

Franken's book pokes fun at right-wing politics

Saturday Night Live alumnus Al Franken takes a hard look at conservative politicians and the media

By Steven Neuman
Freelance Reporter

If there is any author who can get away with beginning a book by saying, "God chose me to write this..." it is Al Franken. To call Franken's peculiar brand of sophisticated satire an acquired taste is not far-fetched, but it would be a disservice to call the author, Saturday Night Live alumnus and political pundit "just" a comedian.

"Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them — A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right" was released among a wave of similar books lampooning current

political events, but Franken's book blows these other bestsellers away. "Lies" is a masterful orchestration of cynical political commentary and hard journalistic research.

The overall narrative of the book follows Franken and his attempts to prove the claim that the conservative media openly lie, twist the truth and paint the mainstream media as liberal conspiracy.

Certainly, "Lies" is going to afford quite a bit more satisfaction to the bleeding-heart liberal than the FOX News conservative, yet Franken's wit shines not in his bullying of right-wing media figureheads, but in his empirical, systematic destruction of their credibility. He takes on political pundit Ann Coulter in chapters one and two — titled "Ann Coulter: Nutcase," and "You Know Who I Don't Like? Ann Coulter" — as well as the folks over at FOX

News, including Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes. When Colmes is mentioned in the book, his name always appears in a smaller font.

Still, "Lies" is hardly just a frivolous diatribe on character. Franken is meticulous (his use of Lexis-Nexis, a comprehensive Web search, seems to verge on obsessive) and his attention to detail makes the book not only powerful, but extremely funny. As you read on, you realize that Franken has done his research. He gives concrete examples of when the right-wing media — television shows, authors, and Web sites — falsify quotes, use poor sources, fake endnotes and change contexts to twist information.

Franken's personal experiences with the media also tend to come into the picture quite often. And while the first-

person perspective is amusing — one incident describes his confrontation with Bill O'Reilly at a book trade show — it comes across as a bit dogmatic.

Franken does not shy away from the current Washington administration either, skewering President Bush's tax plans for pandering to the rich and criticizing what he deems the "chicken hawk" movement, or those who now willingly push for war but who themselves found ways to avoid the draft in previous wars. His fictional short story entitled "Operation Chicken Hawk" reads like a politico's pulp comic book.

Franken repeatedly acknowledges that he could not have written this book without the aid of "Team Franken," his Harvard-based research team. Franken enlisted 14 Harvard students from the John F. Kennedy School of Government, and some of the

book's best anecdotes are mined from his experiences working with a young research staff. In one scenario, Franken and a student go visit Bob Jones University under the pretense of looking at the school; his experiences on the campus are hilariously funny without being malicious or snide.

"Lies" consistently walks the line between information and entertainment, but Franken manages to keep everything remarkably neat. Unlike his last book, "Why Not Me?," which dealt with a fictional Franken presidential campaign and subsequent administration, "Lies" doesn't get old. The chapters are concise, the book never loses momentum and it's solid wit from page one to the endnotes.

Steven Neuman is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

'Desdemona' raises questions about classic performance

Paula Vogel's play, which re-examines the women of Othello, is a departure from more 'typical' plays

By Helen Schumacher
Pulse Columnist

A small round spotlight shines on the front center of the stage. All that's revealed to the audience is a white handkerchief, crumpled on the floor.

A woman rushes to the cloth, picks it up and stuffs it into her bosom. The spotlight disappears, and this is how "Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief" begins.

Written by Pulitzer Prize winner Paula Vogel, the play's title is misleading. Desdemona is about more than a handkerchief; it examines what the women of Shakespeare's Othello might have been like, had the characters been written with more depth.

So Desdemona is not just a

doomed wife, she is a mischievous woman who desperately needs independence. Emilia, Desdemona's scullery maid, is no longer just a tool for her conniving husband, Lago. Instead, she's a devoted but occasionally disgruntled servant. Lieutenant Cassio's lover Bianca serves as a good friend and inspiration to Desdemona.

Although all these women care for and rely on one another, they are trapped by the male-dominated society in which they live. This causes

jealousy and fighting between the characters, making their relationships constant battles for control and honesty.

The University Theatre's production of Desdemona is directed by Stephen Rupsch with Parisse Boothe playing the role of the title character.

The play is comprised from their short scenes, which last anywhere from 30 seconds to 10 minutes. Desdemona will show on Nov. 6, 7 and 8 at the University's Arena Theatre in

104 Villard Hall. All shows begin at 8 p.m. with no late seating. Tickets are \$4 for University students, \$5 for seniors, University staff and faculty, and \$6 for the general public. They can be purchased at the EMU Ticket Office or the University Theatre box office, located in the lobby of the Robinson Theatre.

Contact the Pulse columnist at helenschumacher@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



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