

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE “FOURTH GENRE”: EXAMINING THE LITERARY
CHARACTERISTICS OF BIOGRAPHY THROUGH THE WORK OF
CARL BERNSTEIN
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Whether nature has acted wrongly or rightly in destroying the
mould in which she cast me,
can only be decided after I am dead.”
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The art of biography can be traced back to a time even before writing existed, in societies where ancient “orally recited sagas” (Hamilton 11) “answered a variety of social needs, from kinship connection to group entertainment” (Hamilton 12). Biography has evolved greatly over the thousands of years since its beginning, but its basic purpose still remains the same; which is to provide “insight into human character, experience of life, and human emotion, as guides to our own complex self-understanding” (Hamilton 10). Jeffery Meyers writes that the “serious biographer . . . must not only discover new facts that bring the subject to life, but also master the material and make the facts meaningful (Meyers 696). This task is not always easy, but it is possible for a dedicated biographer to achieve their goal, and proof of that lies in the quality of some of the biographies in print today.

I feel that the work of Carl Bernstein exhibits the exact qualities Meyers and other scholars encourage in biographers: dedication (or “demonic devotion” (Meyers 696)) to one’s subject, masterful use of literary style, and emphasis on presenting information in a way that paints a picture of not only what a particular subject has achieved, but who that subject is as a person. To prove that Bernstein is a gifted biographer and writer, and that his books are exemplary pieces of nonfiction, I will first discuss the genre of nonfiction and give an overview of the history of biography, in order to provide background for the reader on the genre I wish to discuss. I will give a brief summary of Bernstein’s life and career up to the present and point out the specific technical and stylistic elements of his writing that ele-

vate his work to the top of the nonfiction field and, I will argue, that make it comparable in terms of quality with respected works of fiction. In demonstrating that Bernstein's work not only employs some of the common characteristics of fiction writing, but that it is equal in quality to fictional works, I hope to disprove the notion that the genre of nonfiction, and biography in particular, is only meant to contain impersonal, factual accounts, and that even though the subjects of Bernstein's biographies have not been authors themselves, his biographies still deserve to be considered "literary."

It is easy to determine whether a certain work of literature should be classified as "fiction" or "nonfiction." The difficulty seems to lie in the act of classifying works of nonfiction into sub-genres. In their article in *References & User Services Quarterly*, Barry Trott and Abby Alpert introduce the phrase "narrative nonfiction," defining it as "any nonfiction genre or topic that emphasizes story" (Trott 26). In doing this, they already begin to draw a line between this form of nonfiction, which uses "literary technique" (27), and what they refer to as "informational nonfiction" (26), the purpose of which, as its name suggests, it simply to provide information.

Their article goes on to cite another definition of narrative nonfiction, made by Robert Vare, a senior editor at *The Atlantic*, in which he calls it "essentially a hybrid form, a marriage of the art of storytelling and the art of journalism—an attempt to make drama out of the observable world" (Trott 26). Trott and Alpert's article goes on to explain their reasoning behind this name. "The 'narrative' [part of the definition] requires elements that go beyond merely reporting facts or technical or expository writing. How the story is told is as significant as what happened . . . The 'nonfiction' element means that a story is based on fact" (26).

In his article, Robert Root writes "the problem with 'nonfiction' is that it is a one-size-fits-all garment draped over artifacts requiring something tailored. Definitions of nonfiction are . . . on one end so staggeringly encompassing . . . and on the other end so idiosyncratically circumscribed" (Root 245). Root seems happy to recognize narrative nonfiction as a separate entity from poetry, fiction, and drama, but he believes that creative writing has "been seen as a vehicle for the discussion of fiction and poetry, rather than as an equivalent artistic outlet" (245), and thus he senses that current perceptions of the genre are varied and flawed. Even as they attempt to divide nonfiction into spe-

cific sub-genres later in their article, Trott and Alpert acknowledge that “one of the difficulties in the categorization process is that many narrative nonfiction books are hybrids,” (28) making it hard to classify a book when it has diverse qualities that would allow it to fit appropriately into a number of sub-genres.

Trott and Alpert’s article divides narrative nonfiction into sub-genres, the first of which is classified as “Biography/Autobiography, Memoirs, Diaries” (Trott 28). Biography, as a genre of narrative nonfiction, deserves careful consideration and study. Its purpose is not only to provide factual information, but to “[record] and [interpret] real lives” (Hamilton 1). In his book *Biography: A Brief History*, Nigel Hamilton asserts that one of biography’s main purposes is to provide “insight into human character, experience of life, and human emotion, as guides to our own complex self-understanding” (Hamilton 10). Indeed, the earliest forms of biography did fulfill those requirements.

Hamilton writes that the practice of biography writing began in classic Greek and Roman societies, where records were kept by a “compiler” who “put together collections of essays about statesmen, soldiers, or philosophers” (20). These records allowed their writers and the people who would read them later to gain information about influential people in their society and, in the words of the essayist Plutarch, the opportunity to “[imitate] the virtues of the men whose actions” (21) were described in the collections of essays. In this way, ancient biography held dual functions in that it was commemorative and instructive, in which the biographer posed as both a historian and a painter of “a soul in its adventures through life” (21).

The “first golden age of biography” (34) ended with the collapse of the Roman empire, and it remained in the shadows until the Hebrew Scriptures were written. The Old Testament of the Hebrews is “based not only on songs, oral legend, traditions, and court records, but . . . [also] on the scripted histories . . . of the tribes of Israel” (35), says Hamilton. Yet, it was the account of the life of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels of the New Testament, an account that “marked a wholly new symbolic power in Western life depiction” (36) with its “homely detail . . . use of anecdotal dialogue . . . [and] depiction of a personality in crisis” (37), that truly stood out as the biographical masterpiece of the Bible. As Christians, following the example of Saint Augustine, began to write their own life stories and spread them

around the world in an attempt to convert more people to Christianity, the genre of biography (or, in this case, autobiography) was cemented in Europe.

Hamilton observes that with the beginning of the Renaissance, biography returned to its roots: "biographical depictions showed a return to the classical struggle between, on the one hand, the commemoration of the dead" to spur "more moral behavior . . . and, on the other, the need to be able to identify with . . . another mortal individual's life journey" (61). Ancient biographies and autobiographies were translated and re-published, and new historical accounts of secular lives were produced. Writers like Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh "wonderfully enriched" (79) the art of biography in the sixteenth and seventeenth century through their respected works. Hamilton notes that during this time, "life depictions grew in quantity, quality, and variety, from journalistic pamphlets to multi-volume tomes" (80). Thomas Fuller coined the word "biographist" in his *History of the Worthies of England* in 1662, "Bishop Gauden . . . coined the alternative, more English-sounding term 'biographer' in the same year," and "the term 'a biography,' the word used to describe a specific work of written life depiction, had already become fashionable. John Dryden's definition of biography as the "history of particular men's lives" (81) in 1683 became a "neat definition" that obtained "almost indelible influence on the way the public saw the previous three thousand years of life depiction" (81).

It took "almost three hundred years to extend the word 'biography' to encompass the many possible forms of life depiction—and to cover women," (85) but the work of notable biographers, such as Samuel Johnson, did help to move biography into a more journalistic frame of context. In this context, as Johnson himself put it, both the "vice and virtue" (88) of a biography's subject was examined, and the study of "history [was discouraged] in favor of biography," (85) the latter being a form that was more focused towards a reader's "identification" (89) with the life of the subject, rather than the reader just having access to a series of facts about a figure of interest.

Along with the growing popularity of biography came an interest in autobiography. New autobiographies "[meditated] on [the author's] personal experience as experience, rather than as a tribute to divinity" (96). The autobiographer John-Jacques Rousseau was a man known for his "relentless honesty and

self-lacerating self-aggrandizement,” (97) which is evidenced by his work *Confessions*. Of course, even an autobiography cannot be an entirely complete or subjective account of a life, but, as Hamilton noted, autobiographers of the 1700s “accepted that it might be difficult to be entirely truthful about oneself—but they were trying” (99).

The importance of autobiography as a form of nonfiction became even more pronounced after the American and French Revolutions in 1776 and 1789, respectively, because “not only were revolutionaries of interest to the world, but they could even paint their own life stories without waiting for posthumous biographers to do so” (100). As the genre developed in the Victorian period, “it became increasingly focused on the ‘rights of the individual’ and demonstrated “a growing interest in the self” (101). The personal experiences of the Puritans who had traveled to America from Europe to escape religious persecution were very different from that of the European clergy, and they were able to “speak freely and write frankly and with relatively little inhibition” (102). Autobiographers, especially the Romantic poets, began to recognize the fact that their work would most likely eventually be read by the public, as shown by Byron’s statement that he might “be letting out some secret or other to paralyze posterity” (103).

Unfortunately, this “new propellant” (103) of biography soon came up against obstacles. Hamilton theorizes that a combination of factors, including imperialism, “contributed to the demand for patriotic and exemplary, rather than honest, lives,” (111) and changed the way biography and autobiography were written. Another cause he lists was the economy, an economy in which there became a “profession of ‘biographer’” (120). The paid biographer was “sucked into a vortex where veneration was extolled, but criticism of a man’s private life and . . . good name threatened to tarnish the Victorian edifice of work, empire, and medals” (122). Instead of the nonfiction writers of the time, it came to pass that the Victorian novelists were the ones who followed Johnson’s example and continued to showcase both the good and bad elements of human character in their works. In his book, Joseph Reed writes that “masterpieces of biography seem to be more significantly atypical than typical of the period in which produces them, and a coherent line of literary development can more frequently be traced through bad works than through good” (Reed 3).

Hamilton explains that in the early twentieth century, people "working in fields other than written biography began to covet the very thing that was the mainstay and rationale of biography: real lives . . . [and] real-life experiences" (130). Sigmund Freud, a neurologist, went against Victorian "uptightness and obfuscation" (134) when he discussed the intimate details of his patients' lives frankly in his writing, and found "shocking success" (135). Freud argued that biographers should not look at a subject's life as an "idealized Victorian exemplar, but as a psychological riddle" (136). The works of Freud, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, and other writers at the beginning of the twentieth century did "damage to Victorian hypocrisy" (152) by pointing out the "self-satisfied, preening tomes of Victorian hero-worship" produced by the "biographers" of their time. By 1929, a "new biography" (153) had come to America. Instead of "trying to write man's eulogy or commemorate his achievements or hold him up as a profitable example, [they sought] to understand what manner of man he was, to analyze his character and motives, and to classify him and put him in his place with other . . . human beings" (153).

Hamilton brings up an important point when he writes that the introduction of film into American society brought about an entirely new medium in which biography could be expressed. "Given society's moral rules regarding the depiction of real as opposed to fictionalized life," (170) documentary was "unable to compete" (170) with the more radical, sensual, and exciting fictional films that "came to offer a closer, more vivid portrait of human lives" (171). But this exciting new artistic outlet also had its drawbacks; as Hamilton notes, "with the advent of the soundtrack in 1928, movies overnight became the hypnotic opium of the people—a medium that could be exploited . . . for money . . . [and] political purposes" (173).

World War II once again "[changed] the parameters of Western biography" (189). "Millions of individuals' wills" (187) triumphed when the allied forces emerged victorious at the end of the war, and some of the servicemen who fought in the war and had since retired turned to writing about their experiences for monetary gains. This biography, produced "by people, on behalf of the people, and about individual people . . . was in this sense a wholly modern phenomenon" (189). Though biography existed as a "state-censored propaganda with a heavy stamp" (189) in the remaining dictatorships of the world, "in . . . democ-

racies the pursuit of biography . . . began to flourish as never before. The people in Western democracies realized the importance of truthfulness and individuality and began to value them greatly in their works. And these people, including blacks, Jews, feminists, homosexuals, and hippies, were themselves very diverse, referred to as the “antiheroes of the day [who] demanded not only to change the approach and media of biography, but also to be heard by it” (194).

Hamilton writes that by the end of the late twentieth century, the role of biography had become “a plurality of motives and agendas that still characterize biography as it is practiced in different forms and in different media today” (214). Biography in our present society is called on to provide “commemoration . . . deeper insight into personality, identity, and the self . . . factual record . . . the raising of individuals and groups from obscurity . . . entertainment. . . [and] artistic license” (213). Harold Nicolson feared that “print biography as a ‘branch of literature’ might . . . cease to exist, for people interested in ‘all the facts’ would demand biographical work as information—thus spelling the ruin of biography as an art” (214). However, the “boom in biographical output in every medium” (214) prevented such a thing from happening because the exploration of lives “through fictional, filmic, and other narrative techniques” (215) became so popular. After the 1960s biography evolved in that it was “no longer limited to conventional lifespans. Authors, playwrights, and filmmakers now claimed the right to address fragments of lives, too” (215). Every period of a subject’s life—“birth, childhood, early years, life, career, relationships, death, and the afterlife” (216)—became fair game for biographers. Modern biography in England and America grew increasingly fascinated with celebrity and began “to depict, and even deconstruct, living individuals” (219). Perhaps because of biography’s close ties to fiction writing, it, in its modern form, began to borrow narrative techniques, confirming Nicolson’s prediction that “fiction—or at least the techniques and imaginative play of fiction—might be incorporated with biography” (240).

In the end of his book, Hamilton argues that the current definition of biography is too narrow, considering how it is now “represented in almost every field of human inquiry” (279). He points out the influence it has had in broadcasting, publishing, and more recently over the internet in the form of weblogs, and questions why it is practically ignored in academic circles when

many universities now have programs for the study of subjects ranging from "sports history . . . [to] hip hop . . . [to] journalism" (280). He suggests that perhaps biography, while still popular, has lost some of its appeal, because the "representation of the 'real' has become an unpleasant and meretricious spectacle" (281). He also notes "the fact that 'objective' and 'subjective' are not well delineated in today's media" (282) and that "it may be said, in fact, that biography has largely changed places with fiction. Where once factual biographical reporting seemed hard and certain, while fiction could be dismissed as "make believe," the roles have are now reversed" (283). However "inartistic . . . and tacky" (291) some depictions of present life can be, Hamilton reminds us that today's biographers still strive to achieve the same basic goals of honesty, individualism, and self-exploration that has always largely defined the genre.

Former Washington Post writer Carl Bernstein is just one example of someone in today's world who has taken interest in writing about the lives of historical figures, despite the fact that he is not a career "biographer." Bernstein "was born into a politically active family on February 14, 1944" of "leftist sympathizers and one-time Communists," (Jensen 247) which probably contributed—for better or worse—to his life-long interest in politics. Bernstein himself admits that he "was a terrible student" and says, "the only thing I could do was write" (Jensen 247). Fortunately, Bernstein recognized his ability and "found his calling in a tenth-grade journalism course," and continued to gain experience in the field by working on his high school's newspaper and editing "The Lincoln Torch, a Jewish youth group newspaper" (Jensen 248).

"His father helped him get a job as copyboy with the Washington Star" (Jensen 248) when he was still in high school and Bernstein started working for the Star full-time when he dropped out of the University of Maryland, where his "penchant for feature writing and investigative reporting" helped him rise "quickly from copyboy to reporter" (Jensen 248). Bernstein moved from the Star to the Daily Journal in 1965, and an article he wrote for the paper about a massive Manhattan power failure "won . . . one of his three first prizes in the 1965 New Jersey Press Association competitions" (Moritz 33). Bernstein then "used his clippings [from the Journal]" (Jensen 248) to "[land] a spot on the metropolitan staff of the Washington Post" (Moritz 33). When Bernstein was asked by an interviewer at the Post,

“Are you political?” he replied that the only two organizations he had ever belonged to were the B’nai Brith Youth and the Newspaper Guild” (Jensen 248). Since he was opposed to the idea of “reporting as stenography,” Bernstein often clashed with his editors who disapproved of his dynamic, subjective writing style” (Moritz 33). Bernstein became so “frustrated by the editors’ repeated denials of his requests to transfer to the national desk or for reassignment to Southeast Asia, [that he] submitted an application to Rolling Stone” (Moritz 34). However, Bernstein’s assignments at the Post grew much more interesting after a break in at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee on June 17, 1972.

Bernstein “had a reputation for maneuvering his way into stories not originally assigned to him” (“Bernstein” 1) and this case intrigued him. Bernstein started by writing a sidebar to cover the Watergate break in, but soon he was asking “for a chance to follow up on leads [his colleague] Bob Woodward was not pursuing” (Moritz 34). Bernstein and Woodward were distrustful of one another at first, but soon they decided to “combine their efforts and concentrate on tracing the ‘money chain’ from the [Watergate] burglars to the head man” (Moritz 34). The reporters, “known collectively in the newsroom . . . as ‘Woodstein’,” (“Bernstein” 2) ultimately uncovered President Nixon’s involvement in Watergate and co-wrote the book *All the President’s Men* to document what they learned about the scandal over time. Their book was “hailed by journalists and media critics alike as a ‘case-book on news-reporting’ . . . and also won plaudits from literary critics as a skillfully written ‘political whodunit’” (Moritz 34), and was soon followed up by *The Final Days*, which gives an insider’s perspective on Watergate and the end of the Nixon presidency.

Bernstein’s name likely would have gone down in history even if his career had ended with his Watergate coverage, but he continued to be a respected figure in the journalism long after Nixon resigned. He “left the Washington Post in 1976 to begin studying the turbulent McCarthy era . . . in 1979, he was named Washington Bureau Chief for ABC . . . [and] he worked as a correspondent for ABC until 1984” (Jensen 249). Afterwards, Bernstein returned to writing and published *Loyalties*, a book that was “one part McCarthy-era history, one part Bernstein family history, and one part [Bernstein’s] personal account of his relationship with his father” (Jensen 249).

Perhaps an interest in biography was sparked in Bernstein while he was writing his memoir, because in between writing articles for publications like *The New Yorker* and *Rolling Stone*, he published two of them: *His Holiness*, a biography of the late Pope John Paul II, co-written with Marco Politi, which was published in 1996; and *A Woman in Charge*, a biography of the former first lady and current US Senator, Hillary Clinton, which was published in 2007.

Bernstein's *A Woman in Charge* appears to be a bridge between two worlds—a hybrid of the investigative reporting that defined his glory days at the *Washington Post* and the more narrative, literary style of writing he appears to have gravitated towards later in his life with the publication of his memoir and two biographies. Thus, his new biography about Clinton is an ideal example of the type of book that Trott and Alpert describe with their term "narrative nonfiction": it "uses literary devices of fiction to take nonfiction beyond the summarization of a series of facts and into the realm of storytelling" (Trott 26).

Just as the subject of Bernstein's latest biography has faced scrutiny for a number of things in her lifetime, Bernstein's *A Woman in Charge* has also received its share of criticism. While Peggy Curran of *The Gazette* acknowledges that Bernstein's book contains "enough facts to craft a vivid account of the life of the woman who aspires to gain the White House—this time, for herself," (Curran 13) she also believes that "there is something elusive and unsatisfying about this portrait, a failure to unveil the core of this smart, savvy, stoic woman who remains so inscrutable" (Curran 13). Some say that *A Woman in Charge* "covers familiar ground and has little to say about Clinton's years as a senator," (Geltin E.1) writes Josh Getlin of the *Los Angeles Times*. Getlin also points out that Bernstein's "difficulties in getting the story clearly influenced his final product" (Geltin E.1). These "difficulties" resulted from the fact that both Bill and Hillary Clinton declined to be interviewed by Bernstein. Bernstein explains at the end of his biography that "both Bill and Hillary Clinton told me on several occasions they would welcome being interviewed by me. In the end . . . through their spokespersons they said they did not wish to favor one of several books being written about Hillary" (565).

The flaws that some might detect in Bernstein's book seem to be balanced out, if not outweighed, by the critical praise it has received. It is *The Christian Science Monitor* that best explains

the appeal of Bernstein's book—what separates it from many of the other biographies that have been written about Hillary Clinton. In his article for the publication, Peter Grier writes that the best thing about Bernstein's biography is that "it's a book. It's not 500 pages of shocking tabloid headlines . . . Nor is it a paean secretly plotted by the Hillary for President campaign" (Grier 13). Instead, he calls the book "a full scale biography of the former first lady and possible future president" and says, "Given the difficulty of writing a rounded portrait of a polarizing figure whose public life is far from finished, this book is really a considerable achievement" (Grier 13).

A comparison of *A Woman in Charge* with Bernstein's earlier work, *All the President's Men*, is a testament to not only to Bernstein's expert handling of the task of writing about a difficult subject, but to how much he has grown as a narrative writer during the decades between the publications of the two books. Both books are written in third person, which adds to the fictional feel of the work, especially in the case of *All the President's Men*, a book that consists mainly of detailed accounts of what Woodward and Bernstein went through as they were working to uncover who was behind the Watergate break in. In opposition to Bernstein's visible personality as author, narrator, and subject in *All the President's Men*, his presence in *A Woman in Charge* is very limited.

Because they are the stars of their book, the personalities of Woodward and Bernstein come to the forefront in some parts of their narrative and a touch of humor to the otherwise serious and straightforward book. The authors are not afraid to admit to the squabbling that they sometimes engaged in, writing, "To those who sat nearby in the newsroom, it was obvious that Woodward was not always a smoothly operating piece of journalistic machinery. The two fought, often openly" (Bernstein, *President's Men* 50). Bernstein pokes fun at himself in one part of the book when he explains how he used his "primitive high-school Spanish" to talk to a Watergate source from Mexico and theorizes that he had "heard the whole Watergate story [in his conversation with that source] and didn't understand it" (Bernstein, *President's Men* 53).

The book is literary enough to employ an occasional metaphor: "the nighttime visits were fishing expeditions" (Bernstein, *President's Men* 59), and it takes a break from presenting the facts of the case to lament about Bernstein's stolen

bicycle or discuss the hours Woodward spent in waiting in a parking garage for a source. Though it does employ a more literary feel than most journalism, including the use of third person limited point-of-view, it relies heavily on the fact-based reporting that defines the newsroom. The book is full of the interviews that Bernstein and Woodward conducted with their sources, as well as accounts of the evidence they discovered along the way, and summaries of Woodstein's Post articles are given to help the reader understand how they were slowly exposing what was happening to the public as they gained more information. It might not be completely "barren of ideas, or imagination," ("Bernstein" 3) as Richard Rovere wrote, but it is lacking in terms of style and content in comparison to Bernstein's later work.

Like most biographers, Bernstein ventured into the genre because he became interested in researching and depicting the lives of well-known people in today's world. He explained in an interview with Carole Goldberg of the McClatchy-Tribune Business News that he "was fascinated that the only person who came out of [the effort to impeach Bill Clinton] with an enhancement of reputation was Hillary [Clinton]" (Goldberg 1). At the same time that the former president was going through impeachment hearings, his wife was meeting with advisors and considering running for a seat in the United States Senate. "The symmetry [of the events] fascinated me," (Goldberg 1) explained Bernstein.

To achieve symmetry in his own writing, Bernstein remains an objective narrator. He uses accounts from sources both friendly and hostile to the Clintons, and presents both sides to the story in his biography. The fifth chapter of Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* outlines what the authors call "An Approach to Style" and gives "some suggestions and cautionary hints that may help the beginner find the way to a satisfactory style" (Strunk 100) when writing. "Style is an increment of writing. When we speak of Fitzgerald's style, we don't mean his command of the relative pronoun, we mean the sound his words make on paper" (97) Strunk and White explain. One of their pieces of advice to writers is to not inject opinion into their work.

In order to best characterize Clinton, Bernstein maintains a balance throughout his biography in which he presents both positive and negative aspects of her personality and character, portraying her in a grey light rather than a more simple black or

white. Bernstein writes that the failing of the Clinton administration's universal health care plan "was largely Hillary's doing" (394) and reinforces his statement with a quote from the former New York Times reporter Bob Boorstin, who asserts that Hillary's "self-righteousness" (394) was "at the core" (394) of "what killed health care" (394).

However, Bernstein also calls her preparation for her appearances before committees of the House and Senate in which she advocated health care legislation "picture perfect," (395) and he notes that she "answered more than 150 questions from the [committee] members, never consulting notes or aides sitting behind her" (395). In one quote he provides from Boorstin, the reporter also seems to acknowledge that the "decision to give [the responsibility of forming a health care plan] to Ira Magaziner, and keep it within . . . friends [of the Clintons], and timing, and all sorts of other things" contributed to the failure of the plan, though he maintains that Clinton's flaws were the main cause. As David Segal of the Washington Post writes, Bernstein's "book is about as Hillary-neutral as a Hillary book can be" (Segal C. 1).

Reviews of *A Woman in Charge* all seem to agree that Bernstein's book is "a biography rather than a book-length gossip column," (Troy 1) some other biographies of Hillary Clinton presumably being closer to the latter. Gil Troy calls Bernstein's book a "balanced, thoughtful, convincing biography" (Troy 1), and praises his "eye for detail and his authorial integrity" (Troy 1). By refusing to "sacrifice his scruples," (Troy 1) Bernstein is not only presenting his subject in a more accurate and humane light than other authors have presented her in, he is also setting an example for other writers who aspire to become respected journalists or biographers through his careful research and ability to report the facts of Hillary Clinton's life and let his reader form their own judgments of her. In doing this, Bernstein is following Strunk and White's rule that tells the author "do not inject opinion" (Strunk 114).

Bernstein's personal use of neutrality his book can be attributed to his belief that journalism should be more fair and ethical. In an interview with Julia Reynolds in the McClatchy-Tribune Business News Bernstein criticized the "triumph of idiot culture" in which "the question of truthfulness is becoming such a big issue" (Reynolds). Bernstein feels that the owners of media outlets are more committed to having "big profit margins" rather

than the "best obtainable version of the truth" (Reynolds). Hugh Downs writes in a forward to *Stories That Changed America: Muckrakers of the 20th Century* that "liberty is a living tissue that needs an immune system. The First Amendment safeguards our rights of speech and peaceable assembly. But it is the exercise of these rights that constitutes the immune system" (Downs 15). He believes that it is the responsibility of the free press to "[push] us back on course" when we "veer, and the veering becomes dangerous" (Downs 15).

Bernstein, too, seems to be aligned with this mode of thinking, but, unlike Downs, his faith in the press is wavering after the years he has spent as a journalist. Bernstein says in his interview with Reynolds that "the public good doesn't drive [the press] anymore," and that "there is an absence of leadership in both politics and journalism" and that this "has been at a great cost" (Reynolds). Bernstein seems to urge the present-day press to go back to the strategies used by journalists in the past and "report the truth" (Reynolds) on important, substantive issues rather than focus on celebrity.

In *A Woman in Charge*, Bernstein follows another one of Strunk and White's important rules. In opposition to his visible personality as author, narrator, and subject in *All the President's Men*, his presence in *A Woman in Charge* is very limited. Aside from a few comparisons between events that happened during the Clinton presidency and Watergate, which point back to Bernstein's coverage of the scandal during his time at the Post, the reader has no hint as to what the author is like as an individual or his personal feelings towards the subject of his biography. Bernstein's third person objective account in *A Woman in Charge* prevents the thoughts of the narrator from appearing in the work and instead only includes facts about Hillary Clinton and her husband that Bernstein learned from his sources.

Since Woodward and Bernstein are both the narrators and the main characters in *All the President's Men*, some subjective material is bound to appear in the book, even though it seems that in the authors' struggle to keep their Watergate revelations as factual as possible. A description of the atmosphere in the Washington Post newsroom is an example of Bernstein and Woodward's undeniable presence in their book in which they write,

Sussman and the other editors at the post were by

temperament information. The reporters were never formally assigned to work on Watergate full time. They sensed that as long as the stories continued to come, there would be no problem. If [the reporters] failed to produce, anything might happen in the competitive atmosphere of the Post newsroom . . . The invariable question, asked only half-mockingly of reporters by editors at the Post (and then up the hierarchical line of editors) was “What have you done for me today?” (Bernstein, *President’s Men* 52).

In contrast, in *A Woman in Charge*, Bernstein attempts to keep his own thoughts out of the book and instead draws on factual information and the subjective opinions of other people in his biography. Of course, Bernstein was not able to talk with the subject of his book personally, but his interviews with friends and enemies of the Clintons, and more neutral subjects, provide a broad portrait of her character and personality. For example, Bernstein discusses Hillary Clinton heading the Clinton administration’s health care, and explains,

Panetta, Rivlin, and Bentsen, as relative strangers to the Clintons, though no less troubled, had to be more concerned about offending the new first lady. Gently, they took their worries directly to the president-elect. It became clear that Bill didn’t want to disappoint his wife on an issue that obviously meant so much to her. Nonetheless, they all made known their belief that it was a mistake for the president to appoint his wife to run the initiative (Bernstein, *In Charge* 223).

Thus, Bernstein follows Strunk and White’s rule which advises writers to “place [themselves] in the background,” (Strunk 100). In doing this, he places the spotlight firmly on his subject and the people who have interacted with her throughout her life.

Strunk and White also encourage writers to “gauge the nature and extent of the enterprise and write from a suitable design” (101). They explain that this means “to write a biography, you will need at least a rough scheme; you cannot plunge in blindly and start ticking off fact after fact about your subject” (101). Bernstein achieves this goal by covering the progression of Clinton’s life by moving in a chronological order and compiling quotations from his sources to obtain a broad view of what was taking place in her life at a given time. In one example of this, Bernstein neatly sums up Clinton’s tendency to want privacy

when he writes,

Hillary Clinton, in many respects a very private person, intended to keep it that way. . . She had rarely been reticent about her political views or what she saw as matters of right and wrong . . . However, she zealously protected herself (and her family) from almost any invasive inquiry that might reveal something of her emotional life, her deeper ambitions, or her machinations (Bernstein, *In Charge* 221).

Strunk and White encourage writers not to "explain too much" and to "let the conversation itself disclose the speaker's manner or condition" (109). *Elements of Style* also cautions the writer to "make sure the reader knows who is speaking (111). Bernstein achieves both of these things in his biography, as demonstrated with two passages from his book: "Balancing the conservative-mind, liberal-heart equation, addressing the "tumor of the soul," filling the "spiritual vacuum" that Lee Atwater has discovered on his deathbed, these notions, [Hillary] suggested, would inform the Clintonian principles of governance (Bernstein, *In Charge* 300). "Bill recalled so many years before when Hugh drove to Arkansas to help in that first campaign in 1974. 'He never told a living soul I was in love with his daughter, just went up to the people and said . . . "this kid's all right"' (Bernstein, *In Charge* 303).

The careful use of style exhibited in Bernstein's biography is equaled by the effort he put into researching the subject of his biography and by the technical quality of his writing. Bernstein writes in his notes at the end of *A Woman in Charge* that he "interviewed more than two hundred people" (565) in a seven-year time period and he revealed to reporters that he "worked 18-hour days in the last year" (Segal C.1) in order to finish his book. The book is also packed with the quotes from his sources and presents facts about the lives of Hillary and Bill Clinton as clearly and objectively as possible. In a nod to his earlier days as a reporter for the *Washington Post*, Bernstein occasionally references the Watergate scandal—a story that he broke along with colleague Bob Woodward—in comparison to events that took place during the Clinton administration. One example of this is when he discusses the impeachment trial of Bill Clinton. Bernstein writes that the report of the independent council, Starr, "suggested that there were eleven grounds for [the] impeachment [of Bill Clinton]," (522) and contrasts this with the report of

the independent council who investigated Richard Nixon, which “made no suggestions about impeachment or any other matter entrusted to the Congress under the Constitution” (522). His lengthy coverage of the Whitewater scandal and the fallout that resulted from it during the Clinton administration show Bernstein’s devotion to and interest in investigative journalism.

But while some of the more journalistic characteristics of Bernstein’s book can be attributed to his experience as a reporter, other parts of the book employ certain literary characteristics that Bernstein must have picked up when he wasn’t on the beat. His book follows a chronological structure, beginning with Clinton’s childhood in Illinois and ending with her decision to enter the current presidential election, but breaks from his narrative at certain times to relate a specific event in Clinton’s life to those from her past, or one in the future that had yet to influence her. For example, Bernstein jumps ahead while discussing the work Clinton did in Arkansas and writes that “education reform became the model on which Hillary Clinton would one day build her teetering health care initiative” (Bernstein, *In Charge* 174). Later, he connects the present with the past when he says, “by the end of her sermon, Hillary seemed to be lapsing back into the same kind of banal generalities . . . that had punctuated her Wellesley commencement address. By using this method of writing, he takes the basic journalistic questions of “when” and “where” and weaves connections between present, past, and future time and place that seem to be more appropriate in the world of literature than in that of news-reporting.

Bernstein talks about Hillary Clinton—then Hillary Rodham—being elected student body president of Wellesley College and compares her campaign there to her future husband’s “endless campaign for the presidency, even after he had been elected” (51). Bernstein writes that the idea of an endless campaign “aptly fit Hillary’s activities at Wellesley. The formal campaign for student body president lasted for three weeks . . . but in the end, she won because of her tireless campaigning both before and during the allocated election period” (51). Bernstein employs this same technique again when he compares the Clintons’ ascension in the Arkansas political realm to their arrival in Washington. He writes about Clinton’s election to Governor of Arkansas and says that “[Bill and Hillary’s] adjustment to Washington, D.C., would be much more difficult [in comparison to theirs in Fayetteville] . . . Bill knew the people of his

state and their ways" but "he and Hillary remained rank outsiders" (126) in Washington. This idea is also traced further to Hillary's election to the United States Senate, in which she seemed to have learned from her past experiences with Washington insiders and "kept her head down and deferred to the institution" (126)—at least for a time.

Bernstein never employs exceptionally flowery language in *A Woman in Charge*, however his word choice and sentence structure seems to be elevated above the concise, simple lines normally found in print journalism. Some of the phrases found in Bernstein's book, like "the internecine warfare of Washington" (508) and "epiphanous spiritual awakenings" (310) don't seem like they would be appropriate for most newspapers or magazines, and most likely would not be found in those publications. Bernstein's sentences are longer and more complex than those found in most journalism, though they are always clear. For example, in his discussion of the Whitewater scandal, Bernstein writes "if they failed to make the case, Bill, Vernon Jordan, and Betty Curie (and doubtless there would be others) might well be facing perjury charges, maybe obstruction of justice, and, in the president's case, the likelihood of impeachment" (491). While the structure of this sentence is intricate, it is not confusing or hard to read. Bernstein also occasionally uses similes and allusions in his work to illustrate a point, some of which require a base understanding of history or popular culture. He writes that the Clintons and members of their White House staff attempted to prove that the "independent council" [was running] wild as if the United States were a banana republic" (491) and in the next paragraph says that Richard Mellon Scaife was "regarded as the Daddy Warbucks of the conspiracy" (491) against the Clintons.

While the use of quotes is a journalistic technique, it can also be argued that they give *A Woman in Charge* literary merit. The sometimes lengthy quotes that Bernstein uses from his sources certainly provide facts about the life of Hillary Clinton and her husband, but they also help Bernstein develop a "scene-by-scene construction" in which he "[draws] characters, [finds] a moving voice to communicate the drama, and [conveys] the facts in a way that will draw readers into the story" (Trott 26).

Going a step further from employing certain literary characteristics in his own writing style, Bernstein takes the time to

briefly analyze Hillary Clinton's writing style in his biography. "The voice in *It Takes a Village* is unquestionably hers" (448) Bernstein writes of Clinton. "Hillary's voice on the page is very similar to her public speaking voice . . . Even in private, Hillary tends to articulate in whole paragraphs, rarely interrupting herself or needing to stop to struggle for the right word" (448). But however true to her voice the book might be, Bernstein also finds flaws in it. "In both her talking and written voice there is a kind of grown up Girl Scout-speak, full of concept phrases like 'constructive citizenship', 'civil society' and 'generational challenges'" (448) he says, adding "that kind of writing, combined with clichés, produced the sort of prose that made many reviewers cringe" (448).

Earlier in his biography, Bernstein also discusses the commencement speech that Clinton made at her graduation from Wellesley College. He explains that her commencement address became an "unscripted reproof" (58) to the speech that had just been given by Senator Edward Brooke. Bernstein calls her speech "a heartfelt, if hackneyed, litany . . . combined with a verbally tangled commitment to a kind of blissful searching that would seem utterly foreign to the Hillary Rodham Clinton of today" (59), but recognizes that the speech was "in many ways a vivid reflection of Hillary's values, the values of her family and of the placid, secure, suburban environment of [her hometown] Park Ridge" (59). Bernstein's willingness to analyze these and other written and spoken works produced by Clinton throughout her life demonstrate his devotion to his subject and his desire to accurately and thoroughly portray her character and personality, even if it means occasionally using unconventional means to reiterate what he believes are her underlying beliefs and motivations.

One of the few times Bernstein does seem to take the focus off Clinton and insert some of himself into the biography is when he draws on his own experience in the press when he briefly discusses the changes that have taken place in journalism over the last few decades in *A Woman in Charge*. Bernstein cites the appearance of Matt Drudge, the founding editor of a right-wing website, on the political talk show *Meet the Press*. He declares that Drudge's appearance signaled a change in the "face of American journalism" (495) because "the oldest of the weekly television interview shows" (495) was suddenly seeing an internet writer as a suitable subject to invite to

its studio. Bernstein's statement that Drudge's appearance on Meet the Press "confirmed that the country was in some new place now" (495) foreshadowed things to come. Whether intentionally or not, Bernstein's description hints that Drudge's appearance, which took place in 1998, was a harbinger of a new rise in online journalism, in which some blogs would be regarded as credible sources for obtaining information on current events.

In summary, I believe that Bernstein's skill and as a writer and his works, especially *A Woman in Charge*, demonstrate literary merit and are deserving of respect. Bernstein himself proves his love of writing and his dedication to writing well through his careful research, and his concern with applying ethical standards to his work. His analysis of Hillary Clinton's speeches and written works prove that he is aware of the standards of effective prose writing and is interested in using his own experience as a writer to critique the works of others. His stylistic and technical expertise is also evident in his work; demonstrated by his use of (or refusal to integrate) his own persona into a particular work, his use of flashbacks or flash forwards to enhance the effects of time and place, the climactic mood he creates when he builds upon the events of his subject's life and finally reveals what they are experiencing in the present, and his use of figurative language.

Indeed, both journalism and biography—or more widely, nonfiction as a whole—have undergone dramatic changes over time. Scholars still struggle to classify different genres of nonfiction, as there is a "classic clash between form . . . and content" (Hesse 238); how is one to classify, for example, works like *All the President's Men* or *A Woman in Charge*, which demonstrate both literary and journalistic traits? There is no set answer to this question because "boundaries of nonfiction will always be fluid as water" (Root 245) and "definitions . . . limit our vision . . . by categorizing and compartmentalizing" (Root 255). However, it is important to remember that "how creative nonfiction is placed does have implications for literature and writing, both creative and non" (Hesse 240). "Some critics distrust autobiographers categorically, in their presentation of themselves and others around them," (Bloom 281) writes Lynn Bloom, but it is this exact presentation, in both autobiography and biography that must be respected for its exploration of the lives and souls of its subjects and its truthfulness—or at least attempt at truthfulness—about what is discovered during that search.

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