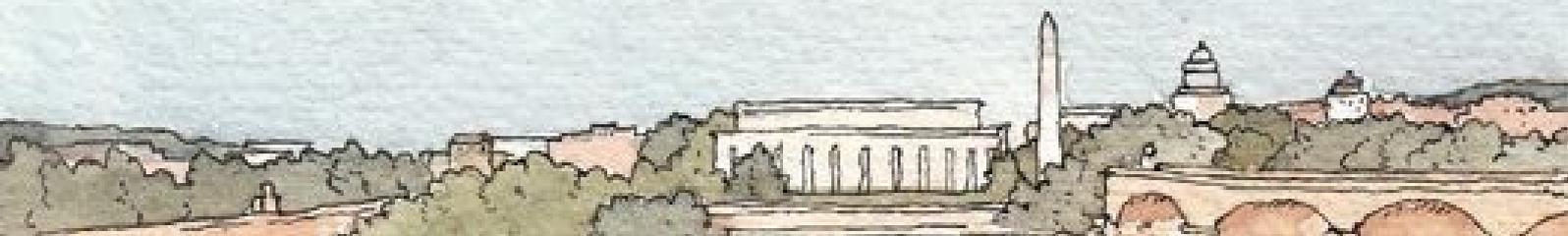


DOG★FIGHT

The 2012 Presidential Campaign in Verse

CALVIN TRILLIN





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The narrative poem that constitutes the bulk of this book appears here for the first time. Most of the poems embedded in it originally appeared in *The Nation*. The prose pieces originally appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Slate*, or *The New York Times*.

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Dedication

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Let the Barking and Biting Begin

Mitt Romney put Seamus on top of the car.
("He liked it up there, and we weren't going far.")
Obama, in boyhood, while in Indonesia,
Once swallowed some dog meat without anesthesia.
Though dog lovers wouldn't be either man's base,
A dogfight seemed what was in store for their race.
And people were saying, "We wonder which dude'll
Emerge as the pit bull, and which as the poodle."

1.



2008

The '08 votes for President were in.
They showed Barack Obama with the win—
A solid win, a win that was historic.
Americans were moved to wax euphoric.
Yes, even some who'd voted for McCain
Were proud we'd have a man of color reign
As President. Historians took note.
Amidst the cheers, one versifier wrote,
“And foreigners from Rome to Yokohama
Were cheering an American: Obama.
From this vote, they were willing to infer
We aren't the people they had thought we were.
And Lady Liberty, as people call her,
Was standing in the harbor somewhat taller.”
The task this man would face, of course, was humbling:
The whole economy had started crumbling.
As people lost their jobs and houses too,
The experts disagreed on what to do.
Some banks were saved, and some were left to fail.
As Hamlet said, “To bail or not to bail ... ”

The People in Charge

The people in charge of the bailout attempts
Are titans of Wall Street, with fortunes accrued.
They seem a bit clueless about what to do.
Remember when they were the guys who seemed shrewd?

Yes, Washington says, from both sides of the aisle,
That these are the shoulders upon which to lean.
But we'd feel more confident if we were sure
That they knew what “credit default swap” might mean.

And Congress seemed to any average voter
Irreparable, much like a seized-up motor.
One hope persisted once Obama'd won:

That he would change the way that things were done.
His victory, some said, could also mean
The GOP was fading from the scene—
A party that was clearly in its throes.
The Sabbath Gasbags on the Sunday shows
Said at the least from now on we would see
A dismal decade for the GOP—
A period filled with sadness and regrets,
With losses like the early sixties Mets.
The Gasbags, though, had said the same before—
To be precise, in 1964.
They'd said the landslide won by LBJ
Might cause the GOP to fade away.
But this was all forgotten by the date
Of Nixon's win in 1968.
The Gasbags have a minor brain affliction:
They can't remember any wrong prediction.

The State of the Union, 2009

The State of the Union's the President's chance to speak, perorate, and evoke.
For this year's an honest first sentence would be "The State of the Union is
broke."

To counter what Obama would orate
To Congress on the nation's shaky state,
The top Republicans chose Bobby Jindal,
In hopes a rising star like him could kindle
Some sort of spark conservatives would find
Inspiring, and not become resigned
To wandering in the wilderness once more
While Democratic liberals ran the store.
But Jindal, thought to be a true past master
Of speaking, was, in fact, a true disaster.
This governor's ideas seemed rather skimpy.
The governor himself seemed rather wimpy.
He proved to be an easy man to mock:
He's like the dorky page on *30 Rock*.

Bad Opening Night for the G.O.P.

Yes, poor Bobby Jindal has flubbed his premiere.

If this is the guy who they think is a star,
There's one thing to say, and to say loud and clear:
Come back, Sarah Palin, wherever you are.

In stories from the capital we read
That now the GOP was close to dead
And Democrats would soon be dancing jigs,
Their opposition fading out like Whigs.

2.



2010

Recovery moved slowly, step by step—
Called sluggish, though most slugs have much more pep.
Obama's health-care bill was passed—a feat
Republicans then demonized *tout suite*,
Although its main ideas all began
As part of a Republican-backed plan.
(The White House seemed afflicted with some shyness
While letting them brand quite a plus a minus.)
Some critics said that health care could have waited
Until our unemployment woes abated.
Barack Obama's promised hope and change
Seemed far away and maybe out of range.
The Sabbath Gasbags then began to say
Obama's mojo may have drained away.

Pundits Say Washington Must Instill Confidence

The pundits say Obama must discuss
Our plight but sound much less like Gloomy Gus:
We need the-only-thing-we-have-to-fear leaders,
Or, failing that, the Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders.

And meanwhile all across this wounded land
Some angry people said they'd take their stand.
They said that what the Framers had in mind
Was not a government that seemed inclined
To dominate our lives at work and play
And grow much more intrusive every day.
They said that those who'd worked, obeyed the rules,
Were now supporting layabouts and fools.
These folks were quick to vocally condemn
All handouts (but the ones that went to them).
Quite quickly, they were ready to proclaim
They were a movement, and they took a name
From Boston patriots who took such glee
In tossing British tea into the sea.