

AEG - White House visit

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 07 Apr 2009

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Stephen Hoy — 07 Apr 2009, 15:22

In the opening chapter of *An Evil Guest*, Wolfe takes us inside the White House for a few moments where we get a brief look at the inside game of a cowboy president and his wily assistant. I wondered for a bit whether these two figures might have historical analogs. Not that everything on a printed page will have its cunning duplicate in the natural world, but it does seem likely that Wolfe's imagination might draw on something he lived through or something that in some way connected to his personal history. Hypothetically, this scene draws on Wolfe's memory of Texas in the early 50s, when a certain senator was politicking his way to national prominence.

To be sure, there's a dash of a several administrations seasoning this presidential chili, but the conversation reminded me most of the way LBJ might handle an interview, which would make the aide "John" into an analog of Johnson's close associate, Jack Valenti. Recent bios of LBJ by Dallek and Caro show Johnson as a man driven by a conviction that 'knowledge is power', and the flip side of that conviction is a touch of paranoia about a man like Reyes who similarly wields knowledge to build power--all of which would fit in with a scene of the cowboy president attempting to manipulate an academic wizard like Gideon Chase so the president can eliminate a competitor.

The scene reminded me of something we might find in a transcription of the Johnson tapes. Caro's bios haven't caught up with Johnson's presidency yet, but maybe Dallek's 'Flawed Giant' has a similar scene. No matter. The cognitive link to what follows in AEG is not through the president but through the Valenti analog. The 'real-life' figure was intimately entwined with the world of actors and acting, one of the larger threads from which AEG is woven.