

Celebrity Seduction: Cosby, Clinton, Trump

by Richard Kostelanetz (June 2016)



As one recurring theme of my political criticism is challenging misunderstandings, I've been doubting some familiar myths about celebrity seduction, which is for me a subject more delicate than most because of some personal knowledge and identifications. Marty Domres, if remembered at all today, was a Columbia College quarterback strong enough to become a pro, replacing the legendary Johnny Unitas in 1972. As a CC alumnus, he was also literate enough to write, apparently wholly on his own, a memoir that contained a nugget I've not forgotten. It simply advised single guys like me that if a single woman already admired your work, you could probably get to know her better. Remember that this was the 1970s, after the development of safer birth control, but before the AIDS scare.

From my own experience, as a minor literary celebrity, Domres's nugget had a certain truth, at least at that time. Certain women who had already admired books of mine could be better known. Unlike the author Arthur Koestler, more than a generation older than I, who reportedly fed alcohol or certain chemicals to women he wanted to seduce, I always regarded such moves as vulgar, creating an unlevel playing field. Other literary seducers both male and female exploited their institutional power, offering publication or recognition in exchange for voluntary heterosex as well as homosex, in another example of seduction occurring on an unlevel playing field.

Simply, among sober men and women, intimations, if not initiations, of physical affection can either be accepted or not. If a man aiming to kiss a woman's lips gets instead her cheek, the result is nothing more sinister than innocent flattery that should be graciously acknowledged on both sides. Likewise if a woman attempting to hug a man gets only his shoulder. Nothing serious is lost. Keep these principles in mind as we read about other putative serial seducers.

The most recent has been Bill Cosby about whom we are asked to believe that,

as celebrity was apparently insufficient, he needed narcotics. The most curious development in the revelations of his history is that several women tell a similar story about his spiking a drink he offered them. This claim would have been credible if they spoke at once, but since they've told the same scenario sequentially, they at once confirm each other's putative authority and yet make me skeptical. If Cosby had been predatory as a younger man, say in the 1970s, may I doubt if seduction would have required drugs. Consider perhaps that drugging was a prerequisite to a sexual practice that might have otherwise been unacceptable (that the women and/or reporters don't want to mention) or that Cosby is simply a somophiliac who prefers seducing unconscious women. If the American press hasn't investigated further, may I suggest it's soft on Cosby?

Whenever I hear about a claim of sexual violation or, indeed, any other purported crime that has no witnesses and no hard evidence, I feel sympathy for the victim, of course, but finally also doubt, profoundly doubt, suspecting that nowadays too many outsiders favor one side or the other out of certain predisposed prejudice. (One sad difference between only a few decades ago and now is that prejudice used to be unacceptable.)

II

Consider, by contrast, the revelations about Bill Clinton. May I notice first that rapacious reporters have discovered remarkably few women—less than two dozen, unless I've missed some. With some this married man certainly misbehaved, no doubt egregiously; but remember that no one claims that he actually had complete "sexual relations" with Monica Lewinsky. Decades ago we teenagers defined four levels of sexual contact as first base, second base, third base, and a home run. While we can debate whether Ms. Lewinsky was second base or third, all would agree that she wasn't a home run.

Curious about the identities of Bill Clinton's purported other scores, I turned to a website claiming to identify "Bill Clinton's Mistresses." It opens, to no surprise, with Hillary Rodham, no doubt a home run, as they've had issue; followed by Ms. Lewinsky. While #3, Gennifer Flowers, a handsome woman who might have been bedded, even for the dozen years she claims, is visibly credible, may I doubt the story of Ms. Paula Jones. Every photograph of her seen by me suggests that this lady is obviously appearance-challenged, to put it gently. As Chico replied to Groucho, "Who are you gonna believe? Me or your own eyes?"

To continue, #4 is a German physician and actress whose name was previously unknown to me, Maria Furtwängler, about whom the website offers this story: "How she knows Bill: She met Bill through her husband, Dr. Hubert Burda, and [has spoken about](#) how great of a speaker Bill Clinton is." Huh? Only "a speaker," not "a lover"? By my measure, that represents barely a few steps down to first base.

#5 on the list of Clinton's mistresses is a Canadian woman with another name new to me—Belinda Caroline Stronach. About her the anonymous website gossiper writes: "The former US president is reported to have been seen dating Stronach and have ['shared an intimate dinner'](#) with her in 2002." Shall we award this gal first base?

#6 is Naomi Robson, an Australian media celebrity. "How she knows Bill: [The two were seen out together in 2006](#) when the former president was in Melbourne. They were introduced through a mutual friend." Still first base?

#7 is an actress named [Markie Post](#). "How she knows Bill: In 1993, Post helped produce a Disney Channel program marking Clinton's first inauguration. Post, Hillary and Bill are known to be close friends and Post and her husband were among the Clintons' first guests in the White House. [Rumors have swirled](#) that Post and Bill Clinton's relationship went further than their friendship and that they held 'secret get-togethers in California hotels.'" Second base maybe, if at all, because it presumes an affair with a married woman already known to Hillary. Remember that John F. Kennedy, who probably homered more mistresses than Bill, favored married women (whom most of us single guys wisely avoid), because he probably calculated that they wouldn't tell. With this in mind, consider that the claim for Ms. Post would benefit from the gossiper's identifying Bill's seducing other married women. No score?

#8: "Patricia Duff is an American political activist and a fundraiser for political and philanthropic causes." A groupie who'd reportedly known him since the mid-1980s, well before Clinton was a presidential candidate. Okay, credible, though more evidence would be required for this to be accepted in divorce court.

#9: Elizabeth Gracen, who was Miss Arkansas in 1981 and Miss America in 1982. "How she knows Bill: In 1992, [Gracen claimed](#) to have had a one-night stand with future President Bill Clinton while she was studying acting in New York." Home run, if you believe her, though no one else can confirm a "one-night stand"

without pictures or, say, some stained clothing.

#10 is Sally Perdue: How she knows Bill: "In 1994, [Perdue stated that she had had an affair](#) with then-governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas in 1983. She also stated that she had been asked not to reveal the affair by a former Democratic party staffer in 1992 who told her that 'they knew that I went jogging by myself and he couldn't guarantee what would happen to my pretty little legs.'" The problem here is that only others think she's had an affair that she shouldn't boast about.

#11 is Dolly Kyle Browning: "How she knows Bill: She and Bill went to High School together and have known each other since they were eleven years old. In a statement, Browning claimed that they had an ongoing sexual relationship between the mid 70s until January 1992, when he stopped returning her calls." This would be more credible than most of the others if additional details were provided, such as, say, photos of them together or some love-letters.

In passing, I should note that Ms. Norris Church, who became the last Mrs. Norman Mailer, revealed in a public interview that Clinton scored her, though she doesn't make this website list. Also note that none of these women claims that Clinton oiled them with alcohol or drugs, which I suppose gives them elementary credibility, though also suggesting that we should doubt any future bimbo who, especially in the wake of the Cosby revelations, claims that Bill plied them.

What undermines this list's credibility for me is identifying #12 as Paula Jones with this explanation: "How she knows Bill: She met Bill while she was working for the state of Arkansas. He reportedly sent over a note with his phone number on it and asked to see her. [In a statement to the court](#), Jones claimed that when she went to see him he tried to make the moves on her." What's wrong with this report, aside from lack of witnesses or hard evidence? Glib flattery, especially from a politician, scarcely represents attempted seduction and anyone thinking otherwise misunderstands badly.

III

When Kathleen Willey in 1998 made her public confession, so to speak, of a putative second-base move that she spurned a few years before, I conjectured that she was a wanna-be double agent who offered stories so dubious they would

discredit any reporter disseminating them and, by extension, the reporting of other women's claims of Clinton's advances. Nearly two decades on, I still believe that she's having perverse fun, though admit that no commentator appears to agree with me, at least not in public. Why not? Are they entwined in myths of their own creation?

While the media has proclaimed an "open season," so to speak, about any stories about predatory Bill, why are they so mute about Hillary? One hypothesis marks her as a Lesbian involved with certain female staffers, but that myth hasn't gotten much journalistic traction. While she may observe marital fidelity, an attractive woman coming of age in the late 1960s (which weren't the 1910s) must have known some men before Bill. Why haven't they been publicly identified and perhaps interviewed? Can such omission be considered "proof" that American media really are, as conservatives claim, soft on the Clintons?

May I find it odd as well that American journalists haven't made much of Bernie Sanders' unlicensed relationship with Susan Campbell Mott, who in 1969 bore him a son Levi, who was sometimes credited to Sanders' first official wife. Recall in the late 19th-Century President Grover Cleveland's antagonists claimed that with an unmarried woman he fathered a boy whose last name, however, belonged to Cleveland's law partner. "Tell me ma, where is pa?" twas said at the time. "He's in the White House, haw, haw, haw."

The once-august *New York Times*, among other media, have declared an open season on Donald Trump's personal activities. Since they can no longer fault a presidential candidate for divorcing and remarrying not once but twice, they must look elsewhere for possible scandals. One NYT story titled "Crossing the Line" (14 May 2016), the result, the reporters claim, of "more than 50 interviews conducted over the course of six weeks," focused upon a 1990 Florida pool party in which Trump asked a model, then 26 years old, to change into a bikini, which she voluntarily did, earning his appreciative compliment. That's it. Scarcely moving down the line to first base but surely not reaching it.

Though the woman later had a "whirlwind romance" with Trump, then in his mid-forties and recently divorced, it consisted of, so the *NYT* reporters write, "a heavy blur of helicopter rides and high-end hotel rooms and flashing cameras." If that is the most deviance that the *NYT* gumshoes can unearth, their editors might be disappointed. Expect reporters' heads to roll?

Forever smug, the *NYT* didn't report that the following week the woman appeared on television condemning not Trump but the *NYT*. "They spun it to where it appeared negative. I did not have a negative experience with Donald Trump," she claimed, "and I don't appreciate them making it look like that I was saying that it was a negative experience because it was not." That refutation put not only the *NYT* but other media on notice that their efforts to explore Trump's sex life might be risky.

My own sense, as a long-divorced hetero a few years older than Trump, is that as a performer he's more interested in appearing publicly with beautiful women, trophies really – eye candy, as we say – than in seducing them. This short-lived *NYT* star worked as a model; so did his current wife. May I wonder if Trump hasn't discovered the truth certainly familiar to sexologists (and certainly to me) that very skinny women tend to be more neurasthenic than women more normally built. (A virgin's nobody's pleasure either.) To the forever disappointment of investigative journalists' editors, in no objectionable sex is no story. May I hope that someone finds this funny?

✘ **Richard Kostelanetz** recently completed a book of previously uncollected critiques, *Deeper, Further, and Beyond*. Individual entries on his work in several fields appear in various editions of *Readers Guide to Twentieth-Century Writers*, *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature*, *Contemporary Poets*, *Contemporary Novelists*, *Postmodern Fiction*, *Webster's Dictionary of American Writers*, *The HarperCollins Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, *Directory of American Scholars*, *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, *Who's Who in American Art*, NNDB.com, Wikipedia.com, and Britannica.com, among other distinguished directories. Otherwise, he survives in New York, where he was born, unemployed and thus overworked.

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