

tales that turn reality inside out or upside down. And the biggest fans of such tales are proud to call themselves “Dickheads.”

More of us are fans of Philip K. Dick (1928-82) than know it. You may not have read his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* but you’ve probably seen *Blade Runner*, the Ridley Scott movie based on it. You may not have read the short story “We Can Remember It for You Wholesale,” but there’s a good chance you’ve watched Arnold Schwarzenegger brawl his way through the screen version, *Total Recall*. Steven Spielberg’s *Minority Report* is based on fiction by Dick, as is the upcoming *A Scanner Darkly*, starring Keanu Reeves. In an increasingly erratic and tortured career, Dick managed to write more than 50 novels, a host of stories, and some 8,000 pages of unedited, often incomprehensible notes toward what he called his “grand Exegesis.” It’s an output that would be remarkable for any writer, but it’s all the more so for one afflicted by a legion of demons.

Agoraphobic, paranoid, possibly schizophrenic, overweight, suicidal, addicted to a raft of prescription medications (he simultaneously patronized a half-dozen doctors to keep himself supplied), a drinker, a smoker, his own worst enemy in almost every way imaginable, Dick nonetheless turned out a briskly paced and richly textured body of work. Though he spent most of his life in

dismal California backwaters, he traveled mentally to other worlds, imagining places where time moved backward and the dead rose from their graves, where animals had become so rare that people bought expensive robot pets, where criminals were caught before they committed their crimes, and where eager customers bought happy memories of events they hadn’t actually experienced. Dick’s work easily places him in the company of science-fiction icons Isaac Asimov, Frank Herbert, and Robert Heinlein.

Just how he accomplished so much is, unfortunately, left obscure in this sympathetic but self-indulgent portrait. “I have tried to depict the life of Philip K. Dick from the inside . . . with the same freedom and empathy—indeed with the same truth—with which he depicted his own characters,” explains French novelist Emmanuel Carrère. In practice, this means we get “imaginative recreations” of Dick’s actions, thoughts, and delusions, but no source notes, bibliography, or index. After dozens of pages imagining one or another hallucination or breakdown, it’s a great relief to seize on a verifiable fact, as if stumbling from a swamp onto dry land. Philip K. Dick often lost touch with reality—indeed, it became his trademark, in his life and in his art—but it’s too bad Carrère felt he had to follow suit.

—ROBERT MASELLO

## CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

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### *FAT MAN FED UP: How American Politics Went Bad.*

By Jack Germond. Random House.  
224 pp. \$24.95

Jack Germond was always on my list of people I’d like to drink with through a long evening. I’m a political junkie, and he has been immersed in American politics for some 50 years, as a terrific reporter and columnist for the Gannett syndicate, *The Washington Star*, and *The Baltimore Sun*, and as a sometime (but not so successful) television talking head on *The McLaughlin Group* and elsewhere. I wanted to hear him tell war stories. Now, I can cross him off my

list. He has written a barroom rant that does the job.

Sort of.

There are lots of stories, although most of the ones starring politicians appeared in *The New York Times* when they happened, and many of the rest feature Germond as subject—and hero.

But *Fat Man Fed Up* is more confession than memoir. We see the emergence of a political soul once buried under the pretense of journalistic objectivity: a liberal Democrat with a fondness for cerebral and verbal candidates such as Morris Udall and Bill Bradley, politicians who find it

hard to connect with voters but who make terrific drinking buddies. Germond roots for those who stand up for truth and justice but get done in by the dirty deeds of consultants and money—as when John McCain’s voting record on breast cancer was distorted during the 2000 Republican primaries, all to the benefit of George W. Bush, whom Germond describes as “an embarrassment” combining “ignorance and arrogance.”

And therein lies one of the lessons of Germond’s diatribe. Reporters have opinions, strong ones. From drinking with candidates or schmoozing with them in unguarded moments, they think they know who should be elected. But the knowledge drives them crazy, because they’re supposed to be objective.

Something else drives Germond crazy, too. The game of politics has changed enormously since his salad days in the 1960s and ’70s. Today, he says, it’s about apathetic and gullible voters, sleazy consultants, incompetent journalists, and, of course, the dominance of money, which he calls the “easy answer” that explains much of what’s so wrong. But I’m old enough to remember Germond’s good old days a bit differently. When I ran for Congress 32 years ago, I spent most of my time dialing for dollars, and I struggled with the same kinds of conflicts and potential obligations that candidates face nowadays.

No, what made the good old days so good for Germond is that he was a player, influential, close to the decision makers, on a first-name basis with the few hundred people who controlled the political process. What’s not to like? For half of those 50 years, you had to talk with Germond (and *The Washington Post’s* David Broder, *The New York Times’s* Johnny Apple, *The Boston Globe’s* Bob Healy, and a few others) if you wanted to go national. Germond was *important*. But today, television and the Internet have shrunk the clout of print reporters.

People didn’t get their political news from *The Daily Show* when Jack was king. Now that he’s off the throne, the mask has come off as well.

—MARTY LINSKY

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*NEW POLITICAL RELIGIONS,  
or An Analysis of Modern Terrorism.*

By Barry Cooper. Univ. of Missouri Press. 242 pp. \$44.95

Wave upon wave of books about Islam and terrorism have been published in the West since September 11, 2001, but few have offered much new. University of Calgary political scientist Barry Cooper’s volume might have been one more rehash, because his sources are entirely secondary. Instead, Cooper draws useful parallels between the Islamist extremism now stalking the planet and prior forms of totalitarian ideology.

A belief in the intrinsic separation of the political follower from the rest of the world; faith in the capacity of the political creed to fulfill divine, historical, or natural laws—such characteristics are common to all forms of totalitarianism, including Nazism, Stalinism, Japanese militarism, Italian fascism, and the contemporary Japanese cult of Aum Shinrikyo, to which Cooper devotes substantial attention. But his main focus is on “Salafism.” That’s the polite term preferred by both militants and Western academics when discussing Wahhabism and neo-Wahhabism, the Islamic movements that inspire Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and their allies.

Classic Wahhabism, like Soviet, Italian, and German totalitarianism, has enjoyed the backing of a state: the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in which Wahhabism remains the official religion. Neo-Wahhabism is the product of thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), who introduced the concept of revolution into a religious milieu that previously had eschewed it as a form of sowing dissension, a major sin in Sunni Islam. Unlike the original Wahhabis in the Arabian Peninsula, who allied with the Christian powers for their own political ends, the neo-Wahhabis of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Pakistani Jama’at movement preached resistance against Christian domination as represented by British rule in their countries.

Cooper believes that the works of political philosopher Eric Voegelin, including *Political Religions* (1938) and *The New Science of Politics* (1952), provide a framework for understanding terrorism. Voegelin not only equated political extremism with forms of religious