

Film Can Revive a Dead Author

It can be easier to sell a departed author when there's a film to stir curiosity. Witness Edith Wharton, who died in 1937. Her "The Age of Innocence" in a Collier paperback ranks high on best-seller lists, thanks in no small measure to a cover that shows Michelle Pfeiffer in the movie version.

And the late Michael Shaara's "The Killer Angels" is generating killer sales in a Ballantine paperback now that the nearly 20-year-old book provides the basis for the movie "Gettysburg."

But what happens when an author dies just before publication? Survivors and fans pitch in to get the word out.

"In History's Shadow," the newly published autobiography of John Connally, was completed by the former Texas governor shortly before a monthlong bout with pneumonia hastened his death in June. He was 76 and had written that he was looking forward to another spring, "when the bluebonnets bloom like lakes of sky blue waters."

Hyperion, Connally's publisher, had planned a 10-city author tour. Now his widow, Nellie, accompanied by one of their sons, John Jr., will follow through on some book-related appearances, including a "Today" interview tied to the 30th anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy.

Connally was a Lyndon Johnson confidant, Treasury secretary and presidential candidate who set out on one of the more colorful American political odysseys of this century. Yet for all his achievements, it was the assassination—specifically, his being wounded while riding in the same car as Kennedy—that overshadowed his career.

"It is true," Connally wrote, "that I have never found a satisfactory answer to the question of why my life was spared." The slaying helped to douse his "fires of ambition" (though he made a presidential bid in 1980) and one of the assassin's bullets, he reveals in the book, caused lung damage that led to pulmonary fibrosis.

Texas Monthly and Time have published excerpts. Hyperion reports that Connally's death did not alter the print run, which stands at

47,500 copies. Apparently, author publicity would have amplified already significant interest in Connally's story.

The latest offering from Laurie Colwin, "A Big Storm Knocked It Over," was to be marketed with a rare assist from the novelist herself. The intensely serious Colwin—she once hung up on a caller who introduced himself as her publicist—had reluctantly agreed to do a six-city tour before she died of a heart attack in October, 1992, at 48.

As a result, HarperCollins has counted on reviews and goodwill to make up for Colwin's planned

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readings, which were designed in part to help elevate the critically appreciated writer to the next level of commercial acclaim. As it turns out, the reviews have been good and the goodwill even better.

The once-dismissed publicist Roger Friedman helped organize readings of "A Big Storm" around New York City. Blair Brown, Tama Janowitz, Calvin Trillin and Wendy Wasserstein were among those who took turns reading from Colwin's tale of love, marriage and a not-so-nuclear family. At Three Lives, a Greenwich Village bookstore the novelist often visited, one reading filled the small shop and a later session prompted dozens of other fans to wait patiently in the rain. "Laurie would have loved that," said co-owner Jill Dunbar.

Meanwhile, at the end of this month, HarperCollins will publish another new book by Colwin. "More Home Cooking" (a sequel to her "Home Cooking") gathers more of her food essays.

The death of New York Times literary critic Anatole Broyard from prostate cancer in 1990 did not deter Carol Southern Books, a division of Crown, from publishing "Kafka Was the Rage," his memoir of living in Greenwich Village after

World War II. Respect for Broyard and a lingering curiosity about the artistic period he describes combined to give his book the kind of launch any author would envy.

Veteran actor Jason Robards so identified with the time and place that he agreed to do a staged reading of excerpts from "Kafka" and Broyard's previous book, "Intoxicated by My Illness," in New York last month. Endicott Booksellers did brisk business selling copies at the reading. Among the "Kafka" passages chosen by Robards was Broyard's recollection of the night he awakened on Jones Street to find his lover, the enigmatic artist Sheri Donatti, purposely resting her head within inches of a hissing gas stove.

There are 12,500 copies of "Kafka" in print. Beyond the interest that this atmospheric memoir holds for New Yorkophiles, a half-dozen great actresses would probably fight for the chance to play Donatti as Broyard remembered her. So perhaps, as with Edith Wharton's rendering of an earlier age, Broyard's Village portrait will someday merit its own film version to broadcast the book's many charms.

On the Racks: The eye-stopping cover on the racks these days belongs to the December issue of *Life*, which features a photograph of a naked mother and nursing child to illustrate extensive text on the miracles of birth. . . .

Get ready for Don Martin, a new magazine produced by the demented cartoonist and former *Mad* magazine mainstay of the same name.

B Matter: Among the guests at last week's book party for Alan Friedman and his new "Spider's Web: The Secret History of How the White House Illegally Armed Iraq" (Bantam) were the author's former protectors from the office of U.S. Attorney Robert Morgenthau. Break-ins and phone threats apparently designed to spook Friedman and a collaborator prompted Morgenthau to assign them bodyguards as they were completing their news-making exposé. Friedman was grateful, to say the least.

Ink is published Thursdays. Paul D. Colford is a columnist for Newsday.