

## All About Hillary

My destiny was standing in front of me,

That's why I saw the light

--Gamble and Huff, "I Saw the Light," sung by Billy Paul

Hillary Clinton may crave the love of the public. Perhaps all politicians do, or if not the public's love, than its attention and its regard for her fearsome discipline, for her compulsive ambition. But surely the public, in some strange way, craves to love her, if only it could. Americans would love to elect a woman as president but probably not this particular woman, as she seems everything we loath and admire in a woman, simultaneously: smart, conniving, clever, bumbling, dishonest, fearless, contemptuous, contemptible, and coolly indifferent to the wreckage in her wake. If she doesn't crave love, if she is purposely not endearing, then she does crave power. That is not fatal in a woman, although it makes a great many people uncomfortable that she craves it so shamelessly. What makes it so difficult for the public to want for her what she wants for herself is that she craves power for its own sake, not for any higher purpose than her desire for it and her unshakable faith in her ability to be able to wield it well.

Senator Obama, her rival for the Democratic nomination, claims to want power for some reformative cause or for some notion of making the American people and the American nation better. He has brilliantly, spellbindingly tied his ambition, his passion for power, into the fabric of the American narrative, of American destiny: elect me as a black man to fulfill the American creed, the promise America made for itself in the Gettysburg's Address when Lincoln said we must bring forth a new nation out of the blood of the old. (In this instance, we would be bringing forth a new nation forged from the blood of the civil rights movement, led by someone who was a product, not a producer, of it, all the more telling for that fact.) You are the change when you come to recognize that by voting for me you have changed yourselves," Senator Obama might very well say. If some might question his competence because he is inexperienced or because he is black, none question his competence, in one sense, because he is a man. (Being a black man, I know of what I speak. Masculinity is a powerful attribute; and, as Toni Morrison said in one of her novels, black men are special, loved as much as they are reviled. Senator Obama is aware of this every time he preens like a peacock or a prized rooster in front of a bunch of fawning women.) Being a man compensates for a great deal of un-ease the public might feel, especially if one looks as fit and fitting for a job as Senator Obama does.

Senator Clinton wants power because power is something worthy to want and because she wants to be elected as the first woman who wanted it without subterfuge of any sort, openly desiring it as a man would. She wants power because she wants to lead, pure and simple, and because she feels she deserves the opportunity to lead. Senator Clinton does not apologize for wanting power or for blatantly showing how much she needs what she needs, how much she wants what she wants. The American public has been taught not to like women like this. Or, in this age of post-feminism, you either madly love a woman like this or you utterly despise her. The American public is equally divided.

The intense hatred that she generates, more profound than that for any other American politician since Richard Nixon, is a sign of love, of a sort, or of fascination with a woman who suggests in her bearing equal parts Queen Elizabeth and Eva Peron. It is Senator Clinton's greatest misfortune, as a colleague pointed out to me, that her qualities, good and bad, make her only a mediocre candidate for the presidency but would make her possibly a formidable, imposing president.

I wish to make one observation about Senator Clinton, based on director Joseph Mankiewicz's analysis of the women characters he created for his most famous and most critically acclaimed movie, *All About Eve* (1950), about the cut-throat backstage of Broadway, for which he won Oscars as director and script-writer. The film was about a young, opportunistic woman named Eve Harrington who becomes fast friends with an established actress named Margo Channing, whom she eventually supplants in a cunning, ruthless way, seducing the star playwright in the bargain. About Eve, Mankiewicz said in a lengthy 1972 interview, "Eves are predatory animals; they'll prefer a terrain best suited to their marauding techniques, hopefully abundant with the particular plunder they're after." He went on: "Eve is essentially. . . the girl unceasingly, relentlessly on the make. Not necessarily for men; as a matter of fact, only rarely. A particular man, perhaps, or series of men—or women—may be the means to an important end, but almost never the ultimate goal. That goal—toward which Eve is fanatically and forever at full charge—is no less than all of whatever there is to be had."

The opposite of Eve is Karen, the wife of the playwright. When the playwright becomes a success, the wife becomes superfluous. According to Mankiewicz: "Remember those services she'd performed as wife—so desperately needed by the Artist, so essential to his functioning at all? 'Mother'? The Mass Audience will replace her, there. They'll give suck to him, spoil, scold, cuddle, and reject him in a variety of ways beyond her power even to imagine. Cooks and house-cleaners will be hired now, of course, and come and go as they do, and her domestic duties will become that of personnel manager for backward delinquents." She will discover that "children become almost always the sole responsibility of the non-performing parent. . ."

"What else? Partner—wailing wall—even whipping post? Forget it. What with producers, packagers, lawyers, agents, business managers, publicity men, secretaries—his professional life and income will become so compartmentalized and overstructured that he, himself, will rarely know what they are. . . She as far as her contribution to her husband's life is concerned, will become one of the smaller moving parts in a mechanism." And she "adjusts to sexuality infidelity by her spouse."

It is easy to see how Hillary Clinton is both of these women in the public's mind—Eve, the grasping, usurping Harpy, and Karen, the helpless appendage to a highly successful man. Senator Clinton is the predatory woman and also the victimized woman. It is indeed much to her credit that as the husband of a famous politician (who is very little different from a performer or an Artist), she has refused to play the role of the suffering, enduring wife, but rather has chosen to remind her husband, if not the world, that he is

married to Eve, not Karen. The marriage is a bargain and she wants her fair cut, which means her chance to be a star and not simply a supporting member. It is her combination of these two archetypes that makes Senator Clinton a much more mythic figure in American politics than Senator Obama is, although not more worthy to be president because of it. (Obama is actually simpler to understand, despite his appearance of being more thoughtful or intellectual.) She is obscene and heroic, exploitative and sympathetic, magnificently, exquisitely, and hideously flawed. There are days when I suppose the public prays that she will become president and days when we shudder at the thought of her in the White House.