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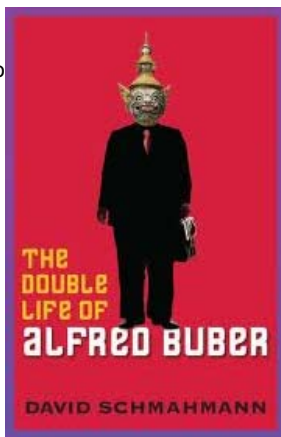
The inner lives of wayward powerful men

By David Schmahmann

About this blog: Who better to speculate on the inner lives of powerful men with double lives than a novelist who created a very human character with a double life? Or maybe he's not the best



one for it. As you'll see below, David Schmahmann's character Alfred Buber may have impulses much like



Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Arnold Schwarzenegger and Anthony Weiner, but how Buber responds to these impulses sadly separates fiction from reality — making the fictional character far more human than those who actually live in the flesh. Schmahmann's book, "The Double Life of Alfred Buber," was released last month by the Permanent Press. It has been called "artful" and "captivating," and as Publishers Weekly said, without so much as a wink at our testosterone-crazed politicians, "Schmahmann has captured desperation and love between unequals."

Allow me to thank Governors Spitzer and Schwarzenegger, Mr. Strauss-Kahn, Congressman Weiner, and also, there just out of the present limelight, a full line up of pastors in massage parlors and shirtless politicians on the Internet. I've spent years writing a novel about a man who leads a double life, and they've made it timely in a wonderfully perverse way.

My fictional Alfred Buber, pillar of sobriety, owner of a beautiful home and museum quality art, may tell his law partners he's on an epicurean tour of Paris and slip off to indulge his shameful secret, but I'd still have dinner with him any day over the photogenic Mr. Weiner.

Buber is like the others in some respects: accomplished, outwardly gracious, competent, a regular brick. But like many men, he battles an array of random sexual yearnings, and like a much smaller number, his

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self-control does not prevail.

Perhaps it all stems from the same thing: the frustrations of adolescence, the need to sublimate desires in order just to get on with it, a creeping sense of sexual invisibility as we age, or more generally the yearning some men have for a more diverse and comprehensive experience with women. (That may be a polite way of saying that most men, evangelical presidents included, lust in their hearts.) While our current crop of sexual perps' secret yearnings drive them to an ignominious exile on YouTube, Buber's drives him to the bordellos of southeast Asia.

I think most men have fugue moments involving some aspect of womankind, take a moment to shepherd them to an indeterminate end, and then get on with mowing the lawn. But we know that some proceed to Level Two, and while we know about the ones who get caught, my guess is that the number who don't is rather larger. For public figures, of course, it's a two-edged sword: with power comes opportunity, and with power comes risk (which begs the question: if you live with demons, why the dickens do you want so badly to be on the front page of the newspaper?) Power, so they tell me, is also both an aphrodisiac and a moral anesthetic. The two collide when our leaders misjudge things sufficiently badly that they seem to believe their writ extends to ordering a hotel chambermaid or a White House intern to do something they otherwise mightn't, and discreetly. Sometimes then you get a chambermaid who thinks different, or a White House intern who thinks discreet is an island off Greece. God bless them. We lesser types need our entertainment.

Where my Alfred Buber is most decidedly not like them – any of them – is in the constant struggle he has with his conscience. He's introspective, racked with guilt, and understands all along that in seeking out vulnerable girls he is constantly on the verge of misusing someone, someone's daughter or sister, another human being. I'm not sure Mr. Strauss-Kahn had similar thoughts, or that Mr. Weiner even internalized that he was dealing with human beings rather than a variety of sexual organs pasted to a remote presence. What redeems my Buber, in short, and sinks the rest, is that he doesn't end the novel in rehab, or expressing remorse that is calibrated to hit the right key for a public redemption.

For him, the disconnect between his two lives, and between his moral compass and his actions, are sources of profound and lasting shame. Not so our rotating crop of Nightly News buffoons.

By David Schmahmann | 03:41 PM ET, 06/29/2011

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- 9:30 a.m. Obama and Biden receive the Presidential Daily Briefing
11:30 a.m. Obama holds a news conference
1:50 p.m. Obama welcomes the WNBA Champion Seattle Storm to the White House
3 p.m. Obama and Biden meet with Senate Democratic Leadership
4:30 p.m. Obama and Biden meet with Secretary of the Treasury Geithner
5:45 p.m. Obama delivers remarks at an event observing LGBT Pride month
7 p.m. Obama and the first lady host a farewell dinner for Secretary of Defense Gates; Biden and Dr. Biden will also attend

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