

Dear Allan: well, here I am distancing myself
from Docudramas!

No news on Are You Now, and I expect none. As I told
you, Ophuls was not interested, and those producers
had set all their hopes on him.

My adaptation of A MANS A MAN is about to be revived
here, and my own play GERMAN REQUIEM follows in the
spring, so I shall have my hands full.

Best wishes for YOUR theatre!

Will yr interest in Yale be reviving? Lloyd Richards
is retiring.

love

Gris

Nov. 12/89

Letters

Docudramas Are No Worse Than TV News

To the Editor:

In reply to "The Basic Crookedness of Docudramas" (Critic's Notebook, Nov. 2): Get real. Any intelligent participant in television news gathering (I was a news cameraman for years) knows it for the farce it is. Why pretend television news is anything but entertainment?

The spin starts with the cameraman's choice of shot, frame, angle and focal length, continues with the editor's choice of available shots, cut-aways, sequences and rhythms, and finishes in the hands of producers and \$2-million-a-year anchor people working in an environment controlled by the bottom-line accountants of major corporations.

Television is money-driven and viewer-numbers critical, and television news is the circus of bread and circuses. While the savings and loans crisis and our budget deficit (which affect all of us) languish as television stories, dramatic shots of crashed airplanes, grieving relatives and cartoon villains like Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi that conjure up the incubus of "terrorism" (which affects few of us) make great television. They also divert our attention and political will to goals that are more suitable for Batman and for politicians and journalists on the make than for the leading nation in the world.

Our political process has deteriorated into photo opportunities; today's successful politician (he who gets elected) is one with television manners and the most money for commercials.

Even the magnificent television coverage of Tiananmen Square did nothing for the democracy movement. Indeed, it got at least one outspoken participant killed.

All the world's a stage. Relax and enjoy it.

PETER STURKEN
New York, Nov. 3, 1989

The writer heads a television production company.

Mystery Source

To the Editor:

Leonard Garment's indignant Oct. 30 Op-Ed article on the "Final Days" docudrama is another illustration of the "Through the Looking Glass" quality of Watergate in retrospect.

Richard Nixon has denied the now notorious Lincoln sitting room breakdown. Now Mr. Garment informs us that "as recently as last week in a conversation with me" Henry Kissinger has denied it as well.

But, in the face of such apparently authoritative denials from both the

principals of the alleged scene, whom did Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein rely upon as the source for this episode in their book?

Perhaps H. R. Haldeman's recollection on why Mr. Nixon had the White House taping system installed offers an intriguing clue. In "The Ends of Power," Mr. Haldeman wrote:

"One of the prime focal points of Nixon's concern was the unpredictable Henry Kissinger. Nixon realized rather early in their relationship that he badly needed a complete account of all that they discussed in their many long and wide-ranging sessions. He knew that Henry was keeping a log of these talks, a luxury which the President didn't have time to indulge. And he knew that Henry's view on a particular subject was sometimes subject to change without notice. He was frequently given to second thoughts on vital matters that the President assumed had been settled."

One hopes Mr. Woodward and Mr. Bernstein have kept their tapes intact as well.

THOMAS H. LIPSCOMB
New York, Oct. 31, 1989

Truth and Facts

To the Editor:

It is a pity Leonard Garment is trying to destroy the favorable picture of him in the ABC special "The Final Days" (Op-Ed, Oct. 30). He was

of course, it is also the danger) of documentary dramas, that they can convey what really matters: the truth. And truth is more than just the facts.

HANS JANITSCHKE
New York, Oct. 30, 1989

Abolishment Will Do

To the Editor:

I do not have the reasons Leonard Garment has for being turned off by "The Final Days" (Op-Ed, Oct. 30). On the contrary, I enjoyed much of it as a well-told story well acted.

But as a drama person, I can agree with the complaint of Mr. Garment, a law person, about docudrama as a genre: It is not really valid because, instead of clarifying, it confuses the issues, not least because the audience has no way of knowing what, in the dialogue and elsewhere, is reported fact and what is fiction, invented by the docudramatist.

Mr. Garment has to complain, naturally, that the document is not a truthful document. I have to complain that the fiction is not sound fiction. In a play (which is fictive), the audience must always have a way of guessing if what a character says is true. But in a docudrama like "The Final Days," the Richard Nixon character can say he is being ruthlessly persecuted, and the audience is given no inkling whether he is telling the truth or not.

So I conclude, not that docudrama should be banned — we have a First Amendment — but abolished in the name of common sense and public spirit.

ERIC BENTLEY
New York, Oct. 30, 1989

The writer is author of "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been," which he describes as a documentary play.

The Viewer's Respect

To the Editor:

"On TV, Fiction Blurs Fact" (editorial, Oct. 31); about "The Final Days," is fine as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. Each time the networks or the local stations try to represent fiction as fact — labeled or not, docudrama or not — they leave another stain on the tube.

Fact's fact; fiction's fiction. And heaven knows there's room enough for both of them on television. But keep them separate, for when viewers believe that we're giving them the facts on the news, then we may, in the medium as a whole, be able to hold their respect.

BILL SWING
Portland, Ore., Nov. 1, 1989

The writer is news director of KPTV.



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the only player in the tragedy who — on television — showed some imagination and tried to avoid disaster.

It is exactly the ability to imagine and to engage the imagination of others that makes a political figure real to ordinary people. It is not always important whether the so-called facts are on the table; what matters is how they are being perceived.

This is the great opportunity (and,

OK!