

# When the Actor Goes, Whither the Character?

By JOHN J. O'CONNOR

Cast changes on successful television series have their reasons. Some stem from the sudden death or lingering illness of an actor. Or, more rarely, an actor may simply decide that a steady and usually substantial weekly paycheck is not enough to justify a nagging feeling of career rut. Whatever the reason, one fact of television quickly becomes clear: The show, the series, the concept must go on. We're talking big bucks here.

At the moment, no fewer than three work series are undergoing major adjustments:

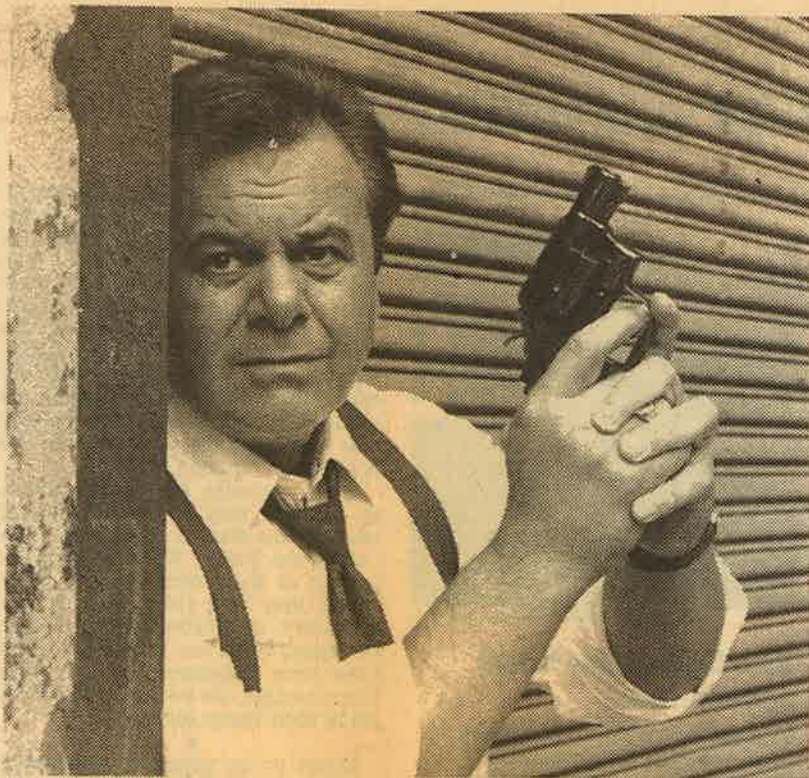
Monday's episode of CBS's "Love and War" revolved around a memorial service at the Blue Shamrock bar for Ike the bartender, the character played by John Hancock, who died a month or so ago.

another in midstream, sometimes permanently, sometimes just for a few weeks. One of the wackier ploys, used later on prime time's "Dynasty," had a character severely burned and swathed in bandages; removal of the bandages revealed an entirely different actor underneath, presumably making the character the beneficiary of miraculous plastic surgery.

The producers of "Love and War," juggling grief for a colleague and panic for a new series still feeling its way, decided to confront Mr. Hancock's death within the context of their sitcom. There was the typical hard-bitten urban humor recalling Ike's ostensibly sour view of life ("One more friend you make is just one more person who'll ask you for a ride to the airport") and hatred of chardonnay.

On the other, longer side of the ledger, there was sentimentality. A surprisingly large crowd turned up to say goodbye to a good friend. And Kip (Michael Nouri), former husband of Wally (Susan Dey), managed to slip in the closing monologue from Robert Anderson's play "I Never Sang for My Father." With "Where or When" playing on the jukebox, a photo of Mr. Hancock filled the screen and Wally, getting rid of a yuppie customer ordering chardonnay, offered the final toast: "That one was for you, my friend." A bit soppy, but bittersweet enough to let viewers make an important transition gracefully.

On "Law and Order," the immi-



Paul Sorvino as Detective Cerrera on "Law and Order."

Al Levine/NBC

nent departure of Mr. Sorvino has been planned for months. It was simply a matter of figuring out how. The character of Lieutenant Cerrera is partner to Detective Logan (Christopher Noth) who, oddly enough, lost his previous partner when the actor George Dzundza decided to leave the show after only one season. The Dzundza character was killed off. Cerrera is luckier, being gunned down and injured just enough to get off the detective grind and take a higher-paying desk job with the Police Department.

Next week, Jerry Orbach joins the

cast as Logan's new partner, Lennie Briscoe, in a league with Ike the bartender when it comes to misanthropy, New York-style. Briscoe doesn't talk; he snarls. Disdaining to pay a restaurant bill, he explains that the owner is his "snitch" and "he thinks I'm corrupt, so he trusts me." It's rumored that Briscoe's two former wives are hoping that Logan's jinx with partners hits the jackpot this time so they can collect his insurance. Mr. Noth is beginning to look understandably uneasy. Mr. Orbach couldn't seem to care less. Mr. Sorvino looks genuinely relieved.

## Book Notes

Esther B. Fein

A scary thought: has Stephen King left horror behind? ■ The incredible disappearing novel.

### King on Horror

Stephen King doesn't have a lot of literary pretenses. He knows, for example, that he will probably never be sitting on a stage, waiting to hear himself named the winner of a National Book Award. (The 1992 awards will be presented tonight at the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan.)

He said he didn't expect the Pulitzer Prize committees to be telephoning him, either. And that's all right with him. He has been married to the same woman, the writer Tabitha King, for 21 years. They have three children he loves to boast about and a big old house in Maine where he can live and work in relative privacy.

"And I am rich," he said. "I've made a huge fortune. Sometimes it's hard to believe."

"Stephen King is simply in a category all by himself," said Bob Wietrak, the director of merchandising at Barnes & Noble Inc. "His numbers set him apart."

When one meets Mr. King, however, little seems to set him apart as special or different, except perhaps the palatial suite at the Pierre Hotel on Fifth Avenue, with its sweeping views of autumn in Central Park, where he stayed for a few days recently to do a brief publicity blitz for "Dolores Claiborne." The suite seems bigger than most ballrooms or football fields. It is to hotel rooms what Stephen King is to authors.

But he looks rather ordinary with his shaggy brown hair, wire-rimmed glasses, pullover sweater and jeans. If you hadn't seen his face shining from all those book jackets, you wouldn't turn if you saw him on the street. He talks about his family, about children who watch too much television, about finding the right balance between work and family, and about scaring the daylight out of ordinary people like him.

Despite Mr. King's resignation that he will never be embraced by the American intelligentsia, first "Gerald's Game" and now "Dolores Claiborne" are being praised by critics for weaving characters and a narrative that captivate the reader without the traditional King trappings of horror, gore and the supernatural.

"Gerald's Game" is about the 28 hours of horror a woman endures after being handcuffed to a bedpost, and "Dolores Claiborne" is about a

housekeeper accused in the death of her senile employer. Not a poltergeist in sight.

"When I write, I want to scare people," he said. "But there is a certain comfort level for the reader because you are aware all the time that it's make-believe. Vampires, the supernatural and all that. In that way, it's safe. But these last two books take people out of the safety zone and that, in a way, is even scarier. Maybe it could happen."

He said he realized that his voice did not appeal to most critics and that for the most part, the "mainstream literary establishment dismisses genre writers."

"No one ever gave any of my books to Martin Amis to review," Mr. King said. "And you can't entirely ignore that attitude. In a way, sales are transient. Opinions last."

Although he has recently received the slightest nod from mainstream critics, there is still no question about whether Mr. King will be beguiled by this stamp of approval into turning over a new, belletristic page.

"Don't say that I'm stretching my range or that I've left horror behind," he warned. "I'm just trying to find things I haven't done, to stay alive creatively. When you've made as much money as I have, there's a huge tendency to say you won't rock the boat; you'll just keep the formula flowing. I don't want to fall in that trap, but at the same time what I am about is trying to scare people by getting inside their shields, and I'm going to continue to do that."

### Read It, and It's Gone

Social and literary critics and been musing for years over this question: Is the book disappearing?

In the case of "Agrippa: A Book of the Dead," the answer, literally, is yes.

The book — and the word is used in the loosest sense possible — is a metallic box with a flashing green light and a liquid-crystal display readout. Inside is a bound volume with a distressed cover that contains etchings by Dennis Ashbaugh printed in an ink that mutates when the pictures are exposed to light. Buried in a hollowed-out trove in the back of the book is a computer disk, which contains a new autobiographical novel by William Gibson, the author of "Neuromancer" and the dean of cyberpunk science fiction, and a code that causes the text to self-destruct after it has been read once.

"We are trying to do something that highlights the changes between traditional publishing and electronic

publishing," said Kevin Begos, who is bringing the book out through his company, Kevin Begos Publishing. Only 455 copies of "Agrippa" will be published, in three limited editions that range in price from \$450 to about \$7,500 for a deluxe copy in a bronze case.

Once the disk is activated, the story scrolls on the screen at a preset pace. There is no way to slow it down, speed it up, copy it or remove the encryption that ultimately causes it to disappear, Mr. Begos said.

Adding to the game of it all, on Dec. 9, the story will be available through a limited number of computer bulletin boards. "Theoretically," Mr. Begos said, "those are also encoded and protected so that the program will destroy itself after each person reads it."

Anyone who buys the book will have to decide whether to enjoy its content or save it as a collector's item. "It depends which experience is more important to you," Mr. Begos said, "owning it or being part of the experience."

"Some people have said that they think this is a scam or pure hype," he added. "Maybe fun, maybe interesting, but still a scam. But Gibson thinks of it as becoming a memory, which he believes is more real than anything you can actually see."

### End Notes

St. Martin's Press has announced that it will publish a book by Randy Shilts, the author of the 1987 best seller "And the Band Played On," about the history of homosexuality in the United States armed forces. "Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Military" is to be published in May. President-elect Bill Clinton has said that ending the military's ban on homosexuals will be one of the top priorities of his administration ... John Ashbery has been named the winner of the 1992 Antonio Feltrinelli International Prize for Poetry. The prize, given by the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei of Italy, is awarded annually and rotates among the fields of humanistic and historical studies, the physical sciences, medicine, the visual and performing arts, and letters. The prize carries an award of 200 million lire, about \$150,000 at the current exchange rate.

# Unearthing The Foibles Of Young Washington

By WALTER GOODMAN

As if the job of turning George Washington from an icon into a human being had not proved daunting enough for generations of historians, David Sutherland, the producer and director of "George Washington: The Man Who Wouldn't Be King," was faced as well with making a television program without any photographs and with few pictures of any sort of the young Washington. The result, at best, is a standoff.

Tonight's offering of "The American Experience" traces Washington's pre-Presidential career from his days as a land surveyor and possible fortune hunter through his mixed record as a British officer in the French and Indian War and his subsequent establishment as a prosperous Virginia planter to his dominating military role in the American Revolution. The climax of the account is his voluntary handing over of power to the Continental Congress, a pivotal point in the development of both the man and his country.

Perhaps it was Mr. Sutherland's determination to add drama to the hour that gives his work the feeling of a made-for-school production. The script, written and narrated by William Martin, who confesses to having committed a historical novel with Washington as a character, is dotted with phrases like "a man's willingness to sacrifice everything for a cause" and "At that moment Washington became the American Revolution." Mr. Martin's appearances on camera are pointless.

The historians who comment along the way seem to have been encouraged to speculate about Washington's state of mind and heart. Some of the analysis is suggestive, but one or two of the scholars come on as though they were trying out for a school play. "He was ripped apart inside," says the most agitated of them. And Mr. Sutherland's resort to dramatizations of battle scenes has a distinctly Saturday morning flavor.

For all its distractions, the program does contain considerable information, not emphasized in school books, about how Washington achieved greatness or had it thrust upon him. It is particularly heartening to be reminded that before becoming what David McCollough, who introduces the program, calls "the marble paragon," Washington enjoyed dancing, drinking, gambling and even going to theater. There may be hope for all of us.

## The American Experience

George Washington: The Man Who Wouldn't Be King

PBS, tonight  
(In the New York area, Channels 13 and 49 at 9)

David Sutherland, producer, director and chief researcher for David Sutherland Productions for "The American Experience"; William Martin, writer and narrator; Nancy Sutherland, co-producer; Joshua Seftel, associate producer; Larry Ross, editor; A. J. Dimaculangan, cinematographer; music by Sheldon Mirowitz; Judy Crichton, executive producer, "The American Experience"; Margaret Drain, senior producer, "The American Experience."

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Tonight at 8 p.m.



## Crossword Edited by Eugene T. Maleska

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| <b>14</b> Hooded jacket           | <b>39</b> Damned or detestable         | <b>68</b> Alfred —, Austrian psychiatrist |
| <b>15</b> German greeting         | <b>41</b> Famous chapel in the Vatican | <b>69</b> TV role for Sonny Shroyer       |
| <b>16</b> Something to toe        | <b>43</b> Aquarium fish                | <b>70</b> Former news agency              |
| <b>17</b> Spirit in "The Tempest" | <b>44</b> Equine staple                |   |
|                                   | <b>46</b> Tolkien forest giants        |   |

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