

## BOOKS & THE ARTS.

### Bob & Al's Bogus Journey

ROBERT SHERRILL

**SILENT COUP:** The Removal of a President. By Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin. St. Martin's. 507 pp. \$24.95.

It used to be that hardly anyone dared criticize the things the legendary Bob Woodward wrote. After all, wasn't he portrayed by, hey, wow, Robert Redford in the movie *All the President's Men*? But Woodward received a severe blow recently when St. Martin's Press published *Silent Coup: The Removal of a President*, a book by Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin—which, despite the biased opposition of a *New York Times* review and the panicky opposition of *The Washington Post*, the two most important newspapers in America when it comes to selling books, fought its way up to the Number 3 spot on the national best-seller list, largely with the help of radio and TV talk shows. In some parts of the country, such as Los Angeles, it reached the Number 1 spot.

Granted, in recent years there has been some strong criticism of Woodward's post-Watergate reporting techniques. But *Silent Coup* is much more radical, going back to the root of his fame and fortune. It asserts that what he and Carl Bernstein wrote about Watergate for *The Washington Post* and in *All the President's Men* and *The Final Days*, although generally accepted as gospel, is to a significant degree based on tainted sources and faulty reporting. And so far as I'm aware, nobody before Colodny and Gettlin had been so impudent as to look back even further, into the pre-Watergate life of Woodward, and use it to question his truthfulness.

Bernstein won't suffer much from the accusations in this book because he has since pretty much disappeared into the swampland of *Time* magazine's staff. But Woodward is different. As an assistant managing editor at the *Post*, he heads the paper's investigative team and has turned out several big-bucks books. His success depends entirely on his credibility, which authors Colodny

*Robert Sherrill has reported extensively on Watergate and followed the development of Silent Coup for several years in casual conversations with the authors.*

and Gettlin seem to have banged up pretty badly.

We'll get back for a much closer look at Woodward in a moment. But first, a rundown on how *Silent Coup* reinterprets the events of Watergate.

Most Americans familiar with recent history will recall that the greatest political scandal of this century began shortly after midnight on June 17, 1972, when burglars were caught inside the Democratic National Committee's headquarters in the Watergate building in Washington, D.C. Why were they there, and who sent them? The Woodward-Bernstein version has it that former Attorney General John Mitchell, who was running Nixon's reelection campaign, dispatched the bungling burglars to dig up dirt that could be used against Larry O'Brien, chair of the D.N.C.

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*Silent Coup offers evidence that the Watergate burglars were sent by none other than John Dean.*

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Then came the cover-up, an effort to steer the cops and Congress away from the White House's ties to the burglary. The Woodward-Bernstein version argues that the cover-up was to protect President Nixon.

In the Woodward-Bernstein history of Watergate, two antiheroes of a sort emerge: John Dean, the young White House counsel with the eyeglasses and slicked-down hair and oh-so-candid voice, is portrayed as a whistleblower; and Gen. Alexander Haig, Nixon's last Chief of Staff, is portrayed as the patriot with the firm hand who kept the Nixon Administration from winding up on the shoals after Nixon lost his grip.

But according to the findings of Colodny, a private investigator, and Gettlin, who was a national reporter in the *Newhouse Newspapers Washington Bureau*—who have been working on this investiga-

tion for seven years and have interviewed most of the principals in the Watergate affair; waded through the complete Oval Office logs of the Nixon presidency and many documents from the Senate Watergate Committee, the National Archives, the F.B.I. Archives, etc.; and along the way uncovered secret documents relating to Watergate that have never been made public before—the Woodward-Bernstein version of Watergate history is dead wrong on all points. *Silent Coup* offers strong evidence that the guy who sent the burglars into the D.N.C. offices on their last and fatal visit was none other than the "whistleblower" John Dean, not Mitchell, and that the reason Dean sent them was not to get dirt on Larry O'Brien but to find and confiscate a little black book containing the names of prostitutes who had romped with D.N.C. employees.

The implication is that Dean was trying to protect someone. Which "someone"? Well, we are told that the madam of the call-girl ring servicing the D.N.C. was the close friend and sometime roommate of Maureen Biner. Ms. Biner was then Dean's girlfriend and would later become his wife.

Coincidentally, when Washington police arrested a young lawyer-pimp involved in the call-girl ring, they seized an address book. Now we learn that among the many names in the book was Mo Biner's, as well as her code name, "Clout." *Silent Coup* details the crafty way Dean went about getting a copy of that book, while keeping its existence a secret from the press.

When the Watergate burglars were caught, Dean's sole effort thereafter, according to *Silent Coup*, was to cover up his part in sending them in, and the reason for sending them in. To protect himself, he was willing to throw suspicion on everybody else, and thus he became the chief stool pigeon in the Senate's Watergate investigation, posing as the naive yuppie who had been misled by sly old dogs like John Mitchell.

If there is a villain in *Silent Coup* equal in treachery to John Dean, it is Alexander Haig. To understand his villainy, Colodny and Gettlin ask you to go back to 1970-71, when the Pentagon had a spy ring inside the White House.

The reason for the spy ring, they say, was to keep Adm. Thomas Moorer, the right-wing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed about the secret plans Nixon and Henry Kissinger had for end-

ing the war in Vietnam and for improving relations with Communist China and the Soviet Union. To Admiral Moorer and other hard-liners at the Pentagon, this back-channel search for peace was treasonous. So the Pentagon conspirators—believing, as Colodny and Gettlin put it, that “the president of the United States was out of control”—planted a spy, Navy Yeoman Charles Edward Radford, on the J.C.S.’s liaison team with the National Security Council, Kissinger’s domain. Following orders, Radford stole all the top-secret information he could from Kissinger’s desk and briefcase and elsewhere.

What was the ultimate purpose in Radford’s project? Colodny and Gettlin, in their interview with Radford, led up to that question and got a stunning answer. “Well,” he said, “bringing Nixon down. Really, getting rid of Kissinger—Kissinger was a real monkey wrench in things,” those “things” being the conduct of the cold war. The existence of the spy ring was finally discovered by the press and by Nixon, but not its full dimensions and not the sinister purpose behind its activities. Those would continue to be covered up until the publication of *Silent Coup*.

Bear in mind that while General Haig was ostensibly Kissinger’s assistant at the N.S.C., he could more accurately be described as the J.C.S.’s man inside the White House. Eventually, after Bob Haldeman’s disgraced exit as Nixon’s Chief of Staff, Haig moved into that job and held it from May 1973 until Nixon resigned. Colodny and Gettlin pile up evidence that Haig as Chief of Staff had two goals: (1) to continue to cover up the real purpose of the military spy ring that had existed in the White House and (2) to, as Radford put it, “bring Nixon down” by giving him faulty information, steering him in the wrong direction for his defense and urging him to do things that made him look guiltier. They argue that Haig not only directed Woodward to the infamous eighteen-and-a-half-minute tape erasure but that it is possible that *Haig himself did the erasing*.

(No, no, Colodny and Gettlin are not Nixon apologists. They believe Nixon was guilty of collusion in the cover-up, but not to the degree that Woodward-Bernstein have insisted. *Silent Coup* makes Nixon out to be more of an unstable sucker and a patsy than a crook.)

So now we come back to Woodward. One of the most puzzling questions of modern journalism is, How did Bob Woodward come up with that all-seeing,

all-knowing, insider source of information that he introduced to the world as Deep Throat? How did Woodward manage to make that connection? Why would a source like Deep Throat want to unload his powerful ammunition through somebody like Woodward, who was at that time a mere rookie at *The Washington Post*? His only previous newspaper experience had been on a suburban Maryland weekly. And before that he had been a Navy lieutenant with—or so he claimed—one of the dullest jobs in the Navy.

### *General Haig may have been the main source around which Woodward and Bernstein built their exposé.*

Ah, but there—in the phrase “so he claimed”—is the key to it all. Colodny and Gettlin found, in some of the best investigative work they did, that Woodward’s background, from high school through Yale through the Navy and through his earliest journalism work, was often far different from what he claimed. They checked with his first wife, with his father, with his former schoolmates and professors, with his former Navy associates and with his first publisher—and found what the authors call an elaborate shroud of fuzzy and often misleading data that Woodward wrapped himself in, apparently to discourage scrutiny.

Colodny and Gettlin point out, for example, that Woodward came from a Republican home. His high school commencement speech was an adaptation of remarks from Barry Goldwater’s *The Conscience of a Conservative*. But then, they continue, “in the carefully constructed version of his own life that he gave to interviewers, Woodward recalled a sea change while at Yale.” He told Leonard Downie Jr. for *The New Muckrakers* and David Halberstam for *The Powers That Be* that when he became aware of how wrong the Vietnam War was, he had a “crisis.” But Kathleen Middlekauff Woodward, who had known Bob since high school days and often visited him at Yale (she became his first wife), told Colodny and Gettlin that she didn’t notice any big change in her lover’s attitude toward the war or any other topic.

“He still remained very conservative,” she told them, and he often scolded her for becoming involved with the radical Students for a Democratic Society. Colodny and Gettlin note that Woodward was tapped for membership in the very establishment Book and Snake, one of Yale’s top four secret societies.

On to the Navy. Woodward owed the Navy only four years’ active service. He stayed for five. According to Woodward, it was red tape that kept him in place that extra year, but Woodward’s father told Colodny and Gettlin that his son volunteered to stay because he was excited about the assignment, which was to be “in the basement of the White House,” at least part of the time.

In several interviews Woodward said he was “miserable” in the Navy because his job was merely directing men who handled communications traffic and was “awful and boring . . . strictly nuts and bolts.” But in fact, our authors discovered, he was an important intelligence officer: a “briefer,” a member of that very close-knit fraternity that deals in the top secrets of government and whose job is to brief the highest military and intelligence officers on the latest policy decisions, global dangers, inter- and intragovernmental feuds, bureaucratic adventures, backstabbing and voodoo rites.

(Once out of that service, the briefers keep in touch as an old-boy network that includes such worthies as Dr. William Bader of the Stanford Research Institute, Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana and Adm. Bobby Ray Inman, former Deputy Director of the C.I.A. It was through this network, said Dr. Bader, that he learned Woodward was “one of us.”)

One of the big shots Woodward regularly briefed was Admiral Moorer. Another, Colodny and Gettlin discovered, was General Haig. For two years (1969 and 1970), “after briefing Moorer at nine in the morning . . . Woodward would often travel to the West Basement offices of the White House, carrying documents from Moorer, and would then deliver these and brief Alexander Haig about the same matters he had earlier conveyed to Moorer.”

When Colodny and Gettlin interviewed Woodward for this book, he claimed that he had never met or talked to Haig until “some time in the spring of 1973”—three years after leaving the Navy and a year after the Watergate scandal started breaking. Further, he vehemently denied that he had ever been a briefer: “I wasn’t,” he said. “It never happened. I’m looking you

in the eye. You have got bad sources." He went further: "I defy you to produce someone who says I did a briefing." Colodny and Gettlin produced several somebodies. Admiral Moorer said Woodward was one of his briefers and "sure, of course," he also briefed Haig. Former Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird told Colodny and Gettlin, "Yes, I was aware that Haig was being briefed by Woodward," and Jerry Friedheim, who used to be Laird's aide, agreed. Roger Morris, who was a member of Kissinger's N.S.C. staff until resigning to protest the Cambodia bombing (and who later became the pre-eminent biographer of pre-Watergate Nixon), contends that Woodward "knew Al Haig well, and had been back and forth in the West Basement in those early days."

All of which makes Colodny and Gettlin understandably suspicious. "Woodward seems to cover his past associations with shadows in order to conceal strong, ongoing connections to the military hierarchy, and to protect people in that hierarchy who are or have been his journalistic sources," they write.

If their suspicions are correct, it's no wonder that General Haig comes out as something of a hero in the Woodward-Bernstein accounts of Watergate, for that must mean that he was, as many have suspected, the main source of the leaks—some of them inaccurate and self-serving—around which Woodward and Bernstein built their famous exposé.

**D**oes *Silent Coup* deserve to be taken seriously, or should it be considered "a lunatic piece of work" (Carl Bernstein) and "absolute garbage" (John Dean) and "bogus" (Haig)?

*Los Angeles Times* correspondent Robert Scheer, one of the best journalists in the business, says, "There is just too much troubling documentation for this book to be dismissed out of hand as some critics have done. . . . And the list of those interviewed, including Woodward himself, is truly impressive."

Herbert Parmet, the City University of New York's distinguished history professor and a Nixon scholar, says that *Silent Coup's* "conclusions bring us as close to what actually happened as we are likely to get for some time."

Roger Morris was so convinced of the book's value that he wrote (without payment) its foreword, in which he describes *Silent Coup* as "the excavation of some vital hidden history." He turned up at the press conference launching the book to

lay his reputation on the line with an endorsement: "I'm here because I believe in the extraordinary importance of this book. . . . I'm here too as a historian because the research and documentation underlying *Silent Coup* is so very impressive." He cried shame on the journalists and historians who, out of laziness, are content to stick with the fallacies in the original version of what happened ("fiction," he calls it).

If Scheer's and Parmet's and Morris's appraisals catch on generally, it will be dangerous and costly to a lot of powerful people and institutions. For one thing, we can expect to hear air escaping from *The Washington Post*, which has been increasingly inflated with arrogance since it crowned itself King of the Watergate Exposé.

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### *The press has begun to sound suspicious, sometimes even contemptuous, of Woodward.*

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And if it were generally felt that Woodward could not be trusted in what he wrote about Watergate, or that he has lied about his background, his credentials would be knocked into a cocked hat. If he was untrustworthy about that, why should we believe what he (and Scott Armstrong) wrote about the Supreme Court (*The Brethren*)? Or what he wrote about John Belushi (*Wired: The Short Life and Fast Times of John Belushi*)? Or what he wrote about Director of Central Intelligence William Casey (*Veil: The Secret Wars of the C.I.A. 1981-1987*)? Or what he wrote recently about the men who decided to go to war in the Persian Gulf (*The Commanders*)?

Pride isn't the only thing at risk here. Millions of bucks are also at risk. That's the kind of money Woodward can demand and that his publisher, Simon and Schuster, can make from his books (S&S has published all of them).

So the establishment struck back. The day after *Silent Coup* was published, *The Washington Post's* media critic, Howard Kurtz, quoted Admiral Moorer as saying his confirmation of the Haig-Woodward connection in the book was "ridiculous" and a "flat lie," and claiming Colodny

and Gettlin "never talked to me. . . . I never heard of them."

The Kurtz story was sent out to the newspapers that subscribed to the Washington Post Syndicate, and it was a devastating blow to the book's chances of getting reviewed elsewhere. It was also quite misleading and unfair. Kurtz failed to mention that at the New York press conference at which St. Martin's Press launched *Silent Coup*, transcripts of the taped interview with Moorer (and others confirming the Haig-Woodward connection) were distributed to reporters, including a reporter from the *Post* (Kurtz says he wasn't aware of the transcripts).

*The Washington Times*, the *Post's* feeble competitor, promptly ran an accurate rebuttal, pointing out that "at least four of the persons or organizations quoted in the *Post* story either contradict comments attributed to them or say the *Post's* quotes did not fully reflect their views." The *Times* also pointed out that when its reporters confronted Admiral Moorer with transcripts of the tapes, he admitted that his disclaimer to the *Post* was false. To this day the *Post* has not mentioned the taped interviews or corrected its story.

CBS's *60 Minutes* crew spent three days going through the Colodny-Gettlin files and two days taping the authors, but then canceled a segment based on *Silent Coup*, even though Mike Wallace, the show's anchor, admitted that "a lot of it was very persuasive, very persuasive." Some believed the cancellation was the result of pressure from Katharine Graham, the *Post's* primary owner, on her old friend Larry Tisch, top dog at CBS. It wasn't the first time she was suspected of pressuring the suppression of a book critical of the *Post*. Or did *Post* editor Ben Bradlee lean on his Hamptons playmate, Howard Stringer, who heads the CBS Broadcast Group?

*Time* paid \$25,000 to excerpt *Silent Coup*, but then decided not to, explaining lamely that it was "a very interesting book but difficult to excerpt because its arguments are complex and tightly woven." Some believe that the real reason *Time* backed off was to keep staff members Carl Bernstein and Hays Gorey (co-author of Maureen Dean's Watergate memoir) from throwing a fit.

Meanwhile, *The New York Times Book Review* was about to do a favor for Simon and Schuster. A vicious review, discrediting Colodny and Gettlin, would not only help salvage the reputation of S&S author Woodward but would also help protect Stephen Ambrose, the third

volume of whose Nixon biography, about to be published by Simon and Schuster, was in danger of seeming outdated before it even reached the stores (and, though of only minor importance, it also might protect the Hays Gorey-Maureen Dean memoir, also published by S&S, from seeming even more worthless than it is).

So whom did the *Times Book Review* select to review *Silent Coup*? None other than Professor Stephen Ambrose. He delivered a review of singular nastiness, full of inaccuracies. But what he didn't reveal in his review was that a year before *Silent Coup* was published, he had written Colodny at the suggestion of "Bob Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and others," offering to trade "findings and conclusions." When Colodny refused, Ambrose phoned him and, according to Colodny's notes on the conversation, said, in what could have been taken as a threat, that "a historian like himself could make or break this type of book." When evidence of Ambrose's conflict of interest was presented to the *Times*, it was forced to issue an apology, saying on July 7, "If the editors had known of Mr. Ambrose's letter and Mr. Colodny's response, the book would have been assigned to a different reviewer." But of course this apology did nothing to lessen the damage of the review.

The whole episode was so embarrassing to the *Times* that when the *New York Post* got hold of a letter protesting the Ambrose review from St. Martin's editor George Witte to *Review* editor Rebecca Sinkler, one of the top editors at the *Review* became so hysterically furious as to call St. Martin's and tell them not to bother to send any more of their catalogues—in effect putting the publishing house on the *Times*'s hit list. Tom McCormack, chair of St. Martin's, took the threat seriously enough that he called from London, where he was buying titles, to try to work things out with the *Review*. (That account comes from Colodny; frightened flacks at St. Martin's deny the story.)

We will have to wait to see what influence *Silent Coup* has on other Nixon historians besides Morris and Parmet. But the book's effect on Woodward is bound to be felt almost at once.

The press, normally so defensive of one of its heroes, has begun to sound suspicious, sometimes even contemptuous, of Woodward. Many are tired of his quest for what he calls "holy shit" stories. Many remember that he was one of the

*Post* editors who didn't press Janet Cooke for the sources (she had none) for "Jimmy's World," the hoax that won (and lost) a Pulitzer Prize in 1981.

But mainly his reputation is getting kicked around because he seemingly considers himself too important to be held to the basic rules of historical writing. His books are stunningly free of footnotes and sources. He seems to feel no need for proof. At first his reputation, born of Watergate, let him get away with it. No more.

The dike began to burst and the criticism to flood through when Woodward wrote his book about the C.I.A., in which he claimed that he had somehow sneaked into Director Casey's hospital room and received a deathbed confession that Casey had been involved in the Iran/*contra* illegalities. Did Woodward have the confession on tape? No. Did he have witnesses? No. Readers just had to take his word for the unlikely episode. Many didn't. Hoots and jeers were

heard from all corners of the press.

Then came *The Commanders*, Woodward's account of how the decision was made to go to war in the gulf. It triggered a new wave of taunts about his research technique. James Atlas, writing in *The New York Times Magazine*, wondered if Woodward made things up: "Are his 'quotations' actual quotations, or Woodward's version of what people told him others said?" And to Anthony Lewis's recommendation that *The Commanders* has "the ring of authority," Atlas responded, "But is it true?"

Suddenly we are on a more dramatic plateau of skepticism, and the reaction to *Silent Coup* may keep us there. Doug Ireland, media critic for *The Village Voice*, puts Atlas's query even more harshly. Reviewing *Silent Coup*, he opened with the question: "Is Bob Woodward a liar?" When a reporter's peers begin asking that question publicly, even if he is the most famous reporter in the country, he is in real trouble. □

## Memory's Citizen

JESSICA GREENBAUM

ROSE. By Li-Young Lee. BOA Editions Limited. 71 pp. Paper \$8.

THE CITY IN WHICH I LOVE YOU. By Li-Young Lee. BOA Editions Limited. 90 pp. \$18. Paper \$9.

Sometimes poets seem like the orators at Speakers' Corner—I can see them now, stacking their well-built stanzas like orange crates, stepping to the top with a deep breath and saying what they have to say. Readers, meanwhile, mill about the edges of the literary park, hoping to be caught by a poet's music or gossip, by the telescopic insinuation of worlds or by the expansive description of them. Sometimes a poet's voice distinguishes itself by carrying authority and by addressing a singular authority. That has been my experience reading Li-Young Lee's poems.

Lee's first book, *Rose* (1986), opens with "Epistle," his letter to the world, as Dickinson called her poems. It ends:

Before it all gets wiped away, let me say,

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there is wisdom in the slender hour  
which arrives between two shadows.

It is not heavenly and it is not sweet.  
It is accompanied by steady human  
weeping,  
and twin furrows between the brows,  
but it is what I know,  
and so am able to tell.

Some of the biographical background for this solemn introduction is well known by now. Both Lee's books carry biographical notes (a whole page in *The City in Which I Love You*) and his interview in Bill Moyers's WNET series *The Power of the Word* supplied more. Lee was born in 1957, to Chinese parents then living in Jakarta, Indonesia. His father had been Mao's personal physician and then professor of English and philosophy at Gamaliel University in Jakarta. The senior Lee ended up a political prisoner under Indonesia President Sukarno and spent two years in prison before escaping and fleeing the country. A nearly five-year trek through Hong Kong, Macao and Japan led the family to the United States, where Lee's father, "the critical 'myth' " of Lee's work, became a "Presbyterian minister in a tiny western Pennsylvania town, full of rage and mystery and pity, blind and silent at the end." Lee's father died in 1980.

The above quotations are from Gerald Stern's introduction to *Rose*. In the late