to stir up antagonisms between East and West and to prevent any agreement on ending nuclear tests." TV producers are usually apolitical and satisfied merely to trade on antagonisms or predilections which already exist in the minds of their audiences.

I viewed a recent "Behind Closed Doors" repeat episode, and it was an unconvincing piece of obvious fiction having to do with the absurd

rescue (in broad daylight in the center of Prague) of an American "courier" who had detailed knowledge of all Western nuclear defenses in Europe. He had been captured by the Communists and was being tried for spying. It is likely (as my correspondent suggested) that had such a "real experience" ever actually happened, it "would have been blazoned in tremendous headlines throughout the world." The same may be said about another episode which showed a spy being arrested by the FBI for "putting a bomb on an American plane carrying twenty-two of America's most important nuclear scientists," to which, my correspondent writes, Admiral Zacharias added at the end, "This episode enabled our work at Cape Canaveral to continue without interruption."

"American Secret Service agents stabbing Russian officials in the back and an American vessel dropping depth charges on a Russian submarine"—these are other scenes my correspondent states he has seen on this series. Is it a measure of our general indifference to truth in our entertainment-information pattern on TV that a private citizen (the producer), a corporation (the sponsor), a publicly regulated communications system (the network), and a retired officer (Admiral Zacharias) should all give assent to such a misrepresentation, in so sensitive a public area as Russian-American nuclear relations, under the unequivocal stamp of truth? Walter Lippmann has eloquently argued in "The Public Philosophy" (Atlantic—Little, Brown), that

if there is a dividing line between liberty and license, it is where freedom of speech is no longer respected as a procedure of the truth and becomes the unrestricted right to exploit the ignorance, and to incite the passions, of the people. Then freedom is such a hullabaloo of sophistry, propaganda, special pleading, lobbying and salesmanship that it is difficult to remember why freedom of speech is worth the pain and trouble of defending it.

Old secret service agents, like old soldiers, are entitled, with the gratitude of the public, to plush jobs in civilian life after the battle is done with.

If "Behind Closed Doors" ever wins a fresh sponsor, Admiral Zacharias could enjoy his residuals just as well, and with an easier conscience—if he would merely put himself down as "consultant" to the series and not give the weight of his reputation to a tasteless hoax.

—ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.



## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

### LITERELATIONS

The literary figures in Columns One and Three, Americans all, are related by pairs, and the relationships are indicated in Column Two. Elizabeth Mills of Springfield, Missouri, asks you to sort out the kinships. Answers on page 35.

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|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Bronson Alcott          | ( ) aunt              | ( ) Constance Woolson       |
| 2. Gertrude Atherton       | ( ) brother           | ( ) Charles Van Doren       |
| 3. William Ellery Channing | ( ) daughter          | ( ) Mary V. Terhune         |
| 4. James Fenimore Cooper   | ( ) father            | ( ) Laura E. Richards       |
| 5. Emily Dickinson         | ( ) grandfather       | ( ) Cotton Mather           |
| 6. Colonel William Falkner | ( ) grandniece        | ( ) James Russell Lowell    |
| 7. Julia Ward Howe         | ( ) granduncle        | ( ) Christopher La Farge    |
| 8. Oliver La Farge         | ( ) great grandfather | ( ) Benjamin Franklin       |
| 9. Robert Lowell           | ( ) great grandson    | ( ) William Faulkner        |
| 10. Richard Mather         | ( ) nephew            | ( ) William Ellery Channing |
| 11. Albert Payson Terhune  | ( ) son               | ( ) Martha Bianchi          |
| 12. Carl Van Doren         | ( ) uncle             | ( ) Louisa M. Alcott        |