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Journal of American Studies, Page 1 of 24
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Imagined Hillarys: Feminism, Fantasy, and Fictional Clintons in *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight*

RACHEL SYKES

In the 2010s, Hillary Clinton emerged as a central character not only in American political life but also in its imagined political scenarios. This article considers the centrality of Clinton as a model for women's legal and political empowerment in CBS drama *The Good Wife* (2009–16), arguing that the show's generic blend of the television procedural with melodrama and soap is key to both its normative portrayal of women in the corporate workplace and its positioning of Clinton as an aspirational figure for white liberal feminists. A similar tension is also central to Clinton's bid for the presidency in 2016, and this article dissects the ways in which Clinton's anticipated victory has provided a powerful but ultimately misleading "feminist" fantasy for many television shows of the last decade. A final section concludes this article with a brief analysis of *The Good Wife*'s 2017 spin-off *The Good Fight*, to argue that this show pivots from a fantasy of women's empowerment to a much more interesting dystopic picture, tapping into the surrealism of the present moment to convey the difficulty of women's aspiration under a Trump administration in ways that more directly, if still imperfectly, tackle the failings of liberal feminism to account for racial and economic difference.

From the pilot episode of US drama *The Good Wife*, which ran on CBS from 2009 to 2016, it was clear that the show existed in a world close to but not entirely like our own. Showrunners Michelle and Robert King claimed to model the series on several publicly mediated sexual scandals of the 1990s and 2000s involving American political figures like Bill Clinton, Dick Morris, and Eliot Spitzer. In the words of Shani Orgad, the show sought "to unsilence the wife mutely standing beside her public figure husband as he apologizes for scandalous misconduct."[1] During the pilot episode, Hillary Clinton also emerged as a real-world allusion and symbolic model for the "good" wife of the show's title. Not only does the show's protagonist, Alicia Florrick (Julianna Margulies), endure a high-profile sex scandal during which she chooses to publicly stay

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[1] Shani Orgad, "The Cruel Optimism of *The Good Wife*: The Fantastic Working Mother on the Fantastical Treadmill," *Television & New Media*, special issue, *The Good Wife and Broadcasting Quality: Re-centering Feminist TV Studies*, 18, 2 (2017), 165–83, 165–66.

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with her husband, but within ten minutes of the pilot's opening Alicia's boss, Diane Lockhart (Christine Baranski), gestures to a framed picture of Clinton in her office. "If she can do it," she says to Alicia on her first day back at work after a fifteen-year career break, "so can you."[2]

This article examines the ways in which Clinton's status as spurned wife, rehabilitated public figure, and high-ranking politician structures the fictionality of *The Good Wife* and its spin-off, *The Good Fight* (2017–). Clinton's ubiquity on American television of the 2010s has already been noted by Suzanne Leonard and Margaret Tally, with Leonard further identifying Clinton as "the *sine qua non* of political wifedom," a prime example of the ways in which contemporary television marriages are represented as transactional or a "professional boon" for the upper echelons of American society.[3] My focus on Clinton, however, serves broader formal and ideological questions about both shows' frequent references to contemporary politics, their thinly veiled reimaginings of current events, and the tension between realism and fantasy that structures their fictionality. As I outline in this article's first section, the relationship between reality, fiction, and fantasy in *The Good Wife* is complicated by the show's generic blend of the legal procedural with soap and melodrama, an explicit tension between realism and fantasy both encouraging and inhibiting ideas of women's agency in the "real" world. The ways in which reality figures in the show, sometimes through the inclusion of public figures like Clinton but more often through reimaginings of current events, ultimately legitimize what Orgad refers to as a "fantasy of female empowerment," one that encourages the viewer to simultaneously believe in the reality and aspire to the unreality of the show.[4]

A similar tension between realism and fantasy is important, I argue, for understanding Hillary Clinton's place in contemporary American culture, particularly with regard to popular feminism. As I examine in the second and third sections of this article, media representation and recurrent fictionalization of Clinton both before and after her defeat in the 2016 presidential election repeatedly place her at the centre of what Andreja Zevnik calls a social fantasy for many white liberals and liberal feminists, one that "gives 'comfort' to one's existence in the world" but ultimately limits sociopolitical change and the formation of a radical and antiracist feminist politics.[5] This

[2] "Pilot," *The Good Wife*, Season 1, written by Michelle and Robert King, dir. Charles McDougall, CBS, 2009.

[3] Suzanne Leonard, "'I May Need You, Peter, but You Sure as Hell Need Me Too': Political Marriages in *The Good Wife* and Beyond," *Television & New Media*, 18, 2 (2017), 131–46, 131, 133.

[4] Orgad, 175.

[5] Andreja Zevnik, "Postracial Society as Social Fantasy: Black Communities Trapped Between Racism and a Struggle for Political Recognition," *Political Psychology*, 38, 4

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article's fourth and final section then considers how *The Good Fight* charts the disillusion of mainstream social fantasies about the possibility and teleology of women's power and empowerment following Clinton's defeat to Donald Trump in 2016. Entering production just days before the polls opened, *The Good Fight* upends the polished world of *The Good Wife*, reflecting the imaginative impossibility of Trump's victory for many Democrats through an absurd and often frightening surrealism.

What *The Good Fight* does most persuasively, I argue, is to problematize the rhetoric of certainty structuring mainstream narratives of women's success at work that are intrinsic to Clinton's place in the popular imagination and that, as Sarah Banet-Weiser suggests in her account of popular feminism, produce a visible spectacle of "equality" that consents to "heteronormativity, to the universality of whiteness, to dominant economic formations, to a trajectory of capitalist 'success.'"[6] In doing so, this article asks several distinct but overlapping questions about the fictionalization of political realities in contemporary television and the ongoing role of fantasy in the project of American feminism. It questions not only the kinds of feminism that are possible in shows like *The Good Wife* but also the limiting role of fantasy as it manifests in narratives of empowerment. On the one hand, feminism requires collective imaginings of better and therefore fantastical futures to resist shared oppressions in the present. As Lola Olufemi suggests, feminism "is a political project about what *could be*. It's always looking forward, invested in futures we can't quite grasp yet."[7] Yet, on the other hand, and as Jacqueline Rose writes of the nation-state, fantasies are often "protective fictions" that are more present- than future-oriented: any fantasy, she writes, is "always heading for the world it only appears to have left behind."[8] This article argues that the ability and indeed the collective will of American media to imagine Clinton's ongoing importance to American life both misjudged the steps required to win her the presidency and imagined her inevitable win as the most likely "feminist" future. Attention paid to the public imaginary of Hillary Clinton on shows like *The Good Wife* therefore has much to tell us not only about the imaginative failures of Clinton's 2016 campaign, but also about the ways in which fictional narratives that place women in power impede the drive for political change and the formation of a radical politics.

(2017), 621–35, 625. Zevnik develops the idea in relation to white liberal imagining of a "postracial" society under President Barack Obama.

[6] Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 16.

[7] Lola Olufemi, *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 1, original emphasis.

[8] Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5, 3.

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THE GOOD WIFE AND GENRE

Since the mid-2000s, Hillary Clinton has been a central character in American politics and its imagined political scenarios. Margaret Tally notes a number of female "proxies" on American television of the past decade, identifying three models of Clintonian woman: the frustrated striver, exemplified by Selena Myer in *VEEP* (2012–19); the unlikely winner, seen in shows like *Madam Secretary* (2014–); and the political wives, used to very different effect on *Scandal* (2012–18), *House of Cards* (2013–18), and *The Good Wife*.[9] As Emily VanDerWerff argues, the mid-2000s saw an uptick of "Clinton-ish" characters on television, starting in 2005 when Geena Davis played a female President in *Commander in Chief* (2005–6) and seen increasingly throughout many politically adjacent programmes, from President Allison Taylor (Cherry Jones) in Season 7 of *24* (2001–14) to Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler) in *Parks and Recreation* (2009–16).[10]

Notably, these shows fall just outside the markers of so-called prestige television.[11] As Taylor Nygaard and Jorie Lagerwey write, discourses of quality or prestige in television tend to privilege shows that centre white middle-class men, while shows like *The Good Wife* "carry all the markers of prestige" except that their "female protagonist, broadcast home, episodic procedural roots, and fan-centric soapiness" mark them as generically and qualitatively

[9] Margaret Tally, "Call It the Hillary Effect: Charting the Imaginary of 'Hillary-esque' fictional narratives," in Betty Kaklamanidou and Margaret Tally, eds., *Politics and Politicians in Contemporary US Television: Washington as Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2018), n.p. Interestingly, Clinton claims to watch all these shows. While it was running, she would often admit to "binge-watching" *The Good Wife* with husband Bill, jokingly suggesting that the showrunners owed her seven years of royalties; she also guest-starred in the Season 5 premiere of *Madam Secretary*. A minor news story to emerge from the US State Department's release of Clinton's home emails in 2015 was confirmation of the Clintons' viewing habits, which included *The Good Wife* and *Parks and Recreation*. Andrew Buncombe, "Hillary Clinton Emails Reveal She Likes *The Good Wife* and *Parks and Recreation*," *The Independent*, 1 Sept. 2015, at www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/hillary-clinton-emails-reveal-she-likes-the-good-wife-and-parks-and-recreation-10481701.html.

[10] Emily VanDerWerff, "TV Has Been Readying Americans for a Hillary Clinton Presidency for a Decade,' *Vox* (15 April 2015), at www.vox.com/2015/4/15/8418047/hillary-clinton-tv-president.

[11] As Mittell writes, cultural markers of prestige are commonly linked "to 'serious' content, cinematic style, and convention-breaking innovations that reflect well on viewers who embrace such programming as a distinctive (and oft-repeated) exception to their standard antitelevision tastes." Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 211. For a fuller dissection of the term see Michael Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status* (London: Routledge, 2011); Colleen Kennedy-Karpat and Eric Sandberg, eds., *Adaptation, Awards Culture, and the Value of Prestige* (Cham: Springer, 2017).

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different.[12] Conversations about these shows and their "Clinton-ish" characters have therefore been limited by what Derek Johnson calls the "masculinist industrial culture" of television production as well as "patriarchal taste cultures" that perpetuate gendered assumptions about genre and value.[13] *Parks and Recreation* and *VEEP* might be sidelined for the perceived lightness of their comedy and *24* and *House of Cards* for the melodrama undercutting the shows' darker themes, while dramas like *Scandal* and *The Good Wife* draw too often on the conventions of soap and melodrama for critics to trace their microscopic attention to current affairs and the cultural and political impact of technological mediation.[14]

Although *The Good Wife*'s blend of genres has meant that critics more often read it as a soap than as a political or procedural drama, these same conventions are what I argue enables it to do serious political and intellectual work. My analysis critiques the vaguely conceived ideas of empowerment common to popular feminism and circulating throughout *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight*. Yet it is also my intention to give each show much-warranted critical attention for the ways in which they appraise the tension between realism and fantasy that structures politics on television and in "real" American life. *The Good Wife*'s generic nods to soap, melodrama, romance, and fantasy are in fact crucial to its rendering of female power and empowerment. Its attempt, for instance, to provide an absent narrative for the typically sidelined political wife mirrors critical conceptions of both soap and melodrama as genres that centre the private and typically "feminine" domestic sphere and act as a companion for women isolated by domestic work.[15] Following Kate Bowles's definition of the soap, *The Good Wife* is shaped by an "emphasis on family life, personal relationships, sexual dramas, emotional and moral conflicts; some coverage of topical issues; set in familiar domestic interiors with only occasional excursions into new locations."[16] Like

[12] Taylor Nygaard and Jorie Lagerway, "Broadcasting Quality: Re-centering Feminist Discourse with *The Good Wife*," *Television & New Media*, special issue, The Good Wife *and Broadcasting Quality: Re-centering Feminist TV Studies*, 18, 2 (2017), 105–13, 106.

[13] Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 61–62.

[14] For readings of the show's use of technology see Suzanne Leonard, "Sexuality, Technology, and Sexual Scandal in *The Good Wife*," *Feminist Media Studies*, 14, 6 (2014), 944–58; Hunter Hargraves, "To Trust in Strange Habits and Last Calls: *The Good Wife*'s Smartphone Storytelling," *Television & New Media*, 18, 2 (2017), 114–30.

[15] Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1985), 54. For a survey of feminist approaches to the soap opera and the housewife see Charlotte Brunsdon, *The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[16] Kate Bowles, "Soap Opera: No End of Story, Ever,"in Graeme Turner and Stuart Cunningham, eds., *The Australian TV Book* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 117–29, 119.

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soaps, the show examines the personal lives of public figures, features an overlapping and rotating cast of central characters and storylines, and follows a serial structure with season arcs. Despite also being a legal drama that follows a case-of-the-week format, the show feels most soapy when it focusses on the emotional and moral dilemmas of its protagonist, Alicia Florrick, particularly her on–off relationships with her disgraced husband, former Chicago state's attorney Peter Florrick (Chris Noth), and boss, Will Gardner (Josh Charles), a love triangle that structures the first five seasons of the show.

Alicia's romantic indecision is also where the show most resembles melodrama, a genre that focusses on a central victim as they make a series of moral and ethical choices. As Susan Hayward notes, from its infancy in the early 1800s melodrama typically staged bourgeois anxieties about wealth and class status, an anxiety that slowly transformed into expressions of worker alienation under industrial capitalism. For Hayward, the melodrama overinvests in both the domestic and the family to prove the value of everyday life when capitalism fails to fulfil the individual. Yet by placing men in the "feminine" context of the home, the melodrama introduces alienation into the family, resulting, as Hayward writes, in "repression (sexual) and woman's self-sacrifice."[17] In this way, and despite its attention to the lives of women, the melodrama furthers "the subordination of the woman" and, particularly during its cinematic peak in the 1950s, manifests American anxieties about women in the workforce, appearing progressive in its focus on domestic settings but keeping whiteness, heterosexuality, and women's domestic roles "firmly in place" as pillars of American capitalism.[18]

If melodramatic conventions centre *The Good Wife* on Alicia's emotional and moral journey, her triumphant return to work troubles the genre's emphasis on the tragedy of unfulfilled desires. In early seasons of the show, Alicia and Peter experience a symbolic reversal of roles. When Peter goes to prison on charges of political corruption, Alicia is publicly disgraced but freed from a suburban life she finds partially, if not wholly, unfulfilling. Midway through Season 1, when Peter is released on house arrest, he literally brings the "experience of alienation" home with him, putting pressure on Alicia to maintain the family unit that she seems destined to uphold, even after their separation at the end of Season 2.[19] Once separated, Alicia remains committed to protecting her children's innocence of the couple's affairs, maintaining the public front of their marriage, and purposefully bolstering Peter's political career. Yet these decisions see her repeatedly sacrifice her own needs and aspirations, overinvesting, as Hayward argues of the

[17] Susan Hayward, "Melodrama and Women's Films," in Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2013), 228–38, 230. [18] Ibid., 230, 234. [19] Ibid., 230.

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melodrama, in the preservation of the family structure even after a romantic relationship with her husband ends. Just as crucially for the popular feminism the show reflects, Alicia's career is strengthened by her commitment to family life and she is able to "have it all" in the language of popular feminism because of her consistent investment in and support from conservative values and normative structures.

THE GOOD WIFE AND POPULAR FEMINISM

Of course, pro-capitalist and heteronormative values are central to many mainstream versions of feminism. In *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (2018), Sarah Banet-Weiser defines popular feminism as a visible and widely admired brand of activism based in individualistic ideas of empowerment, self-reliance, self-confidence, and overcoming personal adversity.[20] As Banet-Weiser points out, this kind of feminism is synonymous with Catherine Rottenberg's notion of neoliberal feminism, a mode of entrepreneurialism that is "in sync with the evolving neoliberal order" and therefore offers no critique of its central structures.[21] Increased visibility of this kind of corporate-friendly, consumerist feminism breeds "exclusions" by focussing on a small selection of wealthy, white, heterosexual, professional women like Alicia, her mentor Diane, and Hillary Clinton, and rendering antiracist, queer, or Marxist feminisms less visible and palatable to the mainstream.[22] Labour journalist Sarah Jaffe similarly points to an overwhelming focus on career progression that "excludes much else" in popular feminism, arguing that this "trickle-down" approach prioritizes women's ascension to boardrooms and largely ignores the 60 per cent of women who make up minimum-wage labour in the United States.[23] Evoking what bell hooks refers to as the "faux feminism" of the "lean in" movement, fictional figures like Alicia and Diane embody the much-knocked philosophy of Sheryl Sandberg's 2013 book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, framing the problem of gender inequality as a series of questions about gaps in ambition, of women "pulling back when we should be leaning in," without acknowledging or advocating for the dismantlement of structural inequality.[24] Not only are there similarities between "Saint Alicia" and

[20] Banet-Weiser, *Empowered*, 12.

[21] Catherine Rottenberg, *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), n.p.

[22] Banet-Weiser, 13.

[23] Sarah Jaffe, "Trickle-Down Feminism," *Dissent* (Winter 2013), at www.dissentmagazine.org/article/trickle-down-feminism.

[24] bell hooks, "Dig Deep: Beyond Lean In," *Feminist Wire* (28 Oct. 2013), at http://www.thefeministwire.com/2013/10/17973; Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 8.

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Sandberg's advice that women assume a nonthreatening or "good" persona at work, but also the show positions its central, largely white, and overwhelmingly wealthy characters as examples of what women can achieve if they learn to "lean in" and work the system.[25]

Unsurprisingly, the essential conservatism of both the melodramatic form and popular feminism suit *The Good Wife*'s network home on CBS. According to VanDerWerff, in the early 2000s CBS's plan for market dominance was to put "the 'broad' in 'broadcast' television," rebranding as a conservative channel with family values or, as Albert Auster notes, "the 'last true broadcast' network appealing to 'flyover' America."[26] *The Good Wife* debuted as part of CBS's Tuesday night schedule, following high-rated police procedurals *NCIS* (2003–) and *NCIS: Los Angeles* (2009–). As then-president of CBS Entertainment Nina Tassler remarks, the show would satisfy the viewer's desire for the "zeitgeist" in a palatable format, representing the endless stream of political outrages thought to characterize the 2000s through the recognizable conventions of the legal procedural and via a lead character who is both "identifiable and relatable" to the viewer.[27] Although CBS marketed the show as a narrative of female empowerment, filled with strong and successful career women who struggled through adverse circumstances to ably compete with charismatic men, the supposedly feminist narrative it presented actually complemented the network's conservatism. Echoing Ien Ang and Charlotte Brunsden's arguments about the companionship that soap opera provided for women in domestic work, Alicia was marketed as "relatable" and aspirational: at once competent and out of place at work and in the home, she is impressive but ultimately recognizable to the average CBS viewer.[28]

[25] "Fleas," *The Good Wife*, Season 1, written by Amanda Segal, dir. Rosemary Rodriguez, CBS, 2010; Sandberg, 151.

[26] VanDerWerff, "CBS Is Remarkably Defensive for Being America's Most-Watched Network," *Vox* (17 May 2017), at www.vox.com/culture/2017/5/17/15655310/cbs-fall-schedule-2017; Johnson, *Media Franchising*, 29. CBS has been referred to as the "Tiffany" network due to its reputation for high-quality news and prestige drama, a move that Albert Auster derogatorily suggests led the network "to resemble Walmart" over the Fifth Avenue jewellers. Albert Auster, "CBS," in Horace Newcomb, ed., *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2013), 560. The strategy worked: between 2008 and 2017, CBS held the highest overall viewing figures of any broadcast network.

[27] VanDerWerff, "CBS Is Remarkably Defensive."

[28] The DVD box set for Season 1 recalls Tassler's description of Alicia as both "identifiable and relatable" by centring Alicia's innocence in the face of a harsh work environment. As the cover notes, she is a "resilient" woman, forced to "take the reins" of her own life, return to work, and defeat her "cutthroat 20-something rivals," all while "raising two teens" and facing a public scandal without the help of her husband.

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The women of *The Good Wife*, however, don't much resemble CBS's target audience, who are characteristically Middle American, middle-aged, and middle-class. Not only is Alicia's life a rarefied version of the average housewife's, but she also belongs to a world populated by "real" public figures with the show's case-of-the-week format used to depict topical debates ranging from the legitimacy of cryptocurrency Bitcoin to news coverage of the Arab Spring close up. In this, the show replicates the complex relationship that soap and melodrama have with realism. As *The Good Wife* notably fictionalizes but barely anonymizes zeitgeisty news stories, its references to real people (Gloria Steinem, Valerie Jarrett, Antony Scalia, and Hillary Clinton), and fictionalized versions of the real (ChumHum (Google), VidTrope (YouTube), and Scabbit (Reddit)) encourage the viewer to believe that the fiction of the show relates to their reality in what Ien Ang calls a "symbolic" rather than a literal way.[29] As Ang writes of the infamously glamourous soap *Dallas* (1978–91), "What is recognized as real is not knowledge of the world, but a subjective experience of the world: a 'structure of feeling'" that is distant from the documentary function of much social realism but nevertheless perceived as "real" by viewers.[30] In this model, "the concrete situations and complications" of soaps like *Dallas* or *The Good Wife* produce a form of "emotional realism" that Ang describes as "symbolic representations of more general living experiences: rows, intrigues, problems, happiness and misery."[31] In other words, soaps depicting the lives of rich, famous, and high-flying professionals might reflect the emotional tenor of the viewer's lives, but won't ever accurately record their material realities.

An "emotional" and, I argue, fantastical relation to realism has repercussions for any feminist reading of the show. As Banet-Weiser notes of popular feminism, the show's fantasy of prosperity and workplace success is based in a spectacle of "equality" that requires its viewers to invest in "heteronormavity" and "the universality of whiteness" as a "trajectory of capitalist 'success.'"[32] Orgad specifically criticizes *The Good Wife*'s portrayal of work and motherhood because the "fantasy" created "plays upon wishes already present in the lives of women" but valorizes working conditions including "competitive, long-hours, high-powered, waged work as the basis for a woman's sense of achievement, value and liberation" that are only available to a privileged subset.[33] For Orgad, *The Good Wife* specifically epitomizes

[29] Ang, *Watching Dallas*, 45.

[30] Ibid. Ang borrows from Raymond Williams's famous discussions of realism, using his infamous phrase "structure of feeling" to describe the ways in which soaps like Dallas capture different ways of thinking vying to emerge in its cultural moment.

[31] Ibid., 44–45.

[32] Banet-Weiser, *Empowered*, 16.

[33] Orgad, "The Cruel Optimism," 168, 166.

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what Lauren Berlant calls "cruel optimism," representing women's empowerment as an aspirational "good life" without acknowledging the many racial and economic barriers between life on-screen and the lives of its viewers.[34] From the moment in the pilot when Diane tells Alicia to channel Clinton, aspiration is built into the fabric of the show, women's empowerment is depicted as an inevitable consequence of hard work, and Alicia's upward trajectory through the firm and eventually into politics furnishes "a fantasy about working mothers in the contemporary workplace" that is not a reality for many.[35] Although the show also criticizes workplace misogyny and the institution of marriage, it repeatedly prioritizes the experiences of wealthy, heterosexual, able-bodied, beautiful, and effortlessly stylish white cis-gendered women who have access to extensive economic, legal, and political networks. These women's show of grit in the face of personal and professional difficulties is buoyed, somewhat remarkably considering that the show premiered during an economic recession, by the financial stability of their worlds. While sometimes posing questions about what it means to be a woman in proximity to power, *The Good Wife* just as consistently suggests that hard work is always rewarded, overtime can be sexy and sociable, household labour will be minimal and/or invisible, and workplace proficiency will return immediately after a long career break.

In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Berlant specifically charts how the idea of a "good life" remains powerful because of a purchase in fantasy, reality, and the quest for meaning. Fantasy, she writes, becomes "the means by which people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux about how they and the world 'add up to something.'"[36] Through Berlant, we might read *The Good Wife* as a show clinging to ideas of the good life even as it sets out to challenge them, replacing fantasies of a fulfilling romantic life with belief in the white working mother's place in neoliberal capitalism and the meritocratic fulfilment of work. This, too, is why I suggest that we might view *The Good Wife*'s use of soap and melodrama and its portrayal of women in power with the same ambivalence Janice Radway applies to the romance. As Radway notes,

> Despite its willingness to acknowledge stylistically that its tale is a fantasy, the popular romance also goes on to exhibit a marked attention to the material details of the world in which that fantasy is set. The effect is so overpowering that the technique may well persuade the reader that the tale need not be considered a fantasy at all.[37]

[34] Ibid., 173; Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.
[35] Orgad, 168.
[36] Berlant, 2.
[37] Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 193.

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By referencing and creating fictionalized versions of current events and public figures, *The Good Wife* retains the material detail Radway attributes to the romance, blurring the lines between what is real and fake, likely and impossible. Although Radway then suggests that the act of reading romance can be "a means of partial protest" against the roles dictated to women, the fascination of romance, soap, and melodrama with the happy ending reasserts the "good life" of Berlant's formulation and, as Radway argues, forces women into a series of conservative types even while centring their stories.[38] The central fantasy of *The Good Wife* might therefore be its belief in the possibility and teleology of women's corporate and political empowerment, with Alicia's singular narrative suggesting that the "good" life for the "good" wife is individual inclusion within an overwhelmingly exclusionary patriarchal system.

IMAGINED HILLARYS

Writing on the day that Hillary Clinton announced her second bid to be the Democratic presidential candidate, Rebecca Traister noted that "there has not been a minute in the past eight years when we have not been assured (or threatened) that Hillary Clinton's candidacy, her presidency even, is an inevitability."[39] There was and perhaps now can only ever be something fantastical about the assumed inevitability of Clinton's presidency. *Newsweek* publishes a special commemorative edition after each presidential election and had to recall 125,000 editions announcing her victory on the morning of 9 November 2016. Although the magazine blamed its distributors for the mistake, one that other publications had made in previous years,[40] the act now seems symbolic of a general assumption made across American media: that Clinton would win.

The fact that both Clinton's supporters and detractors assumed she would become President complicated and inhibited the actualization of her win, projecting a fantasy of women's generalized power and empowerment that stretched far beyond the reality of her defeat. The plethora of "Clinton-ish" characters on television in the 2010s helped to build a sense of certainty in Clinton's future success by cultivating belief in the implicit feminism of her

[38] Ibid., 208.

[39] Rebecca Traister, "There's Nothing Inevitable about Hillary," *New Republic*, 12 April 2015, at https://newrepublic.com/article/121516/hillary-clinton-2016-announcement-5-things-worry-me.

[40] The *Chicago Daily Tribune* famously published an incorrect banner headline, announcing "Dewey Defeats Truman," on 3 Nov. 1948, the day after incumbent United States President Harry S. Truman won an upset victory over Republican challenger and governor of New York Thomas E. Dewey in the 1948 presidential election. "Dewey Defeats Truman," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 Nov. 1948, 1.

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proximity to power. When *The Good Wife* first aired in 2009, Clinton was already a symbol of female professionalism, resilience, and composure, having returned from a failed presidential bid in 2008 to begin her four-year tenure as Secretary of State for Barack Obama. Shows like *The Good Wife*, that represent unfolding political scenarios through a generic blend of the legal procedural, melodrama, and soap in ways that blur the lines between the "real" and the fantastical, helped to maintain Clinton as a prominent personality but also as a cultural type in America's popular and political consciousness. Indeed, if *The Good Wife*'s nods to soap and melodrama exaggerated the conditions of many women's lived realities by focussing on the achievements of the wealthy few, Clinton's ubiquity as a cultural figure mirrored this trope: her political endurance was regularly used to legitimize a form of popular feminism that not only focussed on the needs of the 1 percent but overemphasized the probability of electing Clinton.

Central to both fantasies is a kind of gender determinism that assumes that women's proximity to power is intrinsically feminist. For many Democrats, Clinton's candidacy could be conceived as a feminist "win" simply because she was a woman, with few willing to engage with what Zillah Eisenstein calls Clinton's "white ruling-class feminism."[41] Banet-Weiser further notes that Clinton was "a very good representative for popular feminism – she clearly knew how to lean in, and she was a stellar example of an entrepreneurial woman" with ties to Wall Street and major corporations as well as historic support for laws that perpetuated racial and economic inequalities and the dismantling of the Welfare State.[42] Yet because many of the factors that made Clinton an emblem for popular feminism (her gender, race, heterosexuality, marriage, entrepreneurialism, class, connections, and triumph over personal adversity) also made her a target for misogyny, voters and media alike could interpret her election "as the ultimate feminist act" because so many who opposed her were violently antiwomen.[43] Writing just prior to the 2016 election, Liza Featherstone and Amber A'Lee Frost noted, "Hillary Clinton would be America's first woman president. And for many, that is all she needs to be."[44] In this way, Clinton's prominence in American political and televisual life of the 2010s fed into the "social fantasy" of her election campaign, her endurance in political discourse giving comfort to the existence of many

[41] Zillah Eisenstein, "Beyond Hillary: Toward Anti-racist, Anti-imperialist Feminisms," in Liza Featherstone and Amber A'Lee Frost, eds., *False Choices: The Faux Feminism of Hillary Clinton* (London: Verso, 2016), 173–79, 178.

[42] Banet-Weiser, *Empowered*, 174.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Liza Featherstone and Amber A'Lee Frost, 'Introduction,' in Featherstone and Frost, *False Choices*, 28–37, 28.

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white liberals by presupposing her continued success and demanding very little social or structural reform.[45]

The Good Wife's use of Clinton supports this reading on several levels. First, Clinton is an inspirational reference point, signalling women's capability at work as well as their growing political prestige. Central characters including Diane, Peter, and his campaign manager, Eli Gold (Alan Cumming), voice their support and respect for Clinton, her politics, and her supporters within the Democratic Party. Diane's framed photograph is a constant visual presence and running joke with her husband, Kurt (Gary Cole), who favours Republican Senator and Tea Party member Sarah Palin. The show even pokes fun at its relationship with Clinton, with Diane referring to Alicia and Peter as "Bill and Hillary on steroids"; in Season 7, Peter also runs against Hillary in the 2016 Democratic primaries with the intention of coming second and running as her vice president.[46] Second, Alicia's story directly mirrors Clinton's. Alongside widespread knowledge of their spouses' infidelities, Hillary and Alicia practise law before their husbands take office; both also remain politically if not romantically committed to their marriage. Like Bill Clinton, Peter Florrick regains his political standing post-scandal and uses his connections to further Alicia's career. In Season 6 of *The Good Wife*, Alicia runs for public office following encouragement from Clinton's former colleague Valerie Jarrett as well as mainstream feminist icon and long-time Hillary supporter Gloria Steinem, who tells Alicia, "We need more good women to run."[47] Once elected, Alicia finally faces a series of email leaks reminiscent of the Clinton email controversy that became widely known in 2015, the year the storyline aired.[48]

The third and most significant link between Clinton and Alicia is their personalities: Alicia responds and behaves in ways that Clinton's supporters and her detractors claim the latter also responds and behaves. Pragmatic and competitive, composed and determined, publicly known and emotionally reserved, Alicia frequently privileges head over heart in the face of what Clinton, in one of her three autobiographies, calls life's series of "hard choices."[49] As the seasons

[45] Zevnik, "Postracial Society," 625.

[46] "The Next Day," *The Good Wife*, Season 5, written by Leonard Dick, dir. Michael Zinberg, CBS, 2013; "Bond," *The Good Wife*, Season 7, written by Michelle and Robert King, dir. Brooke Kennedy, CBS, 2015.

[47] In her memoir *My Life on the Road*, Steinem makes several odd defences of Clinton, suggesting that many feminists were jealous of her because of the stability in her marriage. Gloria Steinem, *My Life on the Road* (London: Oneworld Book, 2015), 158–9.

[48] "Loser Edit," *The Good Wife*, Season 7, written by Luke Schelhas, dir. Brooke Kennedy, CBS, 2015.

[49] Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), xi. Through a series of autobiographies, Clinton repeatedly frames herself as a rational being, led by her "head,"

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progress, Alicia becomes increasingly willing to compromise personal relationships with friends and lovers for the preservation and happiness of her family unit; she turns a blind eye when criminal activities work in her favour and treats her rivals with increasing ruthlessness. In ways that prove favourable for the storytelling of the show, Alicia occupies a growing number of morally ambiguous positions, taking advantage of her husband's political connections to gain work and prestige in ways that the Clintons' critics also accuse them of doing.[50]

Alicia's resemblance to Hillary is a key factor in making her "identifiable and relatable" to CBS viewers, who will be familiar with the latter's persona, politics, and personal life and cognizant of similarities with the life of Alicia.[51] Yet by mirroring her life through the fictional narrative of Alicia, *The Good Wife* also increases circulation of stories about Clinton, raising her profile even when the show doesn't reference her directly. In this way, the "Clinton-ish" nature of Alicia's character feeds into the narratives of empowerment common to both popular feminism and Clinton's presidential campaign, stressing the implicit feminism of women's proximity to power without identifying how feminism might reform the current system. According to the Kings, although *The Good Wife* is often "called feminist" it most resembles a "sort of a feminist satire," working to undercut gender stereotypes of the good wife (Alicia), the assertive and childless career woman (Diane), or the sexually liberated bisexual investigator (Kalinda, played by Archie Punjabi), but rarely expressing solidarity between women, campaigning for structural change, or noting the differences and discriminations that intersectional feminisms might identify as dividing them.[52] The similarities between this vision of women as competent, successful, unknowable, and solitary in the workplace further aligns with the show's many references to Clinton, who provides not only the most famous instance of spousal betrayal and wifely fidelity in semi-recent history but a real-life model for the individualistic neoliberal feminisms that its characters often embody.

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sometimes by her "head and heart," but never by "heart" alone. The show presents these choices without condemnation and fully in keeping with the murky boundaries between corporate and personal relationships common to political life.

[50] As sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottam writes, from Bill's presidency onwards, "the implicit promise was that Bill and Hillary were a twofer. His accomplishments would also be hers because she would be there, in the trenches. Hillary was smart and invested in policy. She chafed at the role of merely decorative first lady. Hillary's record is also Bill's record, and that is not just the narrative of revisionist Republican smear campaigns." Tressie McMillan Cottam, "The Great Ambivalence," in Featherstone and Frost, *False Choices*, 97–103.

[51] VanDerWerff, "CBS Is Remarkably Defensive."

[52] Bill Keveney, "First Look: *Good Wife*'s Alicia meets Gloria Steinem," *USA Today*, 1 Oct. 2014, at https://eu.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2014/10/01/exclusive-photos-document-the-meeting-of-good-wife-alicia-florrick-and-real-life-activist-gloria-steinem/16540089.

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Alicia's reverent meeting with Steinem is perhaps the most surprising but significant indication of the show's relation to feminism. Like Clinton's candidacy, Steinem's encouragement of Alicia is at best tokenly feminist: getting "women to run" without consideration of their politics and policies is a notion that Nancy Fraser might describe as sacrificing "the politics of redistribution to the politics of recognition," flattening differences between women in ways that assume that Clinton and Alicia represent a universal idea of womanhood so that all women appear to win when any woman is in power.[53] Figures like Clinton and her fictional supporter Diane Lockhart further perpetuate this fantasy by aligning ideas of success with individual merit and grit. When Alicia makes partner at Lockhart/Gardner, the firm is experiencing financial difficulties and simply needs her capital contribution. To commiserate, Diane reveals that she made partner when her former boss was "sued for sexual harassment."[54] Without acknowledging the injustice of her boss's behaviour and the damage caused to the women he harrassed, Diane uses the language of self-empowerment to encourage Alicia to "lean in" for her own success: "When the door that you have been knocking at finally swings open," she tells her, "you don't ask why, you run through. That is the simple fact. No one is here to make it comfortable for you." This version of empowerment rejects solidarity between women, associating financial and professional progression as a feminist end goal predicated on a race to the boardroom made of winners and losers.

It follows that *The Good Wife* best maintains Clinton's place in the popular imagination in its rhetoric of certainty surrounding women's corporate success. Throughout the series, Alicia's world remains relatively stable: her family's wealth is assured, if sometimes reduced; she circulates in a version of Chicago largely populated by rich white people, with the chances of her breaking from convention, especially in petitioning for divorce, ranging from slim to none. She most resembles Clinton, then, in the calm assurance that she will never truly lose, buoyed by the privileges of her race, marriage, entrepreneurialism, class, and connections. As Tressie McMillan Cottam writes, this kind of security is central to discourses of popular feminism that fixate on whether women like Hillary Clinton and Alicia Florrick can "have it all" when "having it all is for those who already have enough."[55] Within this framework, a woman President is the ultimate glass ceiling, well within reach for those most privileged women who learn to work a system already

[53] Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013), 160.

[54] "The Seven Day Rule," *The Good Wife*, Season 4, written by Keith Eisner, dir. Michael Zinberg, CBS, 2013.

[55] Cottam, 102.

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in their favour. When *The Good Wife*'s final episode aired in May 2016, six months prior to Clinton's defeat in the presidential election, Hillary therefore remained a central touchstone for the show's guiding fantasy of women's continued rise to power.

TRUMP, SURREALISM, AND *THE GOOD FIGHT*

In this final section, I suggest that the problem of imagining Hillary Clinton emerges clearest after her defeat in 2016. Fictive versions of Clinton continue to proliferate across the political spectrum: commissioned before *The Good Wife*'s final episode aired in May 2016, *The Good Fight* is just one of many texts that respond to her defeat. Many are counterfactual and primarily journalistic pieces that tend to cite one of two imagined scenarios: the first, what if Clinton had won,[56] and the second, what if President Clinton acted like President Trump.[57] Prominent Republican Senator and unsuccessful presidential nominee Newt Gingrich dedicated an episode of his Facebook series *What If? History That Could've Been*, to Clinton's imagined first term. Novelist Curtis Sittenfeld announced in May 2017 that her next novel, *Rodham* (2020), "imagine[s] how the former secretary of state's life would have panned out if she had not married Bill Clinton."[58] Published in satirical magazine *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, Devorah Blachor's "Imagine Hillarys" typifies the problems endemic in many responses. The author presents well-known controversies of the Trump administration ("Imagine if Hillary fired her cabinet officials via Twitter") with increasingly absurd counterfactual

[56] Jack Bernhardt, "Sod It, Let's Pretend Hillary Clinton Won the Election Last Year," *The Guardian*, 8 Nov. 2017, at www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/08/president-hillary-clinton-election-trump-email-servers; Victor Davis Hanson, "If Only Hillary Had Won …", *National Review* (1 May 2018), at www.nationalreview.com/2018/05/hillary-clinton-presidency-leakers-lawbreakers-rewarded; Newt Gingrich, "*What If*? History That Could've Been," *Fox News* (12 May 2018), at www.foxnews.com/opinion/2018/05/12/newt-gingrich-what-if-history-that-could-ve-been.html; Niall Ferguson, "If Hillary Clinton Had Won, US Politics Would Be Even Crazier," *Boston Globe*, 27 Aug. 2018, at www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/08/27/hillary-clinton-had-won-politics-would-even-crazier/s2V0ZunuX05QzdU1ahmlEI/story.html; James Mackintosh, "Where Would Stocks Be Now if Hillary Clinton Were President?", *Wall Street Journal*, 18 Jan. 2018, at www.wsj.com/articles/where-would-stocks-be-now-if-hillary-clinton-were-president-1516295645.

[57] James Kleber, "Minutes: News and Notes," *New Republic*, 3 Feb. 2017, at https://newrepublic.com/minutes/140416/can-imagine-hillary-clinton-said-this; Bret Stephens, "What if Clinton Had Done All This?", *New York Times*, 1 Feb. 2018, at www.nytimes.com/2018/02/01/opinion/clinton-trump-republicans-impeach.html.

[58] Bonnie Malkin, "New Curtis Sittenfeld Novel Will Imagine Hillary Clinton's Life without Bill," *The Guardian*, 9 May 2017, at www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/09/new-curtis-sittenfeld-novel-will-imagine-hillary-clintons-life-without-bill.

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scenarios.[59] Signalling the farcicality of the situations Blachor imagines, "real" allusions to Clinton mythology appear alongside references to the goddess Aphrodite and the Qallupilluit, a human-like beast from Inuit mythology. The essay culminates with the following vignette:

> Imagine Hillary dodged the draft but also threw herself a costly military parade and the Fleetwood Mac tribute band played "Tusk" and this inspired all the gun owners in the land to trade in their firearms for wind instruments and the wolf dwelled with the lamb and no one resented women who sought higher offices of power.[60]

The image of a heavenly or utopian space where guns are replaced with musical instruments and imitations of Fleetwood Mac links to the symbolic promise of both Clintons' presidential campaigns. Biblical reference to an Earthly paradise where wolves can live with lambs (Isaiah 11:6), a prophecy sometimes read as foretelling Jesus' birth, is revoked in a final line that expels the reader from the fiction's fantasy and bluntly states its subtext: that Clinton's loss in 2016 reflects public resentment of women who seek "higher offices of power."

There are several ideological problems with fictional Clintons of this kind, problems that *The Good Fight* goes to great lengths to avoid. As just one example, "Imagine Hillarys" oversimplifies opposition to the Clinton campaign and considers her loss as the removal of a utopian future with Hillary depicted as a persecuted and Christlike figure. Such fictions divorce themselves from the problem of living under Trump by mourning Clinton's defeat in ways that neither face the conditions of the present nor understand Clinton's loss as anything more than resentment of her gender. This fascination is likely emphasized by two supposed paradoxes of the 2016 election: first, that Clinton won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College, and second, that 52 percent of white women voted for Trump.[61] In the popular belief of its inconceivability, it's therefore significant that the imagined presidency of Hillary Clinton carries a cultural cachet that, as of 2020, Trump's

[59] Devorah Blachor, "'Imagine Hillarys' with Increasingly Fanciful Endings," *McSweeney's Internet Tendency* (2 May 2018), at www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/imagine-hillarys-with-increasingly-fanciful-endings.

[60] Ibid.

[61] The popular idea that 52 percent of white women voted for Trump (compared to 43 percent for Clinton) is debated: the widely cited statistic is based on 2016 exit polls, which are historically poor at determining demographic breakdowns and tend to replicate systemic biases. A 2018 survey published by the Pew Research Centre nuanced the claim, showing that 47 percent of white women voted for Trump and 45 percent for Clinton. While white women were therefore more likely to vote for Trump than the overall electorate, there was only a 2 percent difference between voting for either candidate. Pew Research Center, "For Most Trump Voters, 'Very Warm' Feelings for Him Endured" (9 Aug. 2018), at www.people-press.org/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters.

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real-life tenure has not, with writers drawing on the former's long-standing presence in American politics to imagine a counterfactual history in which they can rehash details of a former certainty and process the unforeseen and often unimaginable conditions of the present.

I want to conclude this article with a discussion of how *The Good Fight* revises *The Good Wife*'s fantasies of empowerment and ventures a partial critique of its predecessor's invocations of popular feminism. These changes can in some way be traced to the context of the show's production: *The Good Fight* began filming the month of the presidential election in November 2016, premiering as the first show on CBS's streaming service All Access the following February. With the first episode written before Clinton's loss, showrunners Michelle and Robert King conceived *The Good Fight* as a victory lap for wealthy white women like Diane who came of age in the same era as Clinton and counted themselves amongst her long-time supporters.[62] Adverts for the first season feature the photo of Diane, now in a starring role, and Clinton; others depict Diane and supporting characters Maia Rindell (Rose Leslie) and Lucca Quinn (Cush Jumbo) adopting the seductive poses that characterize Alicia's image in *The Good Wife* with the tagline "Get Nasty," a reference to Trump's description of Clinton as a "nasty woman" during a now infamous preelection debate.[63]

One of the central differences between the shows is the visibility and centrality of race. As Linda Williams argues, melodrama has long operated as a way of processing "moral questions" like the legacy of slavery and ongoing racial inequalities by demonstrating "the complex networks and recombinations of racial victimization and vilification in American culture."[64] As such, *The Good Wife* treated race with problematic lightness, focussing occasional episodes on legal cases about racial profiling and algorithmic discrimination in ways that emphasized the moral journey of Alicia and her white colleagues but provided only marginal roles and infrequent storylines for actors of colour.

[62] Matt Donnelly, "How Donald Trump's Election Win Sent 'The Good Fight' Scrambling for Rewrites," *The Wrap* (26 Dec. 2016), at www.thewrap.com/good-fight-rewrites-trump-inauguration-christine-baranski.

[63] This advert is just one example of the ways in which the term was adopted by some women as a rallying cry in the months (and years) after Trump used it. See Lorraine Ali, "'Such a nasty woman': Trump's debate dig becomes a feminist rallying cry," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Oct. 2016, at www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-et-nasty-woman-trump-clinton-debate-janet-jackson-20161020-snap-story.html; Bernardo Alexander Attias and Jeanine Marie Mingé, eds., *Nasty (Wo)manifestos: Remixing Feminisms for Social Change*, special issue of *Women and Language*, 40, 2 (Spring 2018), at www.womenandlanguage.org/40-2womanifestos.

[64] Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 17, 44.

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By comparison, *The Good Fight* interrogates the politics of its predecessor, introducing storylines and characters who openly critique the complacency of white Democrats like Diane and slowly undercutting the surety of her worldview. The title of the show even plays on the sudden political awakening that many Democrats experienced with Trump's election; consciously or not, it also recalls the title of Shirley Chisholm's 1973 autobiography *The Good Fight*, which detailed the Congresswoman's bid to be the first black major-party candidate for President, and the first woman ever to run for the Democratic nomination.[65] In latter seasons of *The Good Wife*, Diane often spoke about her dream of setting up a female-partnered law firm; in the first episode of *The Good Fight*, following the loss of her fortune and the dirtying of her name by association with a Ponzi scheme, she joins Reddick-Boseman, an African American-owned law firm and the only firm that will hire her and her white protégée, Maya. Parodying the "lean-in" attitude of *The Good Wife*'s mainstream feminism, *The Good Fight* gives Diane a parallel version of what she once desired: she will help steer a minority-owned law firm but not for a minority that she associates with.

It is important not to overstate the radicalism of *The Good Fight*, a show that remains deeply invested in the lives of the 1 percent and, at least in its first season, the successes of primarily wealthy white women. Lucca Quinn, a former employee of Diane's and one of the only nonwhite lawyers centred in all seven seasons of *The Good Wife*, works for Reddick-Boseman when the show begins, providing continuity between series but also easing Diane's entry into an African American firm that she would otherwise be excluded from joining. *The Good Fight*'s portrayal of a world turned upside down by Trump's election also carries the undeniable privilege of many white Democrats who were shocked at America's election of a white supremacist in ways that many people of colour were not. Christine Baranski describes filming a scene on the day of the 2016 election, later cut in post-production, in which Diane packs up her office following the loss of her fortune:

> I'm packing all my things and the shot starts with a close-up of that photo [of Diane and Clinton], and you see me look at it and pack it up. I told my director, "When I play that scene, I gain strength because she will be president of the United States tomorrow. Lockhart probably thinks, She has gone through so much and had to pick herself up so many times. She remains an inspiration."[66]

[65] Shirley Chisholm, *The Good Fight* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973).

[66] Aaron Hicklin, "Christine Baranski on Diane Lockhart, Hillary and Fighting *The Good Fight*," *Out* (12 Jan. 2017), at www.out.com/television/2017/1/11/exclusive-christine-baranski-diane-lockhart-hillary-and-fighting-good-fight.

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The enduring fantasy of Clinton's victory would have structured the storyline of Diane's personal hardship in *The Good Fight* through the rhetoric of composure, resilience, and the ability to thrive in unlikely circumstances valorized by popular feminism. Baranski's imagining of Diane here replicates the character's position in early episodes of *The Good Wife*, where the same photograph provided Alicia with encouragement and a visual reminder of the empowerment assured for women who "lean in."

When Trump won, however, the showrunners not only revised Diane's storyline but recalibrated the world of the show, using the emotional and financial upheaval of its central character to reflect the mood of despair pervasive amongst the show's creators. The opening of the first episode was renamed "Inauguration" and provides the best example of the show's change in tone. The credits pass over an array of items specific to modern legal and professional culture (law textbooks, expensive office ornaments, a laptop, a Newton's cradle) set against a stark black background. As a flute and harpsichord play music frantically building, each item flamboyantly and cathartically explodes, symbolizing the loss of several pillars of *The Good Wife*: a legal culture premised on institutional competence, political reliance on American systems of justice, and the corporate ability to manage stress. The sequence ends with a guttural scream that echoes as the screen fades to black, marking the end of the world of *The Good Wife* and the destruction of its symbols of wealth, composure, and resilience. The screen fades onto a close-up of Diane's face, staring open-mouthed, eyebrows raised as she watches Trump's inauguration on her home television.[67] Trump's voice is the first thing the viewer hears: Diane doesn't speak, watching the ceremony for only a few seconds before she hits power on the remote, stands up, smooths her dress, and calmly leaves the room. While this initially appears to be the Diane of *The Good Wife*, darkness extends out from the credits and wraps itself around her. Dressed in black, an ornate and expensively white necklace the main marker of her wealth, she watches the inauguration with no lights on and very little to detract from the incredulity of her expression.

From here on in, *The Good Fight* becomes what Emily Nussbaum describes as an angrier, more reactionary sequel to *The Good Wife*: a show with a

[67] Other shows have replicated the passivity and horror of many white Democrats watching Trump's victory on television. Ryan Murphy's anthology series *American Horror Story* (2011–) opens its seventh season, "Cult," in two living rooms in Michigan, switching between the bright, light living room of a distraught couple, Ivy (Alison Pill) and Ally Mayfair-Richards (Sarah Paulson), and their Hillary-supporting neighbours, and the dark, dank basement room of Kai Anderson (Evan Peterson), an anarchist and later murderer who rejoices at the election results as a sign of oncoming chaos. "Election Night," *American Horror Story*, Season 7 ("Cult"), written by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk, dir. Bradley Buecker, Fox, 2017.

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"French Revolutionary air" and an "incendiary mind-set" that problematizes the fantasy of its predecessor by portraying that same fictional world as one of chaos rather than order.[68] I argue that *The Good Fight*'s hurried rewrite also provides a far more interesting counterfactual scenario than any of Clinton's imagined presidencies. Through subsequent seasons, the show slowly decentres many of its white characters and, much unlike *The Good Wife*, uses references to Trump to timestamp each episode, locating the events of the show in the viewer's recent past in ways that confront the viewer with their own reality. Season 2, for instance, names each episode after the number of days Trump has spent in office ("Day 415," "Day 422," etc.), matching episode titles to the show's streaming schedule and playing chicken with the unfolding news cycle. In this way, while Season 1 largely follows the fallout from Diane's financial losses and the perpetrators of the associated Ponzi scheme, Season 2 promotes the Trump administration "to season regular" with images of the President appearing on-screen and in dialogue with more regularity than Clinton ever did in *The Good Wife*.[69] Significantly, no proxy character is created for Trump and at least for the show's first three seasons, which are all that have aired in the UK at the time of writing, he exists as a central if often off-screen character and an antagonist for the show's narrative action.

The Good Fight therefore uses Trump in very different and, I argue, more challenging ways than Clinton's manifestation in *The Good Wife*. Where Clinton was a sometime reference point and more frequent source material for Alicia's personality and story, Trump is both real and constantly referenced, with Diane involved in legal, Democratic Party-political, and underground attempts to challenge his government. In "Day 450," Reddick, Boseman, & Lockhart is invited to pitch a plan for impeachment to the Democratic National Committee; airing in April 2018, the episode took place a full year before Nancy Pelosi initiated proceedings on 24 September 2019. Similarly, in "Day 464," the firm acquires the infamous "pee tape" thought to show Trump watching sex workers urinate in a Moscow hotel room, leading to an episode-long debate about what the firm should do with it. Both episodes stage hypothetical discussions of how Democrats might react and respond to Trump's presidency, with Diane and her partners, the majority of whom identify as Democrats, voicing internal disagreements about party strategy and debating whether to meet corruption in the Trump administration with legal process or respond to hate speech with

[68] Emily Nussbaum, "The Incendiary Verve of *The Good Fight*," *New Yorker*, 28 May 2018, at www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/06/04/the-incendiary-verve-of-the-good-fight.

[69] Rebecca Nicholson, "The New Season of *The Good Fight* Declares War on Trump," *The Guardian*, 5 March 2018, at www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/mar/05/the-good-fight-new-season-war-on-trump.

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vigilante justice and street violence. Beginning in the final episode of Season 2, and more frequently during Season 3, episodes often include animated musical segments that explain topics like impeachment, Russian "troll farms," and nondisclosure agreements to viewers.[70] In this way, *The Good Fight* employs a surreal array of mixed-media techniques that destabilizes the reality of the show's universe, moving further from the glamourous realism of *The Good Wife* through deliberately gimmicky but politically informative styles.

Indeed, although the world of *The Good Fight* is unequivocally the world of the viewer, it occupies an even more complex relation to realism than its predecessor, undercutting the truth of its storylines with a striking surrealism. At the beginning of Season 2, Diane, known for her poise and love of fine wine and whisky, begins microdosing psilocybin (mushrooms) that she buys from a waiter at a funeral. Without signalling to the viewer whether she is on or off drugs, Diane notices people in Trump masks in an apartment building opposite her law firm; sometimes they're having sex, sometimes they're dancing. The television news she watches grows ever more fantastical: Trump adopts a pot-bellied pig named Petey and tweets about the existence of mermaids, and later in Season 2 a cartoon sheep seems to ask Diane, "How can you sleep when Donald Trump is president?"[71] Pointedly, given Diane's use of mushrooms, it's never explained whether these experiences are "real" or hallucinations. Increasingly the order- and reward-based system that is a guiding fantasy of *The Good Wife* becomes ever more defused and chaotic, with Diane's individualism making the shock of Trump's win at once isolating and surreal but also galvanizing and challenging to the stability of her formerly assured liberal politics.

Importantly, this parallel universe challenges, even if it does not entirely dissolve, the many certainties of *The Good Wife*. Not only does the show foreground the "real" by representing widely reported stories of the Trump administration without fictionalizing key details, but also its nods to fantasy more rigorously satirize the passive liberalism of its characters. As Tully (Tim Matheson), an Antifa activist whom Diane impulsively sleeps with, says to her, "you think institutions will work; you think they will save us

[70] "Day 450," *The Good Fight*, Season 2, written by Tegan Shohet, dir. Frederick E. O. Toye, CBS, 2018; "The One Where Diane Joins the Resistance," *The Good Fight*, Season 3, written by Jonathan Tolins, dir. Brooke Kennedy, CBS, 2019; "The One Where a Nazi Gets Punched," *The Good Fight*, Season 3, written by Tegan Shohet, dir. Jim McKay, CBS, 2019.

[71] "Day 422," *The Good Fight*, Season 2, written by Joey Hartstone, dir. James Whitmore Jr., CBS, 2018; "Day 415," *The Good Fight*, Season 2, written by Williams Finkelstein, dir. Jim McKay, CBS, 2018; "Day 436," *The Good Fight*, written by Marcus Dalzine, dir. Jim McKay, CBS, 2018.

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from the barbarians."[72] While the world of *The Good Wife* certainly upholds this statement, the world of its successor does not, turning away from fantasy to confront the surrealism of a Trump administration for many white and wealthy Democrats and newly committing the show's fictionality to the replication of a news cycle in which fiction feels, at least for them, so poorly separated from fact.

CONCLUSION

As if to provide a final counterpoint, *The Good Fight*'s fourth season premiered in the US just prior to this article's final submission. Its first episode, titled "The Gang Deals with Alternate Reality," is an episode-long hallucination of a world in which Hillary Clinton won the presidency. Replicating the opening of "Inauguration," it begins with Diane watching her television in the dark, popping champagne and laughing in a near-hysterical, celebratory way that contrasts dramatically with her stunned silence in Season 1. Despite her initial celebrations, Diane quickly realizes that a Clinton presidency would not necessarily be better: in this parallel universe, Hillary remains mired in email scandals as her administration circulates fake or at least unverifiable news stories about cures for cancer and declarations that "the rainforest" has been saved. Most significantly, the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment and assault never happened and, without public knowledge of his crimes against women, Diane is forced to take on Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein as a new client as a favour for his "friend," President Clinton.

Throughout the episode, Diane, who remembers every detail of Trump's administration, attempts to publicize women's narratives of abuse and assault. She points to the economic and racial imbalance of those who prosper under Clinton's presidency and cites activist Tarana Burke, who coined the slogan #MeToo but was broadly erased from mainstream coverage. The episode therefore satirizes the kinds of popular feminism never questioned by Diane in *The Good Wife*, demonstrating the ways in which, as I have argued, *The Good Fight* consistently, if sometimes clunkily, subverts the political surety of its world of wealthy white Democrats and liberal feminists. Significantly, Diane's attempts to counter the erasure of sexual assault allegations by referencing the testimony and activism of black women are met by the kind of neoliberal platitudes that she once used: "with the presidency, women can do whatever they want," "we women have to stick together," and, most pointedly,

[72] "Day 436," *The Good Fight*, Season 2, written by Marcus Dalzine, dir. Jim McKay, CBS, 2018.

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"Hillary only gets reelected if men don't feel women are leading with their anger."[73] The differences that can be observed between *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight* therefore tell us something important about the inclusion of politics in contemporary fictions and what happens when mainstream fantasies are challenged, or, indeed, as Hillary Clinton experienced, publicly and catastrophically dissolve into what Lauren Berlant calls an "incoherent mash" of poorly reasoned hopes and dreams.[74] As Rosemary Jackson claims, the literature of fantasy often accentuates "the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder."[75] While *The Good Wife* could use its mix of political stories to legitimize a fantasy of popular feminism in which women's professional successes felt assured, *The Good Fight* is so much in shock at the disillusion and impossibility of these fantasies for figures like Hillary Clinton that it can neither defend the old system that kept it in place nor find the logic to construct a new one. Instead, *The Good Fight* pivots from projecting a fantasy closely related but often cruelly distant from the lived reality of its women viewers to a much more interesting dystopic picture that taps into the surrealism of the present and the difficulty of women's aspiration in, but also before, an era of presidential illogic.

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Rachel Sykes is Senior Lecturer in Contemporary American Literature at the University of Birmingham. She is the author of *The Quiet Contemporary American Novel* (2018) and has published work in *Critique*, *Signs: Journal of Women in Society and Culture*, and *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings*. She is currently working on a project about sharing and surveillance in contemporary American and online cultures. My thanks to Arin Keeble and Sam Thomas who let me workshop this paper at their very generous and welcoming Lit-TV conference in May 2018. My thanks also to my attentive team of readers, Niall Gallen, David James, and Liam Harrison, as well as the inimitable and ever supportive Rachel Williams, Dorothy Butchard, and Katie McGettigan.

[73] "The Gang Deals with Alternate Reality," *The Good Fight*, Season 4, written by Michelle and Robert King, dir. Brooke Kennedy, CBS, 2020. [74] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2.
[75] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981), 2.

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