

# What Hillary Hides

Passionate yet distant, pious yet deceptive, the former first lady is the most provocative of the 2008 presidential candidates—and perhaps the least known.

By Nicholas von Hoffman

IN HIS BIOGRAPHY of Hillary Clinton, Carl Bernstein writes of when Alan Simpson, a Republican senator from Wyoming and a man of great repute, paid a visit to Bill Clinton in the White House at the beginning of the president's second term. Simpson is quoted as telling Clinton, "Now that I am leaving office I can tell you something. You are going to suffer immeasurable difficulty, and this is payback [by Republicans] for Watergate. So expect the worst."

The Clintons and many another Democrat may believe that they got the worst and that Hillary is the ideal person to repay the Republicans in kind. Or it may be that Republicans, their anger over the 2006 midterm rout unslaked, will attempt to pay her back again if their night fears are realized and the Clintons come to power a second time.

With Hillary as the front-running Democratic candidate, the 2008 election is shaping up to have something of Buenos Aires about it. The adoration and hatred she inspires has a tincture of the nearly immortal Evita.

Whether Hillary gets to be the central figure in a musical or an actual opera, as with *Nixon in China*, it is a sure bet that before she trundles off into history, the lady will be the heroine or villain in more than one made-for-TV movie. You have to go back to the 1820s and Rachel Jackson to find a presidential wife as reviled as Hillary, since Eleanor Roosevelt's detractors did not call her a whore. If Hillary is elected, she will

enter office in a vortex of passions, pro and con, at least vaguely comparable to those that followed Abraham Lincoln into the White House. The fear was that he would be assassinated before he could take the oath, and while Hillary does not, let's hope, trigger such violent feelings, the woman gets to people. Polling suggests 80 percent of the country either loves or hates her—and she drives the people who hate her nuts.

Though they are more than competently done, neither *A Woman In Charge*, Bernstein's biography, nor another new one, *Her Way*, by Jeff Gerth and Don Van Natta, has the emotional force to convey a sense of this woman. Hillary fell so hopelessly in love—against her will it seems—that she gave up a promising legal career and calling to help the nation's most distressed children to follow an invincibly charming man with unlikely ideas about how to get ahead in the world to a backwater state known—if known at all—for being the butt of trailer-trash jokes. Now she stands a fair chance of being elected president of the United States.

None of our authors can get their arms around this love story. Gerth and Van Natta do not try. They are seasoned *New York Times* reporters who have been on the Hillary story for years. They provide the hard politics and leave aside matters of heart. But Bernstein takes a pass at this romance. *New York Times* book reviewer Jennifer Senior noted a parallel between Bill and his wife's biographer.

Bernstein was at one point married to writer Nora Ephron, who made the author, already famous, doubly so as the womanizing husband in a 1986 roman à clef called *Heartburn*. Senior observes that "his book suggests that it isn't his executive-scandal bona fides that make him a qualified Hillary biographer; it's his bona fides as a lousy husband. Like Bill Clinton, Bernstein carried on a very public affair while married to a formidable, high-profile woman ... and one of the perverse strengths of his book is his intuitive understanding—a sinner's lament, really—of what happens to a proud woman when she's intimately betrayed and publicly humiliated."

The public betrayal of a proud woman is a theme that many have picked up on, but that cannot be the center of the story. The center must be that Hillary and Bill loved each other then and still do. They did not get divorced. He was not one of those husbands who is thrown out of the house because of his adulteries and goes on to settle down with wife number two or three or four. This a love story in which one lover injures the other, sometimes terribly, and is forgiven. They make up, they go on, one falls again, they split, they make up again. It's the kind of affair that makes friends shake their heads and say they do not understand how she continues in such a hurtful, humiliating, destructive relationship. The friends are not around for the ecstatic hours of love, union, and companionship.

From John and Abigail Adams through Woodrow and Edith Wilson to Bess and Harry Truman, there have been other White House couples who deeply loved each other. The Clintons, though, are the first with a publicly tumultuous marriage. The Hardings and the Kennedys kept their difficulties out of the papers, but they lacked the passionate closeness that is as conspicuous with this couple as Bill's infidelities. That Hillary also served as a kind of deputy president makes the tangle of their lives and our government the more fascinating and complicated.

In Bill and Hillary, we have a white-collar, Americanized version of *Tristan und Isolde* in which, instead of killing herself, Isolde runs for president—a fate worse than death for most people. The tipping point in this drama was the moment when Billary had to decide whether or not to pay off Paula Jones to prevent her lawsuit from coming to court. If they had done so, the name Lewinsky would be unknown, Ken Starr would not have gotten hold of the stained dress, there would have been no perjury and no impeachment.

Bill and his lawyers, according to Gerth and Van Natta, wanted to settle, "But Hillary ultimately overruled them, saying that, 'the public would see a settlement as confirmation,' declaring that if they paid Jones a single dollar, 'the lawsuits would never end.' Hillary seemed to be suggesting that there were other women out there who would be encouraged to file a law suit against her husband ... but ... her advice turned out to be disastrous." The heroine, in the course of trying to save her lover, destroys him—and herself.

How unsuited Hillary would seem to be for such a role. She is described as a private person, who keeps her feelings to herself. Religiously, she is a pious Methodist, a denomination not known for raucous displays. Yet she is hooked

up to a shouting Baptist given to showing emotion and feeling to the broadest possible public.

What may be needed with this topic is a double biography. It may not be possible to write a truly satisfying one of either Hillary or Bill separately. After 32 years of marriage, during which they worked together so closely, they cannot be said to have had stand-alone careers.

According to Gerth and Van Natta, Hillary and Bill exchanged promises for a joint career almost at the outset of their relationship: "More than three decades ago, in the earliest days of their romance, Bill and Hillary struck a plan, one that would become both the foundation and the engine of their relationship. They agreed to work together to revolutionize the Democratic Party and ultimately make the White House their home. ... with Bill's victory in

had always had a tendency to look at people and events with almost biblical judgement. She often weighed matters in terms of good and evil." After the death of Vince Foster, she "found more to judge as evil," Atkinson adds. "There seemed to be something basic reinforcing her view of good and evil, an element of embitterment there, and the notion of conspiracy. There was no reason to have that so early in her life but it existed." According to Atkinson, Clinton was driven by a "dangerous attitude—not just with Republicans and enemies, but even toward people like [George] Stephanopoulos: 'Are you with us or are you against us?' And that led to more demonizing, more judgement of evil around her. It seemed more potent because of self-justification fueled by these Old Testament judgements of good and evil."

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1992, their plan became even more ambitious: eight years as president for him, then eight years for her. Their audacious pact has remained a secret until now."

That pact makes the connection between the two look less like romantic love than power lust. If that is the way it is, out goes Wagner and the *Liebestod* and in comes the Macbeth family. But perhaps they are not mutually exclusive. As Bill says, "Buy one, get two."

This time around, purchasers are getting Hillary first. In the pages of both these books, she can be fierce, and unlike her husband, she is a grudge keeper, not someone who forgets. Bernstein quotes an old Clinton friend, architect Dick Atkinson, who claims "Hillary

Neither book much speculates about what kind of a president she would be, but Hillaryland smacks enough of the present White House to cause a twinge or two. Writing last year in *The New Republic*, Ryan Lizza offered this description of the place:

Ever since 1992, when a young campaign staffer answered a phone call from Hillary with the greeting 'Hillaryland,' the future first lady and her devoted, mostly female aides have embraced the cutesy sobriquet as a way to describe their unique, un-Bill (and sometimes anti-Bill) sorority. ... In the Clinton White House, Hillaryland grew into an influential but

often frustrated power center inhabited by dutiful staffers whose first allegiance was to the first lady, not the president. '[W]e were also our little subculture within the White House,' Hillary writes in her memoir. 'My staff prided themselves on discretion, loyalty and camaraderie, and we had our own special ethos. While the West Wing had a tendency to leak, Hillaryland never did. While the president's senior advisers jockeyed for big offices and proximity to the Oval Office, my senior staff happily shared offices with their young assistants.' Bill Clinton staffers regarded the dwellers in Hillaryland as Kool-Aid drinkers with awful political judgment. Hillarylanders saw Bill's people as showboats and referred to them dismissively as the 'white boys.'

The woman has a guarded personality and an inability to show a relaxed, approachable public self. Add to those characteristics Hillaryland and a history of operating in secret, and you have a recipe for trouble. Her 1993 attempts to shroud her health program from the prying eyes of the public is close enough to Dick Cheney's closed-doors, eyes-only performance with his energy program to furrow a brow. You cannot read these two books without wondering if she, too, will curtain off the government.

Also to be taken into account is Hillary and truth telling—or the want thereof. Both biographies are heavy with instances of fibbing, white lying, misdirecting, and taking liberties with fact. It is impossible to imagine any politician at her level going through a career as long as hers without doing some serious dissembling, but what is troublesome is how often she's been caught.

Both books point to the time she got on the Diane Rehm radio show and said, anent providing the *Washington Post* with all the Whitewater documents, "We actually did that with the *New York Times*. We took every document we had, which again I have to say were not many. We laid them all out." The statement was not only untrue but easily discredited.

Good politicians lie as seldom as they can so that when they do, people believe them. Hillary's failure to carry off her various prevarications makes one wonder about her political skills. Bernstein quotes a member of her legal team remarking that her "instincts are horrible in terms of politics, in terms of managing a crisis like this, like the one she was in, like the one [Bill] got in with Monica. ... We had a joke that all we had to do was ask her, What would you do? And then do just the opposite, without even thinking about it ... because almost always her instincts were wrong, backwards. ... And she never surrounded herself with people who would stand up to her, who where of a different mind."

Gerth, Van Natta, and Bernstein give Hillary's senatorial career a lick and a promise. The absence of a closer account is a serious flaw. These years are free of the *Sturm und Drang* of the previous 25, and are less fun to write about, but they are the best indicator of whether she has overcome the angry, secretive, and stubborn behavior that has caused her past political injury. We are told that the Hillary of the sharp elbow has given way to a legislator with a reputation for working well with others. This Hillary is a dealmaker, the antithesis of the obdurate woman whose intransigence ensured the defeat of her health plan.

Bernstein mentions her success at getting on the Senate Armed Services Committee to reassure voters that a candidate previously identified with chil-

dren, women, and health issues is capable of being commander in chief. A fire-breathing war supporter who voted for the Patriot Act, Hillary may be a case of overcompensation. Democratic politicians are prone to go overboard at proving how tough they are. Hillary, in addition to bearing that fardel, may believe that the supposed weakness of her gender demands that she put on a horned helmet, grab a spear, and do a Valkyrie number for the war jingos.

There is no way of guessing. Nor can we discern the role her husband might play in her administration. Will she stick to NAFTA and the globalist free-trade policies that hallmarked Bill's years in office? Will she place as much emphasis on a balanced budget as the first Clinton did? Nobody can say, and she isn't talking.

In the days of their youth, both she and Barack Obama were influenced by Saul Alinsky, the from-the-people-up organizer for whom I once worked, who called himself a radical, although he was closer to John Locke than Karl Marx. Obama's speeches make clear that he still very much believes in the participatory democracy Alinsky preached, but if Hillary does, it is not reflected in her rhetoric. Will it pop back up once she is sworn in?

Whatever the answers, the Clinton machine is rolling. It is hyperorganized, peopled with skillful political veterans, endowed with lavish funding, endorsed by stars of stage, screen, and sports, and led by a well-spoken, sharp leader who has learned her craft at every level. On paper she is formidable, but elections are won and lost in voting booths. ■

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*Nicholas von Hoffman is a former columnist for the Washington Post and Point-Counterpoint commentator for CBS's 60 Minutes. He is the author of many books including, most recently, Hoax.*

# Musharraf on the Edge

Almost six years ago, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf swore that he would begin combating radicalism and working to reform the religious schools that

churn out Islamic militants. Last month in Islamabad, the Pakistani army's battle with militants in the Red Mosque showed just how meaningless this vow has been. Musharraf's lethal combination of blundering and impotence has reaped a bitter harvest that threatens to worsen Pakistan's internal instability and enhance the power of resurgent pro-Taliban tribal forces in Waziristan.

Militants coming from the *madrassah* system that Musharraf has been unable or unwilling to reform holed up in the Lal Masjid, Islamabad's Red Mosque, which had served as their base and weapons cache. By the start of July, the mosque had become the refuge for Islamic vigilantes whose activities in the mosque's environs included the abduction of Chinese nationals, which turned this local lawlessness into a high priority for a government eager to satisfy its Chinese patron. After a week-long siege, the Pakistani military stormed the mosque on July 10. Some 100 people died, including a dozen soldiers.

This latest episode in a string of challenges to Musharraf's authority and Islamabad's central rule highlights the dangerous weaknesses of the Pakistani state. It serves as a reminder of Musharraf's increasingly tenuous grip on power and the potential for a radical Islamic insurrection that would be ruinous for American efforts in neighboring Afghanistan. Finally, it reveals the risks of American reliance on the unsteady hand of a military ruler who has lost the confidence of his country's

population and warns us of the politically explosive nature of U.S.-backed policies abroad.

Many of the militants hailed from Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, a redoubt of tribal law effectively beyond the reach of the Musharraf government. In the wake of the mosque battle, attacks on army units and installations in the NFWP and Waziristan have risen sharply, resulting in over 100 more fatalities.

In some respects, the fight in Islamabad was simply a resumption of the unsuccessful 2006 campaign that the Pakistani army carried out in the NFWP, at American insistence. It concluded with the army's withdrawal and a negotiated settlement in which tribal elders agreed to prevent the movement of Taliban supporters into Afghanistan. Militants in Waziristan have now repudiated the settlement, and on July 17, suicide attacks reached Islamabad itself.

Following the battle, Musharraf declared his intention to stand for reelection in the fall as a military officer, citing security threats as justification for his decision not to govern as a civilian. Opposition parties are crying foul, arguing that the parliamentary election next year will be rigged to achieve the desired majority for the ruling Pakistan Muslim League.

Even before this, Pakistani political life had been stumbling from one crisis to the next. Musharraf's blatant interference with the judiciary in the removal of the chief justice of the Supreme Court prompted mass protests by prosecutors

and parliamentarians alike. And political opposition in the parliament had already become fierce and vocal after the military's ham-fisted handling of dissent in the restive province of Baluchistan. Facing an already incendiary situation fueled by Baluchi resentments and desire for regional autonomy, the army provoked mass riots when they assassinated a prominent tribal elder and Baluchi "nationalist" who had succeeded in keeping the general peace. Rather than suppressing unrest, Musharraf's clumsy tactics routinely exacerbate Pakistan's already severe problems.

Even now, Musharraf continues to exploit the real threat of Islamic militancy to justify his actions both to Washington and to Pakistanis, but as the last five years have shown, the promises of the "moderate" military man are rarely fulfilled. The United States' Pakistan policy, which has involved elevating it to the status of major non-NATO ally (shared by such countries as Australia and Japan) and looking the other way on its proliferation and terrorism abuses, has combined with Pakistan's own counterproductive policies to undermine the security interests of both countries.

Musharraf's tenure does not justify the continued lavishing of American favors. At the very least, Washington needs to stop reinforcing the general's worst instincts. He has placed a higher priority on making ideologically palatable statements ("enlightened moderation" good, extremism bad) and appearing strong through the application of brute force than on engaging in anything like a smart counterinsurgency and political strategy.

What has failed in Iraq will not fare any better in Waziristan. ■