

In Lem's novel, the planet Solaris is only a minor divinity, "a sick god whose ambition has exceeded his power." But this movie ends with a benevolent, forgiving God's representative welcoming Clooney to the afterlife with the same Sistine gesture with which God the Creator welcomed Adam to this world. Or at least that's what I think happens ... ■

Rated PG13 for mild eroticism and language.  
Copyright © 2002 United Press International

## BOOKS

[*Bush at War*, Bob Woodward,  
Simon & Schuster, 400 pages]

### *You're Invited to the War Party*

By Georgie Ann Geyer

EVER SINCE HIS Watergate revelations, which helped evict a president and change the United States for all time, for better or worse Bob Woodward has stood as the major force in a new genre of journalism. He talks, wheedles, and, using government officials' personal ambitions and dreams of political eternity, implicitly threatens his way into the often closed corridors of power—there, he is a master at getting a certain number of figures who try their best to remain aloof and unknown to tell their stories. The proposition, understood if not explicitly spoken, is that this book, as his former ones, will tell the story—you miss out on leave on this journalistic port, fellow, you miss the whole historic ship!

But once again with *Bush at War*, one has to wonder first what really is this genre? As with his other books, such as *The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House*, the style is curt and commanding. It is easy and fully intended for the reader to get the impression that this is exactly the way it all really happened,

particularly since by far the largest part of the book is direct quote after direct quote, many of them quite complex and all totally impossible to check. There is also little contextual matter or balance and certainly no "other-think" even minimally allowed on the pages.

So, first, we need to keep in mind that the Woodward genre, or style, or indeed whatever we want to call it, is one that we might best and most legitimately call a kind of "journalistic political theater." And the important thing in theater is always, first, to know it is theater and thus not exactly life; but the next important thing is to realize that the discerning theater-goer, the person who has other facts and sufficient faculties of discernment at his fingertips, can gain enormous amounts of knowledge and reflection from a careful attendance to the stage and particularly from a skeptical perusal of the movements behind the curtains.

So, do not look in this book for "the whole story," but do look for incredible insights. Woodward walks us into the closed salons of this secretive administration, and that is a valuable escort service indeed.

First of all, *Bush at War* is really about the decision-making process in the upper levels of the Bush administration—the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon—from the exact morning of Sept. 11th. It begins with a profoundly worried George Tenet, head of the CIA and, from all of the space he gets in the book, obviously one of Woodward's best and favored sources. That very morning, Tenet is wondering about when Osama bin Laden, whom he has been desperately tracking, will strike the U.S. Then "it" happens—and from then onward, the book delineates day-by-day, and sometimes hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute—what supposedly went on in meeting after meeting. From all accounts that I know of, Woodward's interpretations are exactly right; it is the quotes that are so bothersome.

But since so much of the material on the Afghan war has been covered

before, the clues as to a future attack on Iraq are the parts that are the most original and that I will therefore deal with here.

The "question of Iraq," for instance, was raised at a White House meeting of principals the very next day after the terrorist attacks. It was raised by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld but was actually reflecting the long-time obsession of Paul Wolfowitz, his aggressive deputy. In fact, Wolfowitz did not hesitate even to step in ahead of his demanding boss that day in regaling the president on Iraq. "Wolfowitz seized the opportunity," Woodward writes. "Attacking Afghanistan would be uncertain. He worried about 100,000 American troops bogged down in mountain fighting in Afghanistan six months from then. In contrast, Iraq was a brittle, oppressive regime that might break easily. It was doable. He estimated that there was a 10 to 50 percent chance Saddam was involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks."

Here you come upon some of the many revealing counterpoints in the score. Some, like Wolfowitz and the group of neoconservative zealots, with their intimate ties to the hardest parts of the Israeli Right, wanted to attack and ultimately "reconfigure" the entire Middle East for their own and Israel's interests, and soon they were moving Heaven and Earth to convince the president that Iraq constituted, not a mere 10 to 50 percent of the problem, but 100 percent of it. Some of the president's advisors also genuinely feared Saddam's possible use of weapons of mass destruction. But there is also a persistent undercurrent of macho thinking that, hey, we've got the weapons: "Should they think about launching military action elsewhere as an insurance policy in case things in Afghanistan went bad?" Woodward paraphrases these moments. "They would need successes early in any war to maintain domestic and international support." And besides, Rumsfeld was "deeply worried about the availability of good targets in Afghanistan."

All the while, the "rational" group in the leadership is warning, warning, warning, like a Greek chorus awakening every once in a while to take center stage. Secretary of State Colin Powell warns against the U.S. being seen as "playing the superpower bully" and tries to tell the president that the behavior of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, with whom Bush seemed taken with almost a childlike admiration, "borders on the irrational." Powell is "uncomfortable with random regime change." Powell, his State Department staff, and prominent White Housers like the president's more cautious, New England-born Chief of Staff Andrew H. Card Jr. are the hold-outs to the radical, macho, neocon, Likudnik, former Cold Warriors who are not, the book makes clear, at all conservatives in any traditional sense.

It is these "warriors," or the "War Party," or the "cabal," as different elements in the press have dubbed them, who would soon weave their own obsession with Iraq over a Texas president first totally inexperienced in foreign affairs and finally obsessed himself that he and he alone—through his instinct rather than his intellect—has been called to a religious duty in the Middle East to rid the world of Saddam Hussein!

The portrait that comes through of George W. Bush is itself revealing. Here again, Woodward does not directly try

to characterize him, but the direct quotes from his many interviews with "W" often paint a frankly odd picture.

According to Woodward, the president, contrary to much critical thinking, did not embrace the Iraqi war from the very beginning, nor did he embrace it consistently. According to the book, he went up and down on it, his moods vacillating from the emotional conviction that his "father's generation was called" (and now, so is he) to watching the polls and depending upon the political response around the country. At the end of the book, when he finally meets with a deeply worried Colin Powell, after months in which, astonishingly, his own secretary of state barely has access to him, Bush of course finally responds with a willingness to go to the UN and to place the problem before the world community, while Powell breathes a sigh of desperate relief.

Indeed, it is less Bush's immediate obsession with Iraq that is illustrated here, than a kind of religiously-inspired grandiosity of character is revealed. For instance:

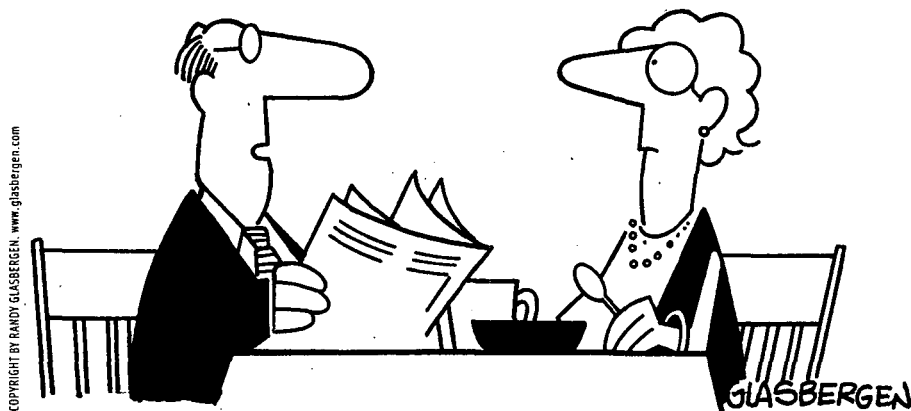
"This will be a monumental struggle between good and evil," he says just after 9/11. He returns to the White House from Camp David one day, makes a brief statement to the press, and takes five questions: "He referred to 'evil' or 'evildoers' seven times and three times voiced amazement at the nature

of the attacks," Woodward writes. In another place, from Bush: "We haven't seen this kind of barbarism in a long period of time." He stops at a hockey game in Philadelphia, and, when the fans demand to watch his speech on the stadium's overhead video screens and the players huddle to watch," Bush says with wonder, "They wanted to hear what the commander in chief, the president of the United States, had to say during this moment! I have never felt more comfortable in my life."

Another time, he says to Woodward, "I'm the commander—see, I don't need to explain—I do not need to explain why I say things. That's the interesting thing about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel like I owe anybody an explanation."

At still another point after the Afghan war has started, the president says to his staff, "Look, our strategy is to create chaos, to create a vacuum." And Woodward ends the book with another quote from the president, in which he again reflects the obsessive chaos theory of the neoconservatives surrounding him like sentinels and for whom Iraq has become the *sine qua non* of political existence: "We will export death and violence to the four corners of the earth in defense of our great nation." Whew.

We must remember here that, since the president has given so few interviews since he was elected and since he has kept himself so errantly far away from the press and indeed almost anyone except those in the War Party, these quotes are quite remarkably revealing. He himself says proudly in the book, repeatedly, that he hates and distrusts the media and adds that he does not see the mail either. Very well. One has the right to humor one's preferences, but in fact, the serious and informed press is an invaluable tool of information for any leader and it does not hurt to hear the public's voices either. He declares continuously here that he trusts his "instinct"—but a good and informed instinct only exists in play to the life experiences its holder has had.



"Kathleen, I have a confession. I've been cold and indifferent with another woman."

The principle behind the Bush thinking, the book says, is, "this is a new world." As a matter of fact, the world that we face today is an exceedingly old world: terrorism as a substitute for armed strength, violence against "the other," the arrogance of the affluent, the careless expectations of the powerful, and the ambitions of the zealous are all as old as the Bible to which George W. Bush so passionately ascribes.

The president says testily at one point in the book to Democrat Thomas Daschle, "I'm in the Lord's hands." One rather thinks, after reading this book, that much of the time now we all are indeed. ■

*Georgie Ann Geyer is a nationally syndicated columnist and the author of Guerrilla Prince, The Untold Story of Fidel Castro.*

*[Democracy: The God That Failed: The Economics and Politics of Monarchy, Democracy, and Natural Order, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, Transaction Publishers, 220 pages]*

## The Democratic Road to Tyranny

By Clyde N. Wilson

HANS-HERMANN HOPPE'S theoretically disciplined examination of the present sad state of Western governments has received considerable and well-deserved attention. His diagnosis of the disease is superb. His recommended cure—the maximum individual disengagement and community secession from the state—is worth serious consideration by those who have learned that government is now without limits and its growth unstoppable by a mere change of parties.

His starting point, which used to be taken for granted by all thinkers in the

tradition of American republicanism, is that society is distinct from and more important than government. The purpose of government should be to protect society and otherwise interfere with it as little as possible. Man is a social being and naturally forms societies in which families go about the business of finding material and spiritual fulfillment, Hoppe's "natural order." But the state no longer nourishes society. (Hoppe would probably say it never has.) Rather it preys upon and distorts society.

This evaluation of the United States and other Western governments is what distinguishes real libertarians and real conservatives from the left libertarians and neoconservatives who flourish today, as well as from mainstream party politics. Hoppe means to appeal to true libertarians and true conservatives, and he definitely has much to say that we should hear.

Why has the state become malignant to society? Hoppe's answer is democracy. He prefers monarchy, for which he builds a strong historical and theoretical case. Historically, the European monarchies of earlier days did not possess more than a tiny fraction of the power over life and property that democratic governments do. Monarchs could not collect income taxes or conscript the national manpower for total wars. They could oppress individuals but could not effectively oppress whole classes.

Theoretically, a monarch has incentives to nourish rather than loot his realm. Since it is the property of himself and his dynasty, it is in his interest to have a happy and wealth-building people over the long term, and the best way to achieve that is to leave them alone. Contrast that to democracy in which the rulers have no incentives to pursue the long-term welfare of the people. Since their possession of the benefits of rule is temporary, their incentive is to maximize their profit out of existing wealth and maintain their popularity by its redistribution.

Alas, the theory is pretty persuasive. Jefferson was making the same point

when he said that "the earth belongs to the living," by which he meant that the current generation can enjoy the usufruct of the earth. It cannot be bound by past generations, but more importantly, it has no right to bind future generations with its overspending and debts. John C. Calhoun was making the same point during the Jacksonian era when he damned the "spoils system" by which those who profited from government (that is, politicians and their beneficiaries) had become a class unto themselves that pursued power without reference to any other interest or principle. Thus, elections had become games designed to mislead the people rather than to represent them.

One can agree that democracy has in some sense failed, but I am not sure it was ever really a deity. Certainly it was not to the American Founding Fathers. Despite the heated rhetoric of grasping politicians, it seems to me that thinking people have always regarded democracy in the way that Churchill did—it is not a very good form of government, just better than all the others known.

That was certainly Jefferson's attitude. Since men are sinful and grasping, none can be trusted with much power (even to secure the alleged goods promised by the Hamiltonian elitists). That government which governs least is the best, and it is most likely achieved by adhering to the sense of a majority of serious citizens, who have no personal agenda. C.S. Lewis defended democracy on the same grounds. Because of original sin, none of us can be trusted, so it is best to have as many sensible people as possible in on the decisions that affect all.

Interestingly, the people who today are making a deity out of "global democracy" as "the end of history" are not democrats but (former?) socialists who used to worship socialism in the same way.

In what sense has democracy failed? The polls indicate that nearly seventy percent of the American people want to curtail the high levels of immigration we have been "enjoying" in recent years.