

War Coverage On TV Confuses

Radnor, Pa. — Despite its broad coverage of the fighting in Vietnam, TV may be contributing to the confusing outlook of many Americans regarding the war, writes Martin Maloney in a recent issue of TV Guide magazine. Maloney is a member of the faculty of Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.

The Vietnam war, he said, may go down in history as the world's first true TV war—a war in which families may eventually sit in their living room 10,000 miles away and watch actual battle action with their sons, brothers and neighbors participating.

Maloney uses the term "TVietnam" to describe the war and its coverage.

"For one thing," he writes, "the war is almost inaccessible to the human intellect. It appears to be the first multivalued war in American history. In previous conflicts, one could always describe what was happening as a war between Us and Them. But in Vietnam, We were not engaged in Warfare at all for a long time. (We simply had sent military advisors to the Good Guys), and even today it is hard to tell whether We are at war or not, or with Whom."

Maloney said it is difficult for Americans to comprehend this war in geographic terms. In Europe or Africa, he noted, American troops were trying to regain conquered areas.

"Vietnam is something else again. In the country proper, there are of course a North and a South, and what is jokingly called a Demilitarized Zone between; but if the war has actually progressed from North to South, or South to North, or in any other discoverable direction, you would never know it from TV. The news broadcasters seem almost to have given up on maps, and may be about to give up on place names," Maloney said.

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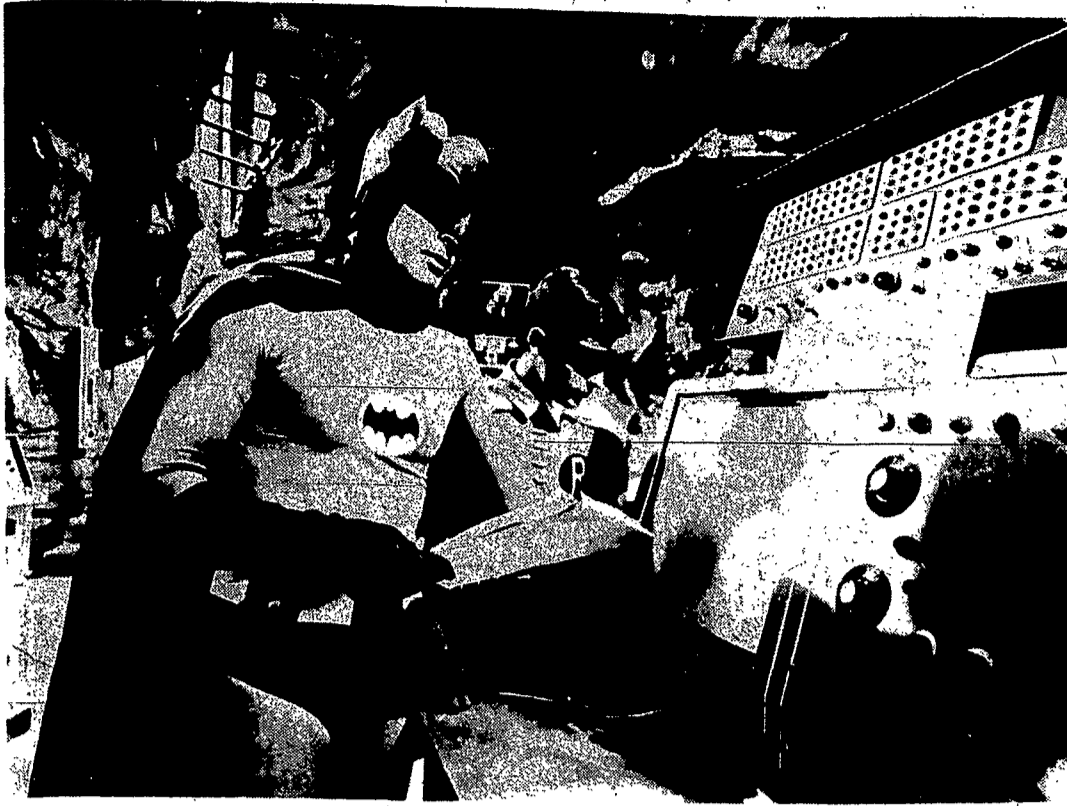
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"Robin, our Bat-computer has come up with a strange answer. It says, 'Smile!'"

Batman: Too Much A Serious Moralizer

Holy penance, Batman! People who become over-serious about religion and morality have been told to watch a few TV episodes of "Batman."

Batman, Robin and now Batgirl are "performing a necessary function in society," claims a professor of religion at Beloit College, by deriding the overly rigid and humorless approach to sacred matters.

"The tendencies within the seriousness of sacred ideologies toward dogmatism and self-righteousness on the one hand, and toward an almost inhuman gravity and solemnity on the other, are held up for well-deserved ridicule," wrote M. Conrad Hyers in "The Christian Century," a Protestant weekly. "They are personified by what are expressly clown figures (Batman and Robin), complete with masks and costumes, doing what clowns often do best—showing us in caricature how funny we sometimes are in our holy masquerades."

Professor Hyers compared Batman and Robin to the masked figures in the satyr plays of ancient Greece, who provided the heavy drama of the tragedies.

Week after week, expressionless, unsmiling, absolutely certain of what is good and what is evil, "Batman is revealed as none other than the gravely serious moralist and defender of the faith who is comical because he lacks all sense of comedy," Professor Hyers commented. "He is funny because he takes himself and his role so seriously; we laugh at him because he does not laugh at himself."

Huge Clothing Donation Set For Overseas

New York — (NC) — The Christmas season was a bit brighter for hundreds of thousands of impoverished men, women and children in 15 countries because of American generosity to the Bishops' Thanksgiving Clothing Campaign in November.

Catholic Relief Services, the agency maintained by U.S. Catholics which processes, ships and distributes material donated to the annual campaign, announced here that more than 4.5 million pounds of used clothing, footwear and blankets have been shipped and scheduled to arrive in the 15 countries during the next few weeks.

The largest portion, 1,115,000 pounds, was designated for distribution in South Vietnam, while 350,000 pounds were shipped to the Middle East for refugees and displaced persons there, and 212,000 pounds for victims of the recent floods in Portugal.



'Puss in Boots'

Tom Oliver is the Giant in the Rochester Repertory Co. production of "Puss in Boots," being presented today, (Friday, Dec. 29), at 2 p.m. at the Carter Street Playhouse. Admission is free. Sponsored by the Rochester Recreation Bureau.

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Admitting that there is a danger that this type of parody might lead to a complete cynicism concerning moral judgment and action, he nevertheless argued that "a TV series such as 'Batman' performs the necessary function in society of profaning the holy."

"It is a function that can well be performed by humor," he went on, "a function, in fact, which the theologian, churchman, or moralist himself should perform, though he usually does not, and therefore it finds other avenues of expression. If we do not laugh at ourselves, others will—which, after all, is the moral of the story."

In his article, Professor Hyers said Robin's overuse of the adjective "holy"—as in "holy hypothesis," "holy Hollywood," "holy crystal ball"—subtly underscores the program's "sacriligious function."

"His prefacing of every exclamation with the word 'holy'—on the face of it an overworked irreverence—symbolizes the comic relativizing of the category of the sacred," he wrote. It is a reminder, he explained, that man has indiscriminately raised everything to the level of the sacred at one time or another.

"'Batman' is thus an instance of a phenomenon found in all cultures—the comic profanation of sacred matters," Professor Hyers wrote, "whether effected through joking, mimicry, caricature, comedy or satire, and whether performed by a humorist, clown, cartoonist, comedian or comic hero."

"On the surface of course, sacred and serious concerns seem to demand only propagation, not profanation; prophets, priests and crusaders, not clowns and comedians. Yet humor is the necessary footnote attached to every pious and moral statement or act, reminding us of our humanity, our mortality, our finiteness and fallibility, our foolishness... Moral concern

apart from humor can be as unresponsive as humor apart from moral concern can be irresponsible."

Giving the last part of his article to the danger of too much parody, he wrote that "this is the implicit risk in the kind of ethico-religious parody perpetuated by 'Batman': that it might be seen as the last word on the subject, the final reduction of everything to the dimensions of the farce."

It is necessary to remember, Professor Hyers stressed, that "humor is not a substitute for rigorous thought and genuine moral action. In itself it is powerless to solve the deepest problems of human existence. Seriousness is the essential basis of humor, and the sacred is the essential basis of the comic."

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