

Robert Emmet Sherwood Biography

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Biography

Robert Emmet Sherwood (1896-1955) was an American playwright whose penetrating dramas often showed an idealistic hero confronted with war.

Robert E. Sherwood was born in New Rochelle, N.Y., on April 4, 1896. He graduated from Milton Academy (1914) and from Harvard (1917). Rejected for service in World War I, he enlisted in the Canadian Black Watch; he was wounded and gassed. He worked for *Vanity Fair* magazine in 1919 and a year later joined the staff of *Life* magazine, becoming its film editor. In 1922 he married Mary Brandon, an actress. Their daughter was born in 1923. He edited *The Best Moving Pictures of 1922-23* and in 1924 became editor of *Life*. The first of his many film credits was *Oh, What a Nurse!* (1926). Sherwood made his stage debut with *The Road to Rome* (1927), a humorous, sophisticated treatment of Hannibal. *Reunion in Vienna* (1931) charmed audiences with its urbane comedy about an old love newly ignited. While publishing a novel, *The Virtuous Knight* (1931), he worked in Hollywood as a dialogue writer and scenarist on his own plays. *Acropolis* (1933), dealing with the problems of Athens and Sparta, was a quick failure. From this time, however, his works became serious.

In 1934 Sherwood was divorced; he married Madeline Hurlock Connelly in 1935. During the next few years, he reached his peak as a dramatist. *The Petrified Forest* (1935), a pertinent assessment of romanticism and reality in American culture, was followed by *Idiot's Delight* (1936). This uncanny prediction of World War II won a Pulitzer Prize. An adaptation, *Tovarich* (1936), preceded the brilliant *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1938), another Pulitzer Prize play and the first production of the Playwrights Company, which Sherwood helped organize. *There Shall Be No Night* (1940), a compelling depiction of the Finish involvement in the war, won Sherwood his third Pulitzer Prize. *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* led to an association with Eleanor Roosevelt.

At the outbreak of World War II Sherwood entered public service as special assistant to the secretary of war (1940), director of the overseas branch of the Office of War Information (1942), and special assistant to the secretary of the Navy (1945). His film play *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) won many Academy Awards, and his historical work *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (1948) earned him several awards. He died in New York City on Nov. 14, 1955.