

Introduction

To the new edition of

Wag the Dog

10 Years After

Wag the Dog is about reality as fiction.

First there was a war.

I was watching it on television. I said to someone, “That’s a made for TV movie.” I didn’t get the response I wanted, which would have either been a burst of laughter or a sense of sudden recognition. I suspect they thought that I meant that it was *like* a mini-series or that the broadcasters were *treating it like* one.

That wasn’t what I meant. I meant it was scripted and directed and being played for an audience, us, the voters in the apparent democracy of America.

In order to explain it, to demonstrate it, to prove it, I wrote this book. It was originally called American Hero.

In it, a motion picture director, who is like Spielberg or Lucas or any one of a number of others, is hired to create the war that we saw as *Desert Storm*. I do not claim that story is literally true. It is, however, a literalization of what is really true. And, although it is a far out conspiracy tale, if you sit down and compare it, side by side, to the fakery that the networks portrayed as reality, you’d have to choose the one that is officially labeled fiction.

That’s my claim. I invite you to make your own judgment, which is the real point of the enterprise.

Then there was the movie.

I am always asked if I, as the writer of the book, liked the movie. I loved the movie. It's a brilliant film.

The next question is, was it faithful to the book? The answer is yes, the movie is exactly like the book, all they changed was the characters and the plot.

The book is about a real president, George Bush the First, and a real war, Gulf War One, with real bombs, blood and dead people.

The movie is about an imaginary president – all we know of him is that he has a sex scandal with a young girl, which is enough to make everyone think it's Bill Clinton – and an imaginary war – no bombs, no bullets, no bodies - just press releases and staged video clips. And a theme song and memorabilia.

If the film had tried to be faithful to the book, I think it would have failed. It made cinematic choices. One of my favorite parts is when Willie Nelson creates theme music for the war in a perfect satire of the then ubiquitous video of *We Are the World*. That was pure movie-making, beyond the reach of literature.

The novel, on the other hand, makes book choices. Like using footnotes.

I happen to love footnotes. They're frequently the stuff that doesn't fit into a book but that the author found so interesting he couldn't let them go. They're also the place where you find out where the information came from. Which is hugely significant in judging its quality. In

this particular book, the footnotes show how the business of creating reality is played, which is the same thing, in essence, that the Willie Nelson/theme song scenes were about.

The movie had far more currency than the book. Movies do that. Wag the Dog became an international byword for fake wars staged to distract from domestic political problems. Without a doubt, it raised the level of cynicism, which is to say it raised the level of awareness that real events are directed and staged for their political impact.

Did that awaken our media and make them sharper in their questions and evaluations? Did it shame our leaders and make them hesitate before making clearly bogus claims and unsupportable allegations? Did that raise the level of our national dialogue?

The answer to all three questions is a resounding, “No!”

In the ten years since the book and the seven years since the film, the gullibility and credulity of the media have only grown. The current President, George Bush the Younger, or the Lesser, called the 9/11 terrorists “cowards.” Bill Maher, on a program called Politically Incorrect said “lobbing cruise missiles from 2,000 miles away. That's cowardly. Staying in the airplane when it hits the building -- say what you want about it, it's not cowardly." Maher was fired and the program was terminated. Some portion of the media should have risen up in outrage, not necessarily to defend Maher and get him his job back, but in defense of speaking the truth. They did not.

That silence signaled to all concerned that other more dangerous fictions would be allowed to stand unchallenged: “they hate us because of our freedoms,” that Saddam Hussein was connected to the 9/11 terrorists, that he had weapons of mass destruction and if we waited

for certainty “the smoking gun” might be “a mushroom cloud,” to name but a few. And that there would never, ever be any serious debate on what a War on Terror would consist of or should consist of.

I read this book for the first time in almost ten years to prepare this introduction. On one level I am pleased to see that it holds up. On another level, I was appalled. I found myself wondering if the Bush administration had read it and used it as an instruction manual.

On the way to scripting GW I, the novel has the director considering:

... a War on Terrorism. Not like the War-on-Drugs war. But real war where we go in and obliterate entire cities. Search and destroy. If they want to hide in Libya, invade Libya. Syria. Anywhere they tried to hide! ...

Bush, in anger and grief, leads the nation - the nations, plural, of the West - in a Holy Crusade against terrorism. ...

The terrorists would be Muslims. The Backward forces of Superstition and Repression of the East against the Rational Ethical, Forward-looking West. It tapped into atavistic hatred. Christian against Moslems! There it was - the project title - *The Crusades*.

First there was a book.

Then there was a war.

The War on Terror that you watched on TV today is about fiction as reality.