



O: A Presidential Novel

Anonymous

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The truth only fiction can tell. This is a novel about aspiration and delusion, set during the presidential election of 2012 and written by an anonymous author who has spent years observing politics and the fraught relationship between public image and self-regard.

The novel includes revealing and insightful portraits of many prominent figures in the political world—some invented and some real.

O: A Presidential Novel Details

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From Reader Review **O: A Presidential Novel** for online ebook

Mary Ronan Drew says

This book isn't all that bad. I expected a lot worse. But I found myself getting entangled in the details of the presidential campaign of 2012 which forms the basis of the story. O is running against a sort of McCain/Romney/Eisenhower Republican, his campaign is a well-oiled machine, unemployment is down to 6 percent, and the incumbent president always has a lot of advantages. His opponent puts up a good fight but O is ahead by 10 points in the polls going into October.

The main characters are not the candidates but Cal Regan, O's campaign manager, and Mandy Cohan, a rising star of a reporter for a Politico-type online news organization. They are in love but decide to put their relationship on hold until after the election so that she can be seen as objective in her role as chief campaign correspondent and he can focus on his job. (She is pretty objective actually.) Unfortunately neither of them really comes to life except briefly late in the book when Mandy has some information harmful to O's campaign and Cal refuses to cooperate with her in a tense interview that can make or break the election.

There's only one real, living character in the book, and he is not a politician but an up-from-the-streets lawyer who has been shunted aside by O's people and who is struggling to take care of his dying mother and find a place in the campaign as more than a gofer. The plot is as expected in this sort of novel and does come alive in the second half of the book when the author stops presenting political positions and lets the story take over.

The anonymous author is believed to be Mark Salter, who has been co-author with John McCain on a few of his books so I expected O to be thoroughly dislikeable and manipulative. Instead the author has presented O's view of politics as an interior monologue, not as interpreted by the Republicans. The conservative side is seen through the eyes of the conservatives. Interesting and fairly unbiased, which I found surprising.

I learned a good deal about how a political campaign is put together and how it can fall apart at the least little shove. I appreciated for the first time how exhausting the travel is for a presidential candidate and his staff and how many things they have to keep in mind as they prepare speeches and rallies, prep for debates and respond to statements by their opponents.

O is a roman a clef and you can identify many of the characters without difficulty. We should have been able to enjoy a good laugh at the expense of the Rahm Emanuel character, but he was presented straightforwardly as very astute but not very interesting. I found myself wishing we had James Carville to work with (he really livened up Primary Colors.) Late in the book a cadaverous former campaign manager with a talent for colorful metaphors does show up but only briefly and alas without much effect.

2011 No 19

Coming soon: Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963

mark says

This a very interesting book for what it attempts—which is to get inside the head of US

President Barack Obama in the future, during the upcoming 2012 presidential election. Therefore, it is not a novel in the way that most people think of novels: What with a plot of mystery, drama, and intrigue, with interesting, super- and sub-typical characters, that takes place in a complimentary land- or cityscape with romance and regret and anger and bitterness and hate and revenge and heroes and heroines who triumph over the forces of bad and evil. There's no sex, no cooking and recipes, no murder, no descriptions of breathtaking scenery. No lovable pets or thrilling car chases and crashes. None of that.

What O attempts to do is depict, what might be an accurate description, of what is going on behind doors that very few people (myself included) are ever invited through; and further, what is going on in the mind of the most public and powerful man on the planet. Of course there is no real way to know that.

What O is, is the interpretations' of one person who decided he or she had too much to lose by being accountable, by putting their name to their thoughts' – which I find a little troubling. That said, this is what I think. I think that what the book does well is inform the reader about a process that is truly unknowable (What Barack Obama is thinking in the future), but that (the book) points out the incredible credulousness of the American public, who actually listens to and pays attention to, all the blather on TV, radio, newspapers and magazines ... that these talking heads and blather-mouths and "reporters," have no real idea what they're talking about. They're only guessing, and guessing with an agenda (to create conflict) that is self-serving (provides them with an income). Whereas the president is actually tasked with an agenda that has your well-being at heart. But that that task is next to impossible given the structure of the system and the types of people who are drawn to it. The characters in the novel are mostly boring and are driven and consumed by a need to excel in their respective jobs (probably true) - which are not "looking after you." It doesn't make for a good story, and the author's style is peculiar which adds to the unpleasantness of the experience. But, so be it – that's what good books should do – disturb the reader. Making the comfortable uncomfortable and bring comfort to the uncomfortable and no one should be comfortable in the situation that is America in the summer of 2011, with a presidential campaign getting under way. Another thing that adds to the banality of this "story" (I know that seems like a contradiction—that the book is both banal and disturbing, but that's the truth of it.) is that the challenger to O, seems like the perfect person to be president – he's not foolish and ego driven like the real ones that we have in the real world. In other words, he resembles no one, whereas many of the other characters do – resemble characters in the real world, obviously including O.

All of which makes me think: Maybe it doesn't matter who's elected president. All the power a president possesses is actually only the power of destruction – to start wars. But a president does not have the power to end them. And the next president won't start anymore wars, no matter who he or she is – will they?

Shani Hilton says

From my review at *The American Prospect*:

In the proud tradition of Joe Klein's fictionalized (and briefly anonymous) retrospective of the 1992 George H.W. Bush- Bill Clinton race comes O: A Presidential Novel. O, which purports to foretell the 2012 race, has already been dismissed for its terrible writing, its lack of women, and the bald stunt of an anonymous author. But, ladies and gentlemen of Washington (and you brave souls who are reading this despite lacking a Beltway address), I encourage you to read it. Because finally, political journalism of the 2000s has gotten the novel it deserves.

Read the rest.

Laura says

Wow...where to start?

First, the writing style was, for the most part, maddeningly passive. Plot developments were summarized rather than allowing the reader to be put in the middle of the action. The plot itself was thin and unexciting -- certainly not substantial enough to carry a 300+ page book. Character development was lacking, and weirdly, the most poorly developed character of all was the supposed protagonist, Cal Regan. You didn't like him. You didn't dislike him. He didn't have much noticeable personality at all, nor much in the way of a back story that would endear him to you. Picture a robot programmed to behave as a campaign manager (well, okay, and have sex every once in awhile), and you have a pretty good idea of how he came across in the book.

Way, way too many pages were taken up with mind-numbingly dull litanies of campaign life and facts of presidential politics. These litanies were passively written and had little or no relevance to the overall story arc. Still more pages were devoted to long, rambling introspections and musings by the various characters, none of which were very interesting or written very engagingly.

I will concede that the last 80 pages or so of the novel were somewhat more readable than the rest of it, mainly because things actually, you know, happened. But even then, multiple aspects of the plot annoyed me. The centerpiece of the action, a minor-ish possible scandal involving the Perfect In Every Way Republican candidate, Tom Morrison, was dull from beginning to end. Other than perhaps waiting for a dramatic plot twist that never came, there was never any real reason to suspect it implicated Morrison in anything much more than failure to properly vet a former employee (and it turned out he wasn't even guilty of that). Really? That was the juiciest campaign scandal the author could come up with?

But I found this plot irritating for reasons beyond that. The book portrayed the pushing of the potential scandal by a Huffington Post...er, Stefani Report reporter as sleazy, totally out of bounds, and unwarranted. The tone was, "How dare anyone even ask questions about such a thing?" But the issue in question wasn't a tawdry personal attack against Morrison or his family. It was a perfectly legitimate question about actions he took or didn't take as CEO of his former company. Yes, it turned out he hadn't done anything wrong, but the exonerating information wasn't something that even a diligent reporter would have been particularly likely to uncover on his/her own. It wasn't as if this information was known and ignored by the Stefani Report in the interest of a more salacious story. So what, exactly, did the young novice journalist do wrong?

And then there was Alex Morrison, the somewhat troubled teenage son of the Republican candidate, and his dad's body man on the campaign. In the middle of a post-debate spin room, Alex physically assaults the Stefani Report reporter. Rather than firing Alex (yes, he's his son, but still an employee, and I'd assume any other campaign worker who did something like that would be fired), issuing an apology, and being thankful that the reporter didn't press charges, Tom Morrison makes excuses for his son and blames the media for the whole incident -- and the media, the O campaign, and apparently the entire country all nod their heads in collective agreement that, no, an 18-year-old who's apparently been deemed mature enough to work on a presidential campaign should surely not be expected to be able to refrain from physically attacking a reporter, and it was all the reporter's fault for saying mean things about his dad. Um...huh?

Finally, the misleading advertising. I'm sure the reported author, Mark Salter from the McCain campaign,

has indeed been in a few rooms with Obama, but the billing implies someone who has worked closely with him and knows things about him that only his friends and close associates would know. Somehow I doubt Salter fits into that category. The self-important claim to be "the truth only fiction can tell" makes it even worse, as if Salter would be privy to some exclusive "truths" about Obama. (And it's not even clear what "truth" Salter thinks he's telling. It's apparent that he doesn't like Obama much. He portrays "O" as being whiny, thin-skinned, and disdainful of the American people -- but not as actually evil or corrupt, and even with some redeeming qualities as well. Is Salter's alleged "truth" that gossip news websites like Huffington Post are bad? If so, he did quite a poor job of making that case, for the reasons mentioned above.)

Anyway, hopefully the slow sales of this book will clue publishers in to the fact that marketing gimmicks are not enough. You also have to have a book that doesn't suck in order to make money.

Jerry Landry says

This book is more of a novelty than anything else. There's some interesting observations on modern politics, but the attempted plot threads leave much to be desired. It's worth a read if you're curious, but you're not missing much if you don't read it.

Helen Dunn says

wow. If I could give this ZERO stars I would. It's awful. I read the first 50% and skimmed the rest and even skimming it was painful.

The plot is thin. The characters are completely wooden and unlikeable. The author drifts off into these random flights of fancy and forgets what's going on in the story. You can tell he likes to think of himself as a great and eloquent writer but it all comes off as a teenager who just discovered some big words. He really needed an editor.

Bottom line is that nothing happens. It's not funny, it's not showing me any insight into the "inside baseball" of politics. It's just a pure waste of time.

I think my favorite ridiculous part was when the handsome, good at sports, but peculiar and socially awkward teenaged son of the Republican candidate is deemed too much of an oddball to go to college, so they decide to bring him on the campaign trail. As a reader I'm waiting for this ticking time-bomb to go off and do something crazy and awful -- like buy a gun or sleep with a staffer or something totally dramatic that will derail the campaign. What does he do? He gets mad at a reporter asking his daddy a hard question so he shakes up a pepsi and sprays it on the reporter. Seriously!! That's it??!! How lame!! I guess maybe there is some pushing and shoving too which leaves the reporter "trembling" (and it's a guy!) so stupid!

I can't believe it was published and I can't believe I was dumb enough to buy it!

Stay away!

K.J. Dell'Antonia says

I'm not gonna lie--I will read this and take it all pretty much as gospel truth, I know I will.

Damn. Location 125 and I am already bored. Author seems to have the vocabulary and descriptive powers of Tom Clancy, minus the plotting skills. Off to try again.

Oof. Another chapter, and I don't know how much more I can take. Leaden prose, passive verbs, Tom Swifties...already with a byzantine series of relationships among indistinguishable male characters (unless they're black, then they stand out, and I don't mean that in a good way) and a trite relationship sub plot. I am so disappointed. I was hoping for juicy but this sucker is dry and cold. It may warm up a few DC-ers looking for something to do with their snow day, but I bet that the coasts and flyover country let this sink without a trace. I don't even care who Anonymous is, but I hope he (and I have little doubt it's a he) can hang onto his day job.

Scott Rhee says

I read this book in December of 2010, during a spate of literature being published, mostly nonfiction, about the Obama Administration and President Barack Obama specifically. There were, it seemed, equal numbers of pro-Obama books versus anti-Obama books. "O" was one of the few novels I found during this era that was blatantly attempting to describe a "behind the scenes" look into the Obama Administration. It was, in my opinion, a failure, mainly because it didn't go far enough in focusing a critical eye on the person and the position. I still stand by my review; my opinion hasn't changed. I also still stand by my decision to vote for Obama, twice. I still admire and respect the President. If anything has changed in my mind, it is my regret that I was not more willing to accept some of the valid criticisms and complaints that pundits (both on the left and right) were lobbing at Obama. To be fair, many of the criticisms being lobbed at the president were ridiculous attempts by pissed-off Republicans or right-wingers to discredit and destroy Obama's character, and it was difficult to sort out the valid criticisms from the load of horse-shit. That said, I do not consider myself an Obama apologist. I do believe that Obama has probably done some things that are indefensible and for which he should be (and, in some cases, has been) held accountable. but, for the most part, I truly believe that he has been no better nor no worse than past presidents, and I think that, as always, history will decide his legacy.

"O: A Presidential Novel" is one of those behind-the-scenes glimpses of a presidential campaign, written by Anonymous, perhaps in an effort to "expose" the very human, flawed persona of the current person in power. In this case, the target is President Barack Obama.

As an aside: Anonymous, the author, has a long and fascinating career. Anonymous also wrote "Primary Colors", which was a similarly "scathing" attempt to reshape President William Clinton in the minds of voters. Anonymous is also author of countless other "scathing tell-all" books about politics dating back to Ancient Greece, if not before then. If a society had a written language, it certainly had an Anonymous waiting to blow the lid off the dirty little secrets of the king, emperor, pharaoh, chief, or president.

While "O" is somewhat insightful, it is definitely not scathing or fascinating enough to be called risky. On the contrary, it strikes me as being an apologia for the Obama administration, which makes me wonder why the author chose to remain anonymous. If he/she were trying to defend Obama and/or at least make him look

like a flawed sympathetic character, then why hide his/her name? It seems to me that based on the current polls, a majority of people are either in love with Obama or are at least in like with him. This novel isn't going to change that.

Other than a few times that "O" drops an 'f'-bomb or two and whines that he doesn't get to play enough golf, Anonymous's characterization in this novel is pretty un-scathing. If anything, it may simply make the President look *more* human. Otherwise, I'm not sure what the point of this novel was.

While entertaining at times (there is a mystery, of sorts, involved in the storyline) and, at times, interesting in its details of the minutiae of a president's day-to-day as well as on the campaign trail, "O" doesn't really succeed in doing much of anything except tell a pretty mediocre story about a basically mediocre president.

Hadrian says

What a trainwreck. A bad gimmick, with leaden writing, about events which are paltry distortions of facts, boring talking-head characters, lousy political propaganda, and nothing happens. Why do I push myself to suffer through these terrible books when I have 2000 on my to-read list?

Matthew Ciarvella says

What a mess. "O" fails to live up to the standard (which really wasn't that high) set by its obvious inspiration "Primary Colors" as a *wink-wink fictional* account of the 2012 election campaign between Obama and Romney. Even though it's non-fiction, "Double Down" by Mark Halperin creates a more exciting narrative of the race, and that's without the freedom to create any series of events one desires, since fiction doesn't have to correspond to real events.

The story itself is a wandering mess. Point-of-view changes occur back and forth mid-chapter in an odd fashion. Despite being billed a book about "what O(bama) is really thinking," he's surprisingly absent for most of the book. Instead, we spend a lot of time looking over the shoulder of campaign manager Cal Regan and spend a lot of time going back and forth over the same issues of campaigning. Over and over.

Though it owes its existence to Primary Colors, O suffers in every comparison. Perhaps it's because the Clintons, love 'em or hate 'em, are larger-than-life characters even in real life, with drama and scandal and intrigue. Contrast Bill Clinton with "No Drama Obama" and you see why the best the author can do is come up with a tepid "donor tries to share dirt about campaign rival" storyline that isn't interesting, isn't intense, and never actually turns into anything. Considering how little the story actually seems to follow the 2012 campaign, it's a wonder why the author didn't invent something more dramatic. The Republican opponent, Tom Morrison, seems to be a fusion between McCain (war hero) and Romney (businessman), so . . . maybe we're just reading some guy's political fan fiction about the hypothetical candidate he wishes could have existed to run against Obama?

Instead, we get side references to the fact that Obama likes to smoke, wishes he could play more rounds of gold, and swears sometimes. Riveting stuff.

If you want a more exciting political fiction novel that is based (loosely) on real people, read Primary Colors;

it holds up better, and this is from someone who wasn't overly impressed with that book, either. If you want a narrative that actually managed to be interesting, and has the added benefit of being true, look at Mark Halperin's works, "Game Changer" and "Double Down," about the 2008 and 2012 campaigns respectively. They're good stories, and both have the added benefit of being based on actual events.

Brian says

"O-A Presidential Novel" is a poor excuse of a novel. Written by Anonymous (who is obviously a political insider and clearly not a writer) the book is dull, poorly characterized, and a slog of a read. In fact, I only completed it out of a stupid sense of finishing what I started.

Plotting in this book is insanely bad, jumping all over the place. The author introduces almost a dozen (I counted) sub plots in which they hint at something interesting to follow and then drops completely, never to be heard of again. Where was the editor of this novel?

My biggest disappointment with this text is that the premise was rich with possibilities. The 2012 presidential campaign, and the personalities of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney could be the stuff of rich characterizations. But that takes a real novelist to pull off, and Anonymous is not that person. Save yourself, don't read this text.

Chrissy says

I didn't think this was a bad book, but I feel that it required a lot of background information/knowledge in order to fully grasp the import of what you were reading. Since I didn't have that at my disposal and didn't know all the people/characters referenced throughout the book, I DNFed this about halfway through. I might pick it up again at some point and see if I can slog my way through this to give a more thorough review.

Joanna says

This is an abysmal attempt at novel writing. The conceit of having an 'Anonymous' author is really the only semi-interesting thing this book has going for it.

Although it promotes itself as a fictionalized novel of the Obama presidency, the writing is so clunky and uninspired, the plot so unimaginative, and the characters - ostensibly based on real people - so wooden, that any larger point about politics or power or the media (if it exists) is lost in the muddle of poor execution.

Unlike its anonymous political counterpart "Primary Colors," this book is never smart enough to reach the level of satire. You know it's going to be rough going from the moment you see a list of character names and descriptions preceding the opening pages. This is the first sign that alerts the reader to a cast of characters as anonymous as their creator, devoid of both personality and any sense of identity. The apparent protagonist, Cal Regan, is referred to by both his first and last name all the way through the book, perhaps to guard against the possibility that the reader otherwise might forget who he is.

The fact that these characters are supposed to be thinly veiled proxies of actual political players really calls the author's powers of research and observation into question, as he still can not render them either interesting or believable. It may be that the frequent awkwardly switched perspective narrations or the

strange flash future hint insertions are devices intended to distract the reader from the pervasive lack of realistic character interaction. Or, alternately, they might be further proof of the author's appalling lack of talent combined with a perfect storm of sloppy editing.

Better editing could at least have cleaned up some of the most glaringly awful issues with calling the president 'O' at all times. While this is fine for when opponents and operatives are talking to him, or about him, or amongst themselves - having crowds at rallies chanting "O" is deeply stupid. Could you not just write around it, and say they were chanting his name? Or did the author actually just write the novel slam book style, using the actual names of people and then using the find and replace function to substitute in their fake names? Unknown, but the end result is ridiculous either way. Especially when the book makes an ill-advised seven paragraph switch over to a news article, and the reporter refers to "President O." Uh-huh. If I had not borrowed this book from the library, I would have attacked it with a red pen just to make myself feel better.

And although all of the writing is bad, the simultaneous marginalization and objectification of the very few female characters who appear at all, speak to a casual misogyny that seem to prove that the anonymous author is clearly a man. Of the three female characters who rate a mention on the opening page character chart - two of them get there by sleeping with Cal Regan, and the third is supposed to be Ariana Huffington. Other bit parts for women include: the ice cold First Lady, the aggrieved ex-assistant and future porn star, and the eighteen year old prostitute blackmailer. With such treatment, I can't really wish that the author had included any more women, as he clearly has very limited ideas about what to do with them, most of which involve penises and intrigue.

The plot of the novel, which seeks to imagine the 2012 campaign, is felled by the dramatic irony of having nothing happen. It tries to create some drama with a non-scandal involving a donor trying to get a government contract, which fails to be either compelling or really remotely relevant in any way. And if the reader is not moved to care about the un-scandalous scandal, it's very difficult to see why the mythic electorate of the book would care about it either.

In the end, it appears that the author fails to care about the book enough to even give it an ending. The narrative just peters out on the eve of the election. There are vague but contradictory hints about whether or not O wins reelection (Walter LaFontaine never speaks to him again, there is a party at 1am but it only lasts an hour), but any irritation over the failure of the story to achieve resolution is completely subsumed by gratitude at having finally reached the end of this mirthless parade of non-action and unwieldy prose.

Ron Charles says

Like the people who end up running for president, this anonymous novel about Barack Obama's reelection campaign isn't as good as you hoped or as bad as you feared. Maybe the American people get the roman a clef they deserve. Because regardless of how closely "O" anticipates next year's campaign, it's an uncanny response to this month's call for a more civil political discourse.

In fact, its anonymity may be the sexiest thing about "O." The publisher is being coy, claiming it was written by someone who "has been in the room with Barack Obama," which means we can rule out Kim Jong Il, but just about everybody else is still fair game. In any case, trust me, it's far too earnest for Christopher Buckley. And "O" has none of the snazzy wit of Joe Klein's briefly anonymous novel about the Clinton campaign, or

the grandeur of Robert Penn Warren's "All the King's Men," or the pathos of Ethan Canin's "America America." No, in the pages of this new novel, primary colors fade to soft pastels.

The story opens just a few months in the future: The economy is picking up slowly, the war in Afghanistan is still grinding along, and the political operatives are getting their soldiers into position for that once-every-four-years ordeal mandated by our Constitution. A tawdry scandal has swept aside Obama's campaign manager and opened up the job for Cal Regan, a handsome, affable insider who plays the novel's central character in a cast that remains surprisingly small. There's a list at the front of the book, but you won't need it. Despite the world-altering import of these events, "O" operates like one of those underfunded BBC productions in which eight actors represent the angry citizens of Rome.

Cal's job is to engineer the reelection of Barack Obama, and like a well-run campaign, everything in this novel remains relentlessly "on message." Even the physical world seems excluded from these characters' lives, a fair representation, I'm sure, of the claustrophobic concentration the campaign requires. In fact, that's what "O" does best - without any undue cynicism or gooeey romanticism: It clearly illustrates, season by season, just how effectively presidential campaigners plan, draft and articulate the political discourse that the press pretends it controls. "The Office of the President has the power to change the subject anytime," a staffer reminds Obama as they consider an opponent's accusations. "You could get another dog, and the press would forget about this and start begging for bulletins about how it's getting along with your other dog."

"O's" dramatization of a presidential race may shock an eighth grade student council member somewhere in Kansas City, but most of us will wish that the author had pursued his themes with a little more satiric bite. Nonetheless, he describes the typical campaign with documentary accuracy, and he's particularly good at the dynamic between old and new journalism. Gabby online news sites, such as Bianca Stefani's Stefani Report (a thinly veiled version of the Huffington Post) float salacious stories, while the mainstream media tut-tut and report on the controversy surrounding the rumors. Largely ignoring the pressing issues of the day, the New York Times and The Washington Post obsess over the horse race, the tone and the process of the campaign. And while each candidate portrays himself as above the fray, Cal and his men trade scoops with their favorite reporters in exchange for favorable treatment. (And yes, they're mostly men. For all its up-to-the-minute pretensions, "O" consigns women to the roles of wives, mothers, spunky beat reporters and obnoxious divorcees.)

Dramatically, "O" suffers from its concentration on a pair of candidates determined to be civil and restrained. That would be nice for our country, but it's damning for a novel. The author seems incapable of competing with the outlandish real-life characters who have blessed and cursed American political life. Sarah Palin, "flaunting that whole lusty librarian thing," has decided not to run. "But I'm not going away," she says in a brief, barely parodic appearance. "I'll be keepin' an eye on our candidates."

Instead, Obama's opponent is Tom "Terrific" Morrison, the perfect amalgamation of John McCain (without the maverick instability) and Mitt Romney (without the Mormonism): "square-jawed, straight-backed, irresistibly perfect." He's got it all: military service, humility, savvy and business acumen. You think this is a setup for the big reveal - the pregnant campaign aide, the blue dress that's never been dry-cleaned, the wide stance in a public restroom - but Morrison really is a fine, upstanding man. And what's more, he's determined to run a clean, fair, courteous campaign. Wake me up when it's over.

But at the center is Obama himself - the cool, brilliant black man from Chicago, with "an anthropologist's detachment," who has to keep worrying about coming across as too articulate, too good a talker. "O" stays very close to the conventional wisdom and never presses into the intimate details of his life or his marriage - none of those squirm-inducing intimacies we got from Curtis Sittenfeld's "American Wife" about the Bushes.

It wouldn't be fair to say "O" is a stridently partisan novel, but it's clear that the author's sympathies are with the current resident of the White House. Obama comes across here as determined but weary. "I'm tired," he tells his staff as they begin planning for "nine miserable months" of campaigning. "He feared nothing more than losing control of his own destiny," the author writes.

But how to win over these fickle American voters - portrayed in these pages largely as a mob, "impervious to facts and reason or even the memory of their recent experience with Republican incompetence"? Obama laments that everything he did "to alleviate the anxiety of the American middle class seemed at times only to exasperate the people more. It was as if they had expected O to turn the country around in his first month in office, and when he didn't, they hardened their hearts against him."

According to this story, the White House will run with the slogan "Promises Made. Promises Kept." That's a little flat, but it feels about right for what we're about to endure over the next 22 months. If you want to get a jump on all that - the ads, the debates, the op-eds, the speeches - here's a blueprint that's probably pretty close to the mark.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/...>

Steve Hnosko says

I enjoyed the first half of this book but the second half seemed rushed. It was almost as if the author was told he had a page limit and saw he was getting close so had to wrap it up.
