

# “America’s Exhibit A”: Hillary Rodham Clinton’s *Living History* and the Genres of Authenticity

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*“Does she have the stuff to come on Hardball . . . into the belly of the beast?”*

Chris Matthews to Howard Fineman, MSNBC 2000

**In this terrain, women are held up simultaneously to often deeply contradictory standards—could Clinton, a girl, really be commander in chief? Or was she too tough and unladylike for the job?**

Susan Douglas, *Enlightened Sexism*

As the old canard goes: a year is a millennium in politics. So what the candidate line-up will look like in 2016 is far from predictable. But for many politicians, the expectation is that Hillary Clinton will make a second run for the Democratic nomination and then for the White House. She will be 69 in 2016, not the oldest candidate; Ronald Reagan was 69 when elected. She’ll have

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her experience as Secretary of State in the Obama administration, international bona fides, and security credibility that expand her claims to formidable expertise. Chances are she will have written another book, this one on foreign policy. Clinton's 2003 best-selling autobiography *Living History* will more than likely be reissued sometime before the campaign begins in earnest. It will most likely enter the *New York Times* best-seller list for a second time.

Given this possible future for Clinton's autobiography, I want to return to *Living History* to meditate on the political uses of autobiography in the gendered arena of American presidential politics.<sup>1</sup> *Living History* earned big bucks. Its audio book version won an Emmy. The book tour, interviews, and reviews that followed put Clinton in contact with a national audience of celebrity fans and potential voters that the aspiring presidential candidate would recruit into "Hillaryland."<sup>2</sup> Translations of the book, including the Chinese version, turned her autobiography into a global best seller.<sup>3</sup>

As prologue to a campaign for the presidential nomination, *Living History* sought to do the social work of convincing the voting public that a woman could assume national leadership. Not that Hillary Clinton was the first woman to launch a presidential bid in the US. Margaret Chase Smith, a Congresswoman and senator from Maine, made a bid for the Republican nomination in 1964, losing out to Barry Goldwater; and Shirley Chisholm, Congresswoman from the 12th District of New York, made a bid for the Democratic nomination, the first by an African American, in 1972. But Clinton was the first former First Lady to position herself for a presidential run, and the first woman with national and global celebrity status to establish a viable plan for pursuing and gaining the nomination. The "Hillary" of *Living History*, then, would translate celebrity aura into active support, skepticism into investment, and do so by performing a convincing political persona. But how would this woman, this feminist professional, former First Lady, and duly-elected senator, craft the story of representative American-ness in the hyper-masculinized genre of the aspiring candidate's autobiography; and how would she perform the intimacy that secures the claim to authenticity in this highly mediated form?

### 1. Mobilizing the "Authentic" Political Persona

Before pursuing these questions, let me comment briefly on the social action of contemporary candidate autobiography. A corporate production, the candidacy of late capitalism is crafted,

packaged, marketed, displayed, polled, and sold. The presidential candidate must perform as a celebrity, sustain celebrity appeal, and successfully navigate the shoals of celebrity culture.<sup>4</sup> In this densely mediated environment, the political persona is ever more deftly and promiscuously imaged, voiced, choreographed, and networked.<sup>5</sup> Central to the political utility of the persona is the “life story,” the story that does the political work of securing the symbolic relationship between person and political system (Corner 398), at once individualizing the candidate and projecting the candidate as the embodiment of representivity, to use Dana Nelson’s term (“Representative/Democracy” 325). The aspiring candidate wants to get a book written, get it out, get it read, and get it on the *New York Times* best-seller list. Its very shelf life registers its power to compel voter support. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, memoir culture, celebrity culture, and presidential politics converge to convert a life into money, message, and conduit for affective attachment that circulates through what Lauren Berlant defines as the intimate public sphere (1–24).

Contemporary candidate autobiography would seem to be highly managed and instrumental, and thus inauthentic. But in politics, convincing authenticity is the coin of the realm. And so, how exactly is an aura of authenticity produced in the utilitarian, commodified form of political autobiography? Autobiographical discourse itself promises a kind of authenticity. The “narrating ‘I’” functions as the “voice” of the politician seeking to capture the attention of the reader sitting at home, in a coffee house, on the beach (Smith and Watson 79).<sup>6</sup> In its address to the imagined interlocutor, the narrating “I” promises to draw the reader into the zone of familiarity, identification, and affective attachment, thereby overcoming, if only for a moment and illusorily, the sense of remoteness between voter and candidate.

But there are other metrics of authenticity at the intersection of the singular history and shared discourses. Generic intelligibility, by which I mean a species or template of storytelling that is recognizable to an audience, is certainly one of the most important in producing the aura of authenticity. Modes of autobiographical narration reproduce intelligible subject positions, plots, tropes, and rhetorics of self-representation. Doing so, they project a “reality” effect of the sincere or “real” person behind the political persona. “We elect our leaders,” observes Laura Kipnis, “because they’ve made themselves legible to us as a collective mirror”; in this way they “embody the appropriate collective story” (317). Kipnis’s observation zeroes in on the importance of the generic mode to the aura of authenticity attached to a candidate’s story.

And it is to the authenticity effects of generic intelligibility in Clinton's *Living History* that I now turn. What is fundamentally at stake in this book that would launch a thousand voters is how to find the right story (the right stuff) for the narrating "I" to tell. The "I" of *Living History* has to mobilize autobiographical narration to do the social work of launching a presidential bid by a feminist woman by offering the public access to the *real* "Hillary" whose claims to political power are legitimate. This challenge involves negotiating a masculine subject position, projecting for "the people" what Nelson describes as critical to producing the aura of constitutional "presidentialism"—a "concentrated and purified experience of representation in the executive body of the president—the concrete correlative for national manhood" (333).<sup>7</sup> Equally challenging, the narrating "I" brings to this autobiographical project multiple histories: she is at once a feminist and a former First Lady, in themselves potentially contradictory subject positions, and certainly historically nonpresidential subject positions.

In this context, it is important to recall that Hillary Clinton's autobiography is a corporate project. The narrating "I" of *Living History* is the collective endeavor of Clinton herself, her three ghostwriters, and the editor(s) involved in its publication. While the fact that it is ghostwritten certainly does not surprise—ghostwriting of political memoirs is the norm as in Theodore Sorenson's ghostwriting of John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* (1955) and more recently Mark Salter's co-authorship of John McCain's *Faith of My Fathers: A Family Memoir* (1999)—the corporate ghostwriting in *Living History* exposes the postmodern bureaucratization of a candidacy, its standardization, packaging, and test marketing.

This ensemble of actors producing *Living History* as the aspiring presidential candidate's official autobiography actually mobilizes a constellation of generic modes and autobiographical discourses, all of which produce their different authenticity effects. In following the diverse strands and entanglements of the different generic modes, we begin to understand how the published autobiography produces, or not, the authenticity effect of a *real Hillary*, the convincing persona that is always at stake in the political field.

The case of Hillary Clinton's *Living History* and its "management" of "being American" (Berlant 25) captures what's at stake in the political arena for the feminist who would be president. Clinton's very public narrative is routed through something like five generic modes—modernist bildungsroman, feminist bildungsroman, First Lady memoir, buddy narrative, and war

memoir; and it refuses to be routed through a sixth mode, the celebrity confession. In exploring the authenticity effects of these generic modes and tracking the intimations of inauthenticity inherent in their contradictory subject positions and rhetorics, we can assess how the heterogeneous, sometimes conflicting, genres of life-writing expose the difficulty of successfully managing political and politicized gender. In what follows, we can observe how it takes a “village” of genres to make, and unmake, the “real” “Hillary.”

## 2. Modernist Bildungsroman

*Living History* seems a robustly modernist autobiography, characterized by its retrospective narrative trajectory, its developmental, autonomous narrated “I,” and its narrative grammar of modernity as a telos of freedom and progress. In this it reproduces a highly intelligible mode of political memoir in which, Margaret Henderson notes, “individualistic narrators use linearity and realism to recount their lives, the seemingly authoritative mode with which to make the self cohere, produce verisimilitude, and construct the historical record” (169). This generic mode is the mode of the traditional bildungsroman whose history extends back to the late eighteenth century. Indeed, *Living History* can be read as a coming-of-age story of education and a journey of subjective incorporation as a normative national subject. In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (1997), Lauren Berlant calls this the “infantile citizen form,” “a political subjectivity based on the suppression of critical knowledge and a resulting contraction of citizenship to something smaller than agency: patriotic inclination, default social membership, or the simple possession of a normal national character” (27). The infantile citizen’s narrative, according to Berlant, “casts his [sic] pilgrimage to Washington as a life-structuring project that began in childhood” (37). The first paragraph of *Living History* announces the trope of the defining national fable: “I wasn’t born a first lady or a senator. I wasn’t born a Democrat. I wasn’t born a lawyer or an advocate for women’s rights and human rights. I wasn’t born a wife or mother. I was born an American in the middle of the twentieth century, a fortunate time and place” (1). *Living History* reproduces what Joseph Slaughter describes in another context as the tautological/teleological structure of bildungsroman; that is, it “situate[s] the human personality both before and after the process of incorporation” (26). The narrating “I” of the autobiography is the *elected* senator who tells the story

of becoming what she was from the beginning, in *Living History's* case the essential American subject. As such, the narrator acts as guarantor of the First Lady's "enfranchisement" (à la Slaughter 20) as a bona fide and electable candidate.

For the aspiring presidential candidate, then, the modernist bildungsroman form reproduces the realness norms naturalizing American national identity. Through the performative act of life-writing, the narrating "I" of *Living History* registers the characterological features of modernist subjectivity, among them free will, intelligence, mastery, entrepreneurial autonomy, and ambition. This reiteration of the national fable of individualist self-making secures the symbolic relationship between person and nation (Corner 398). As Philip Holden observes, the social project of modernist self-narrating involves projecting the legitimacy of power by suturing the story of the individual to the story of the nation, projecting as it does so the coherence of both national subject and nation.<sup>8</sup>

*[T]he modernist autobiography of the political leader has been a masculinist mode of bildungsroman. . . . The constraint of the modernist mode of bildungsroman is to position the woman who would be president in a constitutively masculine subject position, to position her, in effect, as an inauthentically gendered presidential aspirant.*

Yet the modernist autobiography of the political leader has been a masculinist mode of bildungsroman, conjoining the phallic agent of narration, the linearity of progressive time, and the symbolic narrated "I." The realness norms producing the authenticity effect of American identity for the aspiring presidential candidate are effects of the masculinist tropes of phallic leadership. The constraint of the modernist mode of bildungsroman is to position the woman who would be president in a constitutively masculine subject position, to position her, in effect, as an inauthentically gendered presidential aspirant.

### 3. Feminist Bildungsroman

In this light, let us return to the opening paragraph to reread the subsequent sentences: "I was free to make choices unavailable to past generations of women in my own country and inconceivable to many women in the world today. I came of age on the crest of tumultuous social change and took part in the political battles fought over the meaning of America and its role in the world" (1). Here the narrator positions herself as a historical figure in what Berlant terms the "crisis of the national future"—the struggle of those historically excluded from full citizenship to claim full, rather than partial, citizenship in a collective founded on the "abstract principles of democratic nationality" (18). This self-positioning introduces a second generic mode into *Living History*, the feminist bildungsroman. The "arrival" in a Senate seat for the former First Lady is the culmination of the feminist fable



of the struggle for full citizenship, the arrival in “Washington City” as a senator. We observe the voice and form of feminist bildungsroman when the narrator tells us what it was like to be “a woman”—in a Seven Sisters college, in the antiwar movement, in law school, in the campaign, in the governor’s mansion, in the law firm, in the White House, and on the senatorial campaign trail. We hear it also when she parses her discomforts with gendered roles, her negotiations of gender bias, and her analysis of gender ideology in action. This “Hillary” is positioned as generational symbol, “America’s Exhibit A” (141), the embodiment of the future of America’s second-wave feminism and of “America” itself.

The feminist bildungsroman produces its authenticity effects by condensing the ur-story of second-wave feminism. Clinton’s narrative is the generational auto/biography of women fighting for equality in the workplace and in national politics for some 30 years, of women competing in the world despite formidable obstacles, accumulating success and power as entrepreneurial feminists, projecting themselves as individualist agents of change. Its claim to authenticity is an effect of its triumphalist plot of achievement against the odds, and its tacit acknowledgment that most women have to work far harder than men to get respect, that women cannot just “be” charismatic political personalities. “America’s Exhibit A” reiterates the individualist plot of development and possessive masculinity of liberal feminism.

The mobilization of feminist bildungsroman in *Living History* exposes the realness norms pervading and defining modernist autobiography as masculinist norms. And it strips the normative narrative that is the nation’s privileged fable of American political identity of its gendered features, contesting the gendered content of the viable political persona. Doing so, it would remake the nation as more fully inclusive, women’s citizenship as full rather than partial, and “Hillary” as a real candidate. And yet, the liberal feminist move to resituate the narrator from the subject of modernist bildungsroman to the subject of feminist bildungsroman does not necessarily promise full generic citizenship. What Margaret Henderson observes of the feminist bildungsroman form in the autobiographies of Robin Morgan and Betty Friedan illuminates the difficulty of claiming legitimate or “real” political power through a revisionary mode: “In liberal feminist fashion, they modify rather than transform the genre, which forms an uncanny parallel to the limited concessions granted by the social order of late capitalism to accommodate feminist demands” (171).

Further, even as *Living History* presents a paradigmatic story invoking legacies of 1970s’ liberal feminist discourse, two specters haunt the grammar of the feminist bildungsroman. First is the

specter of what Rush Limbaugh calls a “feminazi,” the woman too strident, humorless, power-hungry, and threatening to elect to lead the nation. This alternative version of the real “Hillary” had long circulated in hostile media that portrayed her as a lying, cold-hearted “bitch,” a scandalous persona. We sense this ghost every time the narrator makes a joke and pokes fun at herself. Second is the specter of the feminist who failed to assert her agency to sever a relationship that had been the source of betrayal and public humiliation. The first specter is the specter of too much feminism; the second, the specter of too little. The contradiction undermines Clinton’s claim to the authenticity of her femininity and the authenticity of her feminism.

#### 4. First Lady Memoir

*Living History* also has to be read as a First Lady memoir, that mode of life-writing Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Diane M. Blair describe as an intractably gendered genre in American political life.<sup>9</sup> This generic mode is by definition a narrative of a gendered “role,” of heteronormative coupling, feminine subject positions, and feminized fables of identity that attach both narrated and narrating “I”s to another whose history as president compels the wife’s version as the summation of her identity. It is a genre out of “women’s culture,” identified with affect and mission. As such it is a genre that reproduces the gendered privatization of politics (Berlant xii). It is also a haunted genre, inflected as it is by the cultural anxieties surrounding the role itself, a non-elective, non-constitutional post that troubles the notion of legitimate power in a representative democracy. The role of First Lady in the “First Heteronormative Relation” is a role without a warrant. Or rather, its warrant is to maintain the integrity of the zone of presidential politics as phallic ground.

Hillary Clinton was not the first activist and politically savvy advisor in the role; merely recall Eleanor Roosevelt and Lady Bird Johnson, for instance. She was however the first avowedly feminist woman in the White House; and her version of the genre is one of role discomfort. Of the 1992 presidential campaign, the narrating “I” observes: “I had worked full-time during my marriage to Bill and valued the independence and identity that work provided. Now I was solely ‘the wife,’ an odd experience for me” (111). Further on, she describes how after 1994 she was convinced by advisors that she “could advance the Clinton agenda through symbolic action” (265).<sup>10</sup> The story of the First Wife is the story of how the narrated “I” rerouted herself through feminized



sentimentalism's symbolic script of indirect influence through activism on behalf of women and children.<sup>11</sup> That subject position is also performed by the narrating "I" through *Living History*'s tracking of the story of romance, marriage, and motherhood, and its maternalist advocacy on behalf of Bill Clinton's presidency and of the Constitution itself.

In telling the story of this gendered role, which she describes as "an ideal—and largely mythical—concept of American womanhood" (119), the narrator of *Living History* interrupts the grammar of the liberal feminist bildungsroman. If the mode of feminist bildungsroman unfolds through a triumphalist plot of self-making, in this mode, the narrator tells of constant failure, failure either to fit or escape sentimentality's role. The First Lady mode becomes one of role abjection, to invoke a Kristevan concept. It exposes the ways in which she is an inappropriate subject who is clumsily or uncomfortably feminized, as the serial recourse and references to unsuccessful hairstyles metonymically suggest.

The negotiations of the First Lady memoir form fail to produce a determinable ground upon which to authenticate a political persona. In political terms, this is the genre, and the abject subject position, from which Clinton must extract herself if she is to position herself for a run for the presidency and make a claim for legitimate power. The paradox of the generic mode here is that in the very narration of her history as First Lady, the narrating "I" reproduces "the realness" norms of femininity and renders "Hillary" inauthentically feminine.

## 5. Buddy Narrative

To manage the political persona of the woman who would be president, the narrator of *Living History* reconfigures the First Lady memoir as the "buddy" narrative of the First Partnership. Through the buddy narrative, the narrator shifts from the subject position of sentimentalized wife to that of sidekick. This is *Living History*'s fourth generic mode.

Bill and Hillary Clinton presented themselves to the nation as the First Buddyship. (Interesting that they named their White House dog "Buddy.") When they arrived at the White House and during their eight years in residence, the Clintons packaged their relationship to the American public as a working relationship, and a new kind of First Marriage. Loren Glass observed at the time that "insofar as the vision of the 'professional couple' is a focus-group-driven product of the Clinton administrations' professional media team, it is a product of itself: 'professionalism' is

both the manufactured image and the working reality of the Clinton White House. Even their personal relationship is increasingly characterized as pragmatic and professional; their marriage seems to be a ‘working’ relationship, in both senses of the term” (n.p.). A “dual-career” marriage in the White House required media management because it so predictably drew fire for its rescripting and disruption of gendered roles and affects. Clinton wore her pantsuits; Bill emoted for the public and the electorate. “Bill and Hillary”—or “Billary” as they were sometimes called—as a presidential package deal confused the norms of the First Couple’s heteronormativity in ways that unsettled public/private binaries, the idioms of patriarchally organized relations, and the gendered politics of leadership. In the First Buddyship, affect and agency became fungible features of presidential leadership.

This fungibility persists in the rhetorical moves of Clinton’s *Living History*. The narrating “I” of the First professional couple places herself at the center of presidential politics, as in this passage where she bemoans the failure of the Clinton health care initiative: “Someday we will fix the system. When we do, it will be the result of more than fifty years of efforts by Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter and Bill and me. Yes, I’m still glad we tried” (249). The slippage of the initial “we” of the American people as a collective to the second “we” of “Bill and me” registers Clinton’s self-figuration as co-President during the “Clinton” years. Consider as well the passage where she tells of the Presidential visit to Jordan and Israel in October 1994: “Heading back home, I believed I was leaving Israel another step closer to peace and security” (254). In such gestures the narrator of *Living History* inserts herself rhetorically in the subject position of co-equal partner in the phallic arena of Presidential leadership. The narrator of *Living History* mobilizes the power of rhetoric to intimate that she has already been a “real” “President,” already inhabited the subject position and exercised the phallic leadership attached to political leadership—in reality and in the pronouns of narration. This is authenticity by pronominal location.

The positing of the subject position of co-President in her version of the buddy narrative, however, reinforces “Hillary’s” uncomfortable feminization as First Lady, thereby undermining the authenticity effect of her self-performance as the dutiful wife. It also leaves Clinton open to charges of unseemly and opportunistic self-aggrandizement, demonstrated by the attacks on her credibility by Republicans, among them Dick Morris, who rewrites her narrative as *Rewriting History* (2004). But it is not only her frenzied antagonists who trouble her buddy story. The Buddy did as well. Bill Clinton penned his own presidential memoir. When

*My Life* appeared in 2004, dutifully delayed until the year after his wife's book appeared, his life story only energized opposition research. The book to retrieve his presidency and himself from the scandals of the Clinton years effectively marginalizes his wife's book, and undermines the credibility of her claims to the First Buddyship, as it was bound to do. In a certain way, Bill's narrative puts "Hillary" back in place and reminds the public that he will not go gently.<sup>12</sup> In one more way, the recourse to the generic mode of Buddy narrative undermines the credibility and sincerity of candidate "Hillary."

## 6. Celebrity Confession

A fifth generic mode haunts *Living History*, suppressed in the corporate voice of the narrating "I," emergent in traces only—the mode of celebrity confession. Written in the wake of the President's very public adultery, *Living History* is dogged by Bill Clinton's sex acts and indiscretions. With the publication of *The Starr Report* in 1998, the "president's privates," as Glass notes, had become the "vital center of public discussion in the United States and the world" (n.p.) and the White House had become a theater of capacious desire. Glass goes on to argue that "Clinton's apparent inability to restrain his libido, to keep his dick in his pants, constantly reminds us of the human penis behind the official phallus. This repeated thrusting of the pornographic penis into a public realm organized around the symbolic phallus indicates a crisis in the patriarchal structure of authority that has traditionally undergirded the American public sphere." Hillary Clinton's intimacy with the president's privates became a public affair in all senses of the word. That spectacular scandal had consumed the celebrity tabloids as well as national news media. Indeed, the coverage of the scandal, the Starr Report, and the impeachment turned the mainstream news organizations into touts for pornographic representations and pleasures, moral outrage, and crusader zeal.

Reviews of the book indicate that for many, finding out what Hillary would say and how she would say it drove readers to purchase and consume *Living History*.<sup>13</sup> The public, pundits, and politicians had struggled to script "Hillary's" reaction, predicament, and emotions, parsing every gesture, look, behavior, and statement. In the remediations of Hillary's predicament and response, her celebrity, initially attached to her position as First Lady, intensified. With the publication of her story, readers hoped for a first-hand account of what "Hillary" really felt about her husband's philandering and her public humiliation. Readers and reviewers

read for the mode of celebrity confession, the revelation of the gritty details of betrayal, humiliation, and rage. As Susan Douglas so vividly captures in *Enlightened Sexism* (2010), celebrity culture “is a world governed first and foremost by emotional ties” (247). It is driven by the desire for intimacy with one’s fantasy projections, and what agency comes from the persistent beliefs that pain and suffering are universally experienced and that at least one can exercise feel-good adulation, intense identification, and moralizing judgment.

The ensemble of actors composing *Living History* certainly anticipated that readers would buy Clinton’s autobiography to read for confession. But confessional mode is not a presidential mode. It is not surprising, then, that the narrating “I” of *Living History* manages the history of humiliation by refusing the narrative of individualizing and privatizing sentimentality with its promise of titillation and the pleasures attached to witnessing another’s debasement. The narrator says next to nothing about how it felt to endure her husband’s philandering and its aftermath. She acknowledges celebrity gossip culture and second-wave feminist judgment: “After all that has happened since, I’m often asked why Bill and I have stayed together. It’s not a question I welcome, but given the public nature of our lives, it’s one I know will be asked again and again. . . . All I know is that no one understands me better and no one can make me laugh the way Bill does. Even after all these years, he is still the most interesting, energizing and fully alive person I have ever met” (75). This is the extent of her “confessional.” This “Hillary” reveals only what is minimally necessary to come across as credibly human.

The narrator of *Living History* might have mobilized more sympathy by playing to the tropes of celebrity confession, emoting for a public nurtured on narratives of debasement, personal pain, and overwrought emotion. She might have brokered her celebrity to capture sympathy and admiration as the wronged woman. But to take up the subject position of wronged wife would be to keep Bill’s penis in the story and with it the identification of political leadership with the phallus, however much the exposure of the president’s penis as topic for circulation, satire, and constitutional crisis undermines the invisibility of the political economy of phallic power, as Glass suggests. Moreover, to succumb to the reader’s desire for intimate details of unhappiness, rage, shame, and humiliation would be to depoliticize the presidential aspirant, to keep her in her place, the place of the wounded heart. For the woman who would be president, the place of sentiment is not perceived as a place of performative capaciousness, of the president’s soft body; rather, it is the “natural” place of femininity.

And yet, there is a downside for the presidential aspirant in managing the public humiliation of the Lewinsky scandal by eschewing the mode of celebrity confession. Scandals of love found and lost animate and preoccupy celebrity culture, saturating the public sphere with larger-than-life dramas of (most often) philandering men and wronged women. In such dramas, celebrities are fully sexualized and sensualized beings, appearing to the public as untouchable icons of libidinal attraction or melodramatic icons of emotional excess in affective transactions around humiliation and shame (see Rubenstein 222–23). Protecting her “privacy” by refusing the subject position of sexualized celebrity icon, the narrator of *Living History* reinforces the media images and representations of “Hillary” as non-sexual, as too “manly” and self-controlled to be an object of desire to which potential supporters can be affectively attached. Such attachment, too, is a coin of the realm in celebrity politics. Moreover, as Janice M. Irvine observes, the “popular notion of authenticity that casts feelings as expressive of a core, moral self” is powerful in celebrity culture (3). The stoic constraint of the narrative voice and failure to disclose wounded feelings combine to project a “cold,” withholding “Hillary” rather than an emotionally spontaneous, or “real” Hillary.<sup>14</sup>

## 7. War Memoir

The narrator of *Living History* refuses the mode of confession with its allure of intimate revelations and “confidences” (Bauman 34), and instead pursues the survivor narrative, a public genre mobilized for the collective action of redressing wrongs and the wrongs of rights denied. This sixth generic mode incorporated in *Living History* can be observed in the narrator’s invocation of warrior discourse to ground the narrative grammar of the survivor story. *Living History*’s narrator takes up the subject position of the battle-scarred woman warrior, the subject under assault; but the assaults are not inflicted by a philandering husband (though she concedes them) and the perpetrator is not Bill Clinton. Wrongs are wrought by political opponents, the perpetrators are the Republican party and its media touts. The narrator represents herself as having survived the assault on everything she ever did; the assault on her past, as lived and remembered, which, she tells the reader, is an “archeological dig” for opposition research (105). The assaults are several: on her character (on her integrity, motivations, morals, ambition); on her identity; and on her gendered humanity as

insufficiently maternal, insufficiently feeling, given to irrational anger. Such assaults contest the realness and authenticity of Clinton's gendered person, identity, and history. In the discourse of Clinton's war memoir, the terms of reference are enemies, battles, victories. "This was all-out political war," the narrator says of Troopergate (209). In the chapter entitled "Soldiering On," she describes wearing "armor" that "thickened over the years" (443). The factional "battles" over health care reform were "the front lines" (230): "We soon learned that nothing was off-limits in this war and that the other side was far better armed with the tools of political battle" (230). Through generic adaptability, the domestic battle of the sexes (the afterlife of the Lewinsky scandal) recedes before a national battle between the right and the center left, the Republican and Democratic agenda for the nation.

As First Lady, the narrator didn't have her finger on the button; she hadn't ordered the armed forces to the field; but she invokes the discourse of warfare as a proxy for performing the defining acts of a presidency. She provides evidence to her readers that she has honed the idioms of muscular masculinity associated with presidential power, that she can exercise the discipline of phallic leadership. The *real* "Hillary" in this script is not the emoting, debased wife. The presidential aspirant is not looking to secure the bond with her public, with potential voters, around domesticated pain and suffering. She is looking to secure a bond around the figure of the warrior, stoical and single-minded, who soldiers on and fights for the country as an agent of the nation's muscular defense; who assures her readers of her self-control by means of the performance of stoic self-discipline. The survivor hones the hard presidential body promising the electorate protection, safety, and ruthless, firm certitude.<sup>15</sup>

And yet, the rhetoric of bellicosity deployed in the performance of phallic self-command undermines the intimacy of intersubjective exchange with readers seeking the authentic "Hillary" behind the carefully composed mask. For the woman who would be president the competing demands for what Nelson terms the hard and soft bodies of phallic leadership—the former "offer[ing] us a strong guarantee for national boundaries and self-identity" and the latter "hold[ing] out for us sensations of democratic recognition for our individuality and equalitarian exchange" ("Representative/Democracy" 334)—cannot be so easily negotiated. On the one hand, the political persona can appear too feminine to be president; on the other, she can appear too masculine to be president.



## 8. Conclusion: How to Be “Hillary”

The claim to power in the political field derives in large part from the projection of an ordered identity and a knowable, authentic self (Mansfield 80). The “Hillary” of *Living History* would perform that certainty. The iconic image on the front cover of the book certainly does its peritextual work in that direction, consolidating the fractured subject positions captured in snapshots on the back cover into the unified image of self-knowing self-sufficiency.<sup>16</sup> On the back cover, “Hillary” is dispersed into a pastiche of frames positioning the senator and former First Lady in her multiple roles, most particularly those of “first lady.” The family album situates Clinton in gendered familial roles and in generational identities, and in her ascriptive roles as daughter, wife, mother, first lady. The “Hillarys” of the back cover present a woman interpellated in heterogeneous subject positions; the front cover projects a singular iconic image of the celebrity. This is a figure sans “background,” sans relationship. The hair that has often been so unruly is almost perfectly coiffed. The eyes sparkle. The mouth smiles. This “Hillary’s” chin rests on her hands in a gesture of assured self-confidence and self-support. The eyes are marked with age lines, enough to project experience, but not too many to foreground aging. The cheeks are marked by smile lines, intimating the ludic break-up of a gendered mask. The cover gives us an iconic figure of a powerful woman, staring directly at the reader, unafraid of public scrutiny. It announces everything: I’m here. I’m together. I’m “like steel tempered in fire” (Clinton 393). In this celebrity photograph “Hillary” appears opaque because Clinton’s pose and image is one of enigmatic and glamorized “self-sufficiency” (Rubenstein 206–7). Nothing mediates this phallic presentation of Clinton. Here is the inaugural gesture of legitimate political power of the successful candidate, leaving behind the illegitimate political power identified with presidential spouses.

But you can’t always read a book by its cover. On the one hand, all these generic modes promise some grounds of authenticity upon which the candidate can project her bona fides of character, competence, readiness, and legitimacy for presidential leadership. On the other hand, the contradictions set in motion through the autobiography by the cacophony of generic modes expose the instability of the subject positions those modes would fix and the unity of political persona the presidential aspirant would consolidate for her reader: the subject positions—American individualist, second-wave feminist, First Lady, buddy, war hero—and the subject position of wronged wife the narrative would

erase, not to mention the gendered identities—feminine, feminist, masculine, “ambiguously gendered” (Rubenstein 209). The restlessness of generic modes also opens up the suspicion that it is impossible to locate the “real” Hillary, and any ground of authenticity to this political persona, except the Exhibit A of ambition.

Situating herself as “America’s Exhibit A,” the narrator of *Living History* invokes legal discourse, her professional lingua franca, and thereby situates her addressee as adjudicator of her authenticity, with judgment as the end of the reading. Has this woman projected a convincing performance of the capacity for presidential leadership? This question can be recast as a question of genre. Has she convinced us that she has, not the right stuff, but the right generic mode of gendered identity to be president?

And readers weighed in, on the book and on the “real” Hillary. Readings, of course, can be neither predicted nor contained, however much an ensemble of actors work to project authenticity in the candidate narrative. In the arena of presidential politics, readers bring their political ideologies, myths of national identity, desired repertoire of traits, and grounds of judgment to an evolving assessment of the politician and his or her personal fable. Those supportive of her bid for the presidency found the “real” Hillary in the second-wave feminist warrior woman. They could dismiss the recourse to feminine subject positions and feminized plots as obligatory for the feminist who would be president. Others found the “real” Hillary elsewhere. For some of them, *Living History* gave us the corporately produced faux authenticity of the test-marketed “Hillary,” the prized political commodity of contemporary political cultures. For her detractors, the “real” Hillary remained a scandal. That was the message of Morris’s *Rewriting History* and its front cover. Featured on the cover is a “cut-up” of Clinton. Her mouth in close-up appears in the top half of the cover, her eyes in close-up on the bottom half. The mouth signifies on multiple levels: as the danger zone or sprung trap of authenticity’s appearance; as the site of female seduction; as the “other” feminine mouth she didn’t have, the brightly soft one of Monica; as the origin of lying and subterfuge; as the vagina dentata, or toothed vagina. The mismatch pathologizes Clinton as an untrustworthy, congenital liar and demonizes her as monstrous woman, at once too feminine (in her wiliness) and not feminine enough (in her lack of sexual attraction). The dismembered “Hillary” here becomes the personification of scandal, the scandal of illegitimate, corrupting power whose name is woman. It isn’t just that Hillary Clinton lived through the scandal of the Clinton presidency. Her image is rebranded as a scandal, indeed the scandal of the feminine as disorderly and deceptive (see Mansfield 95).

Public judgments proliferated in the news, on talk radio, on the Internet. Feminist warrior. Shrewd politician. Scandalous self-fabricator. The public weighed the evidence: Too much femininity, too little femininity, too much feminism, too little feminism, too much muscular masculinity, too little phallic authority, too hot tempered, too coldly calculating. Too soft. Too hard. Too indeterminate. Too inauthentic. The performativity of genre that courses through *Living History* intersects the cultural politics of authenticity in the era of “enlightened sexism,” with its enduring “double standards” of judgment (see Douglas epigraph).

In the end, Clinton’s very conventional campaign autobiography refracts 30 years of feminist activism and its discontents. The aspiring candidate and her entourage in “Hillaryland” manage her “brand” as a legitimate political persona; and yet her autobiography keeps “woman” in circulation as “a political category” not yet fully incorporated in the political system as a legitimate political subject (Berlant 36). Reading her autobiography, we witness the instability of the grounds of a woman’s gendered identity in the last enclave of phallic exclusivity in American political life. We “brand” her as a particular kind of woman.

This corporate and public branding will go on and intensify, especially if, or when, Hillary Clinton makes another run for the presidential nomination in 2016. As I noted in the opening, Clinton most likely will have written another book by then. The narrator of this next book, the (perhaps former) secretary of state in the Obama administration, will also be a corporately produced persona of a would-be president. But what will that “Hillary” be? And how will we read the book?

## Notes

1. I am indebted to Ben Belado, Beth Davila, and Hannah Dickinson for surveying and summarizing recent work on presidential politics and for tracking reviews and commentaries on Clinton’s *Living History*.
2. The term “Hillaryland” became the nickname for the section of the 1992 presidential campaign headquarters in Little Rock, where Hillary Clinton’s staff organized her activities. “The name stuck,” she writes in *Living History* (115).
3. The Chinese translation caused uproar around the Chinese government’s act of censorship. The section in which Clinton describes her participation in and speech before the women delegates of the 1995 United Nations Beijing Conference on Women had been deleted.
4. “Celebrity politics,” argue Darrell M. West and John Orman, “fit the needs of a new media that focused on human features, not detailed substance” (10). See

their *Celebrity Politics* (2003). This is not to argue that celebrity is new to presidential politics. In over 200 years of American presidential politics, candidates for the presidency have often been celebrities of a kind, men who earned recognition for various achievements or exploits, men like Ulysses S. Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, and Dwight Eisenhower.

5. Tracking changes in the presentation of political personas in a succession of mediascapes, John R. Corner describes the contemporary moment of political performance as one characterized by the “degree of self-conscious strategy attending its planning and performance, the intensity of its interaction with media systems and the degree to which certain personal qualities” are “seen not merely to enhance but to *underwrite* political values” (387).

6. In “Teaching Voice of Authors, Narrators and Audience,” James Phelan, pointing to the “synesthesia of narrative voice,” suggests that “as we see words on a page we can hear sounds” (2). See *Teaching Narrative Theory* (2010), eds. James Phelan, Brian McHale, and David Herman. Julia Watson and I note in the revised edition of *Reading Autobiography* (2010) that “voice as an attribute of the narrating ‘I’ . . . is a metaphor for the reader’s felt experience of the narrator’s personhood, and a marker of the relationship between a narrating ‘I’ and his or her experiential history. . . . Although the text unfolds through an ensemble of voices, we as readers ascribe a distinct voice to that ensemble, with a way of organizing experience, a rhetoric of address, a particular register of affect, and an ideological inflection that is attached to the subject’s history” (79–80).

7. In “Representative/Democracy,” Nelson explores the implications of the Constitution’s production of the presidential system of government, one that locates “representivity’s logic and desires” (326) in the figure and body of the president as synecdoche for the nation. “This presidential institutionalization of representative democracy,” she argues, “offered a reassuringly hierarchicalized substitute for the messiness of local interaction: a rationally stratified structure, the atomization of factional interests through electoral distance, and (eventually) the ritual release of democratic energy in the form of elections” (333).

8. Over the last 50 years, as Philip Holden has observed, national leaders have produced a succession of such modernist narratives, especially national leaders of movements for decolonization who were identified or elected as “fathers” of the nation. Through a temporality of modernist, progressive linearity, an individualist fable of agentic heroism, and a realist aesthetics, these narratives join the story of “the growth of the individual” with “the growth of national consciousness and, frequently proleptically, the achievement of an independent nation-state” (5).

9. Parry-Giles and Blair explore how, through their speech acts in books and public addresses, First Ladies have projected themselves into the public arena of the nation’s political life. And after they have left the White House, former First Ladies have sometimes written autobiographies through which they add their “take” on the presidency of their husbands (565–99). Eleanor Roosevelt, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Clinton, all wrote books while residing in the White House; many wrote newspaper columns and delivered speeches at large public events, often events related to themes to which they have dedicated their attention, the beautiful America of Ladybird Johnson, the literacy of Laura Bush, the childhood obesity of Michelle Obama.

10. As First Lady Clinton writes *It Takes a Village* (1996). Parry-Giles and Blair remark that such an act is “part of the rhetorical performance of the role, illustrating the commitment to the history of the institution as well as the adherence to lingering republican motherhood values” (576). She writes a children’s book in 1998 entitled *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy: Kids’ Letters to the First Pets*.

11. The First Lady genre also projects her identification with a community of women and the terms of their identification with her as a professional woman. In this genre, the narrator connects herself laterally to other first ladies around the world and claims that her advocacy on behalf of women and children connects her to a larger transnational community of women fighting for women’s human rights. She locates the high point of her activism on behalf of women’s rights in her “triumphant” speech to the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing. Clinton’s advocacy for women’s human rights enacts a liberal feminist transnationalism: intervention on the part of a Western feminist to “rescue” third world women from third world men.

12. As Stephanie Li so perceptively observes in her reading of Bill Clinton’s autobiography in this special issue on Presidential memoir, he is pursuing his own ghosts. In his search for the secret parental past of his father, Bill Clinton produces a narrative of addiction and multiple personalities.

13. Reviews of Clinton’s *Living History* were, as could be expected, mixed. After the book’s role in Clinton’s potential presidential candidacy, the story of her response to the Lewinsky scandal is the most commonly addressed topic. There were two general patterns for the treatment of the Monica Lewinsky scandal in the reviews: (1) reproducing excerpts of the passages dealing with Lewinsky and Clinton’s reaction with very little attention to the rest of the book, or (2) chastising Clinton for not providing any new information and commenting on how relatively minor a role the Lewinsky scandal plays in the larger narrative. This second mode also tended to express skepticism about Clinton’s sincerity and/or honesty. After Clinton’s presidential aspirations, the scandal and her response to it in the book was the most frequently addressed topic.

14. In her brilliant analysis of Clinton’s “come back” in the 2000 senatorial campaign, Diane Rubenstein explores how Clinton is re-sexualized through her “listening tour” around New York during which she manages spontaneous laughter and cozy beer-drinking.

15. On the two bodies of the president, Nelson writes: “Americans have come to expect two somewhat contradictory symbolic roles from the president. In one aspect, Americans look for a sense of democratic connection and recognition—a heart-warming unity delivered by the ‘soft’ president who can ‘feel our pain.’ In the other, Americans look for an avenging protector, a steely sense of safety that comes through the toughness of the ‘hard’ and unforgiving president” (*Bad for Democracy* 6).

16. Exploring newspaper accounts of Clinton’s 2000 campaign that present Clinton as an enigma, Diane Rubenstein ponders the celebrity fascination with Clinton that lies in her projection of “that originary narcissism of childhood”: “While still not as fully affirmative as Nietzsche’s ‘Dionysian’ subject, she does not suffer from *ressentiment* and appears to have little need for male desire in order to please or desire herself” (207).

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