

I Love Thee, [Insert Politician's Name]. Lovest Thou Me?

Nipped by the bitter German wind and hidden behind the walls of a dilapidated cottage, Victor Frankenstein's creature peers into a hole in the wall to catch glimpses of picture-perfect residents inside and their gestures of affection towards each other. Predictably, the creature's increasing emotional attachment to the family and its seeming moral infallibility spirals out of control; his conviction that the family will reciprocate his love soon proves to be irrevocably, and disastrously, wrong. Yet we should not dismiss the creature with our self-righteous judgment—not when we ourselves huddle on the steps of the Capitol, jostling one another to view a mere cowlick or index finger of our picture-perfect politicians. A friendly wave sends us reeling with joy; a greeting presses us closer to the illuminated windows, desperate for more. This absurd idolization of politicians has created not only a bubble of political and moral impunity around Capitol Hill but also a dangerous coping mechanism for our increased social isolation.

Bluntly put, most politicians seek only one thing from their constituents: votes. Now, an American's vote serves less as a means to uphold a centuries-old democracy and more so as a means to reinforce the standing of the political elite. Politicians, desperate to stay in power, are more than willing to twist this unfortunate truth to their advantage. Their creativity in snatching votes is simply unparalleled; from Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's live stream of her playing the video game *Among Us* ahead of the 2020 elections to Senator Jon Ossoff's TikTok memes during the 2021 Georgia runoff, politicians paint portraits of approachability and relatability geared to win voters' hearts. And many voters fall right into these intricate traps. Ocasio-Cortez's admirers flood every social media platform, praising her every Tweet or Instagram post; the magazine *Allure* called upon an astrologer to explain how her birth chart

correlates to her brilliance. Ossoff's online fans swarm his accounts as "Ossimps," and the vast majority of comments on his posts on Georgian infrastructure or solar power energy declare their love for his face. Too often do we see commentaries on actual policies pushed aside by such feverish adoration of personalities or physical features; too often do we brush aside the political component of politicians for the charming facades that they offer us.

Unfortunately, this love of politicians' curated personalities rather than tangible legislative action is far from the harmless, chaotic fun it appears to be. Our treatment of political representatives as our friends imbues them with far too much power. When we lauded Mitt Romney as The Good Republican for his open criticism of Donald Trump, or confessed our "cuomosexuality" in admiration of Governor Andrew Cuomo's guidance during the pandemic, we pedestaled these politicians as infallible celebrities. When we failed to seriously acknowledge Mitt Romney's uneasy record of opposing same-sex marriages or Cuomo's cover-up of nursing home death numbers, we allowed them to scrape with our unconditional support, leaving them unscathed despite their unjustifiable wrongs. Cuomo may have finally fallen from grace, but hundreds of his image-obsessed colleagues remain safe within their offices, shielded by the masses who refuse to see past the glitz and glamor. Our impulsive loyalty to such politicians propels us not only to dismiss every semblance of criticism without a second thought, but stifles the productive political discourse necessary for democracy. A well-informed, cautious electorate can hold the fates of politicians within their hands, determining his or her representatives as either effective agents of or ejecting them as useless sycophants. Our ignorant, fawning electorate instead places themselves in the hands of politicians, allowing the all-powerful to guide them in whatever direction they please.

But how did we end up sacrificing ourselves as mere marionettes of Capitol Hill's finest? Both fortunately and unfortunately, this puppetry is not entirely our fault. Our obsessive investment in politicians ultimately stems from the loneliness and fear that pervades every aspect of American society. With the isolation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the socio-economic instability of rising unemployment rates, and the impending doom of climate disasters, our futures remain beyond uncertain. Our increasing dependence on the artificial worlds of social media allows our familial, platonic, and communal bonds to wilt and wither away silently. As our insecurities about ourselves, our relationships, and even the entirety of our lives skyrocket, we must turn to something stable and accessible in which we can find true meaning—and unfortunately, we often find that stability and accessibility in the tumultuous world of politics. By aligning ourselves with a politician, we can establish a concrete identity for ourselves: the follower of a supposedly admirable, accomplished figure. By offering them our unconditional allegiance, we ensure the immortality of this identity; if they are forever worthy of our worship, we can forever enjoy our safety as the worshiper. Simply put, we see our idolization of politicians as the ultimate remedy for the inevitable perils of living. No matter the cost of ignorance, isolation from our real neighbors, or even the ultimate loss of democracy, we can enjoy a brief breath of relief.

Yet that relief is nothing but false and temporary—in actuality, we remain as pitifully delusional as Frankenstein's creature. The politicians through the pinhole will never love us; their superficial smiles will not repair but instead tear open our wounds of isolation. The only way to escape the bitter cold of our current world is to recognize the humanity within ourselves—the humanity desperate to bond with real, tangible human beings rather than the insincere charmers that populate C-SPAN. We must push ourselves, and other individuals, to

seek true connections in one another rather than doom ourselves to deriving bits of artificial joy from parasocial, artificial relationships with politicians. Then, we must recognize the humanity within politicians; we must accept that they may one day fail us, and that we must hold them accountable for those potential failures. We must build our own cottage; by living together as a unified society, fully conscious of the reality of our imperfect political world, we will hold far more power than any politician's cheap campaign to win our vote, allowing democracy to prevail freely once more.