



AGENT PROVOCATEUR

How “real” do we really want a first lady to be? France’s Valérie Trierweiler seemed poised to redefine the role—until *le tweet* heard across the country turned her into a tabloid target. *By Judith Warner*

She was supposed to be a new kind of first lady—for the country and maybe even for the world. An average Frenchwoman, albeit a striking one—middle class, twice divorced, a mother of three who’d always worked hard to make ends meet—who was perfectly matched, in utter unremarkableness, by her paunchy, balding boyfriend, who just happened to be the newly elected president of France. He’d sold himself as “Mr. Normal”—an unassuming bureaucrat who’d bring modesty and humility back to the office of the French presidency.

Together, Valérie Trierweiler and François Hollande, France’s first unmarried First Couple, were set to usher in a new era in Paris’ Élysée Palace, where they took up residence in May. No more of the glitz, glitter, or emotional fireworks that had characterized the time of Hollande’s predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy, a man so enamored of fancy watches and chichi parties that he’d been nicknamed the “bling-bling” president. No more of the personal dramas that had turned Sarkozy’s presidency into

France’s most-watched soap opera, as the volatile conservative was, within the first year of his single term, very publicly dumped by his (second) wife, Cécilia, then went on to marry the Dior-clad supermodel turned singer Carla Bruni.

And, at first, it seemed like the new political couple just might be able to pull it off. Hollande, a Socialist, looked convincingly grim and determined as he promised to embody the seriousness and self-restraint needed to lead the French through a painful period of economic austerity and draw the curtain on the “confusion of private and public” that had allowed Sarkozy to make his in-office marriage(s) into an embarrassing public spectacle. And Trierweiler, a longtime political journalist responsible for the lion’s share of her three teenage boys’ care and upkeep, managed to cut a deal with her employer, the *People* magazine-like weekly *Paris Match*, that enabled her to keep writing regular articles about books while steering clear of politics. Journalism colleagues at and beyond the magazine grumbled about conflicts of interest, but

the public at large overwhelmingly approved, particularly in the provinces, where they embraced the 47-year-old former inhabitant of the western town of Angers as one of their own.

Americans had viewed the Bruni-Sarkozy romance as a delicious show of French glamour and sophistication. We wondered about the protocol challenges an unmarried presidential couple would face when they shared sleeping quarters in countries that frowned upon such arrangements. In France, however, Bruni had been viewed as something of an intellectual lightweight, and in a country where marriage has been on the decline for years, the Hollande-Trierweiler duo's domestic arrangements ruffled relatively few feathers.

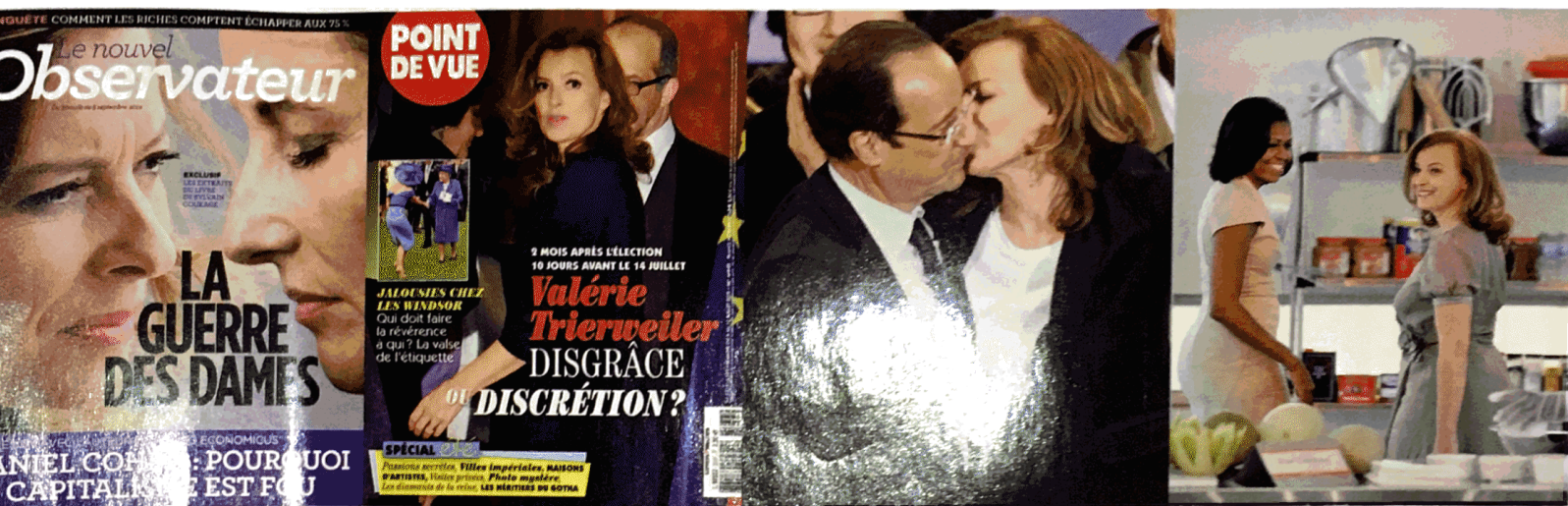
People there enjoyed Trierweiler's Balzac-worthy story of social mobility and self-creation: how the fifth child of six born to a father on permanent disability and a mother who worked the cash register at the municipal skating rink had worked her way up from public housing to rubbing shoulders with the country's most powerful movers and shakers in Paris. They admired her combina-

moon" period with the French should have been rosier), and has obsessed the French political and media establishment ever since. Its words, banal enough on their surface, translate as: "Courage to Olivier Falorni, who has not been unworthy, who fights unselfishly alongside the people of La Rochelle for so many years."

Problem was, President Hollande, behind whose back Trierweiler sent the tweet (after a massive fight), had already sent his own official message of support to Falorni's opponent, Ségolène Royal.

Royal, it should be noted: (1) had been the Socialist presidential candidate in 2007, and after losing that election viewed this particular race as her last chance for a political comeback; (2) also happens to be the mother of Hollande's four children; (3) and, until Trierweiler stole him away, had been Hollande's partner for almost 30 years.

"With Nicolas Sarkozy, we had a president who broke the rules," says Anna Cabana, a journalist with *Le Point* and coauthor of *Between Two Fires*, the most telling of the Valérie tell-alls. "With



tion of style and substance; her tasteful belted trenches and high heels (off the sales rack); her IKEA furniture; her "sexy décolleté" and "impeccable blow-out" (as one sympathetic journalist put it early on) coupled with her insistence that she had always earned her keep and always would. "My financial independence is, as for millions of French women, a concrete reality and a priority," she declared in an interview published right after Hollande's election.

So how, in the flash of a single tweet—in support of a dissident Socialist candidate in a provincial legislative election—could Valérie Trierweiler have become the consummate political embarrassment? By September, she was being pounded nonstop by the press as a scheming traitor—"irritable, excessive, crazy, a twit," in the words of fellow journalist Laurent Greilsamer, author of one of three Trierweiler tell-alls that were soon dominating every bookstore and newsstand in France. Come October, she issued a formal apology in a regional newspaper and announced she'd "chosen" to give up on her plans to work on a TV documentary series; a poll early that month showed that only 28 percent of the French public had a positive opinion of her and 42 percent said Hollande's private life had a negative impact on his image.

"I never saw anyone make herself hated so quickly by so many French people," a fellow reporter, who has known Trierweiler well for 20 years and spoke only on the condition of anonymity, was moved to comment.

In 137 characters, the tweet wrecked Trierweiler's public image, helped send Hollande's popularity rating shooting down a damning seven points in a single month (right when his "honey-

THE NEW NORMAL (From left) The French press sets its sights on Trierweiler; the first couple on election night; Trierweiler with Michelle Obama

Valérie Trierweiler, it's much more serious. It's an unheard-of transgression. She's the companion of the president who went against her guy. It's as though you had a first lady who opened the door to the bedroom of the president of the United States."

We want our public figures to be "real"—approachable, relatable—yet if they pull us in too close, we recoil. Hence the collective "yuck" when Michelle Obama divulged, back in 2007, that her husband was so "snorey and stinky" in the morning that their girls wouldn't crawl into bed with him. There's human and there's all too human, and the line between them keeps shifting as the let-it-all-hang-out baby boomers and post-boomers move into the highest reaches of public life.

Trierweiler is, in many ways, a woman typical of her time, one for whom it's a point of principle not to passively stand by any man, and to reject soundly the stoicism that a previous generation employed to keep the peace. Even her Twitter crack-up can be viewed as a sign that she is, indeed, all too normal: a middle-aged woman feeling weak and insecure in a relatively late-in-life romance with a powerful, much-solicited man. A man whose longtime partner—the beautiful, intelligent Royal, more beloved by the public as a woman wronged than she ever had been as a political candidate—is very much still a part of his life. Which raises the question: Is it possible for a prominent public figure—a woman in particular—to be so very normal? Don't the demands of public life require a superhuman degree of levelheadedness, dignity, skilled compartmentalization, and emotional cool? Or at least the ability to fake it?

From left: courtesy of Le Nouvel Observateur; courtesy of Point de Vue; Sean Gallup/Getty Images; AFP/Getty Images

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Sarkozy's second wife, Cécilia, had learned the hard way—via widespread public condemnation—when she began acting as a shadow adviser to her then husband, that the French public, like the American, has a limited tolerance for a first lady who allows herself too visible a role in her president's political life. Hillary Clinton, of course, learned this the hard way too, as did Nancy Reagan, and Rosalynn Carter, who infuriated many in the 1970s when she regularly sat in on cabinet meetings with the president. Michelle Obama has always made sure not to cross the line since she landed in the White House—which is partly why, undoubtedly, she's taken refuge in the otherwise uncharacteristic Hallmark card-like moniker of mom-in-chief.

On the campaign trail, Trierweiler took pains to maintain enough physical distance to demonstrate that she knew her activities would have to reside in a sphere wholly separate from Hollande's political life. Yet at the same time, in interview after interview, she made sure to assert the primacy of her position in Hollande's heart—almost as though, with her old rival still prominently placed on the Socialist scene, she felt the public needed to be reminded that she, Trierweiler, was the “first lady” of his heart. “I'm not campaigning, I'm not a woman politician, but a politician woman,” she told French ELLE, in a statement teeming with double entendres. “I know my place. Which happens to be by his side.” But as soon as Hollande was in office, there were complaints about the way, at his first ceremonial event in the Élysée Palace, she stepped forward to shake the hands of the politicians who'd come to greet him. Musing over her new role, she'd had the audacity to joke that, acting on a suggestion from a voter, she might take on the title of “First Journalist.”

This didn't go over well with her colleagues. Although Trierweiler was a long-time member of the small cadre of reporters who covered French politics, she'd inspired relatively little goodwill among them. “That personality she has, where she isn't afraid of anyone and sticks to her guns no matter what, bothers people,” says Constance Vergara, a former colleague and friend from *Paris Match*, and the one author to whom Trierweiler has granted interviews. “She had said, right from the start, that she wouldn't choose between her professional career and her role of first lady. Some moralistic journalists wanted to force her, talking about conflicts of interest, but they were above all jealous, because she could have it all. What better for a female political reporter than to find herself right in the hallways of power, knowing all the secrets? A lot of them imagined themselves being in her place and doing it better.”

When Trierweiler crossed one too many boundaries, she really had no constituency to defend her. A very large and highly vocal Greek chorus was standing at the ready to narrate her downfall. “In one tweet, Valérie Trierweiler completely exploded the president's base of normality, authority, and credibility,” says Cabana. “Journalists now consider it legitimate to insert themselves in her private life.”

The bedroom drama that Trierweiler's tweet unveiled was one of the many that Paris' journalists had kept largely for their own private delectation for years—former Socialist presidential hopeful Dominique Strauss-Kahn's issues with sexual self-regulation; former Socialist president François Mitterrand's secret second family. French reporters have traditionally prided themselves on gaining politicians' confidence and (sometimes) keeping their personal secrets. (During the Monica Lewinsky business, there was endless talk in Paris: Why did it matter? Why was the U.S. press even talking about this?) For decades, in fact, they'd watched as Hollande, a Mitterrand protégé, rose through the ranks of the Socialist party, collaborating—and often competing—with his partner, Royal. She, too, had strived to position herself as a normal, modern French woman, even posing for pictures and sitting for interviews in the maternity ward in 1992, when her youngest child, Flora, was born. (One of the reporters at the time covering government minister Royal's work-family balance? Valérie Trierweiler.)

The media establishment had watched the ups and downs of Hollande and Royal's struggles to lead the Socialist party, as well as the ups and downs of their relationship. They enjoyed the show when, in 2006, with her relationship on the rocks and Trierweiler already in the wings, Royal had speculated publicly about a possible wedding with Hollande in Polynesia, only to reportedly draw the dry response of “I wasn't informed” from her would-be groom. They'd known before the public did that Royal and Hollande had called it quits, even as the couple pretended to stay together for her 2007 presidential campaign. They'd heard that Royal had gone to *Paris Match* to demand, successfully, that Trierweiler be stopped from covering the Socialist party. And that Trierweiler—despite being the woman who had “won” Hollande in the end—hated Royal for interfering with her career and, years later, still harbored a combination of fear and rage for her rival.

“Sometimes something gets the better of her,” says the fellow journalist who frequently crossed paths with Trierweiler over the past few years. “Her jealousy, her little neuroses that she can't control, can't gauge the consequences of. That's what happened with the tweet.”

Trierweiler's colleagues had watched avidly, deconstructing her every move, when, in April, the first-lady-to-be maneuvered herself at a Hollande campaign event so that Royal was forced to shake her hand before the cameras. Then they'd caught the moment on camera when, on election night, the new president came to Paris and, in front of a gathered crowd, was greeted by Socialist party luminaries, including his former partner, whom he companionably kissed on both cheeks, before ending up beside Trierweiler, who whispered to him, “Kiss me on the mouth.”

So when Trierweiler sent that tweet, the press had the backstory—the whole long, sad, sordid tale—ready to roll out: How Trierweiler believed that Royal had engaged in “emotional blackmail” to get Hollande to support her in her race. How Trierweiler and Hollande had fought over his endorsement; how, the morning of the tweet, she'd threatened him, saying, “You'll see what I'm capable of!” And how, in the wake of that fateful morning, the whole house of cards of Hollande's purported normality finally, all too predictably, imploded. ❖

GAME CHANGER

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hard to become an actor was actually study acting. The girl who can self-deprecate her way through any bit of flattery is able to own this one thing: “Acting, films, scripts, is literally the only thing I'm 100 percent confident in. I know what I'm doing. I just understand it, and I love it. When I'm on set, that's when I feel the most at home and in control.” *The Hunger Games*' Ross recalls Lawrence's costar Donald Sutherland watching one of her scenes. “He said, ‘She's a pure, unadulterated actor—a Please-God-don't-touch-her actor,’” says Ross. “I think what he meant was, there are some people who are born with such a special gift that they don't even understand it fully.”

Silver Linings Playbook is a dysfunctional-family drama with spot-on comedic timing, not to mention Eagles football, high-stakes betting, and ballroom dancing. Cooper's Pat is a bipolar former teacher, prematurely sprung from a mental hospital and living at home with his parents (Robert De Niro as his OCD bookie father, Jacki Weaver as the mother trying to hold the whole loony bunch together), pining for his estranged wife (who has a restraining order against him), and determined to find a silver lining in his situation. Enter Lawrence's raven-haired Tiffany, the reformed neighborhood bad girl who is not so reformed anymore—her coping mechanism since her cop husband died has been “having sex with everybody in the office.”

When the movie premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, Lawrence's performance whipped up a frenzy of early Oscar buzz. In one raucous scene, she barges in, wresting control of the action from a meltdown De Niro. He rages at her, but then something unfathomable happens: Lawrence returns fire, decimating him with a stream of football factoids. “When she came into the scene, it really had the effect it has in the movie,” says Russell. “She did kind of shock everybody a little bit. Nobody knew what to expect. Nobody knew if she was up to it, you know?” The fun part, Russell says, was watching De Niro—never predictable in any scene—go at her hard, then soften, as if in awe. It's a transformation that plays over his face: Oh, this girl is good.

It's easy to forget that we're talking about someone who was a kid not five minutes ago; someone whose idea of a good time is sleepovers with her girlfriends, munching chips in pajamas, watching *The Wendy Williams Show*, *Khloé & Lamar*, and the twisted Syfy series *Scare Tactics*. “Jen would rather drink tar than go to a party,” says actress Lauren Sweetser, who became one of Lawrence's best friends after playing her only confidante in *Winter's Bone*. “That's what I love about her.” Sweetser has her own take on the sixteenth-most-powerful person in Hollywood: “She's just a total goober.”

Technically, Lawrence has never even had a place of her own. She's still living in the modest Santa Monica condo her parents sprang for when the Hollywood thing was still a pipe dream. “Ten million dollars and I'm still living in my parents' condo,” she says. “I'm humiliated. Are you happy?” She needs a more secure, private place to live, but she's not sure she'd be able to handle the kind of digs that her budget would allow. “I've always lived in a tiny rat-infested apartment in New York, or a little condo in L.A., or a normal house in Kentucky. I think it would be very bizarre to live in a big mansion by myself.” So what's she going to do? “I'm going to buy a big mansion and suck it up,” she scoffs, back on that roll again. “I'm an actor. I have to do this.” ❖