

BOOK *of the* MONTH

RODHAM

Curtis Sittenfeld

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

What compelled you to write a novelisation of Hillary Rodham Clinton's life?

In early 2016, a magazine editor reached out and asked if I'd be interested in writing a short story from the perspective of Hillary Clinton as she was accepting the Democratic nomination for president. When this opportunity arose to write about her fictionally, I realized that I could flip around a frequent question. Instead of asking "What do the American people think of Hillary?" I could ask "What does Hillary think of the American people?"

Another factor that contributed to the novel was that around the time of the 2016 election, I had the realization that children who knew Hillary Clinton was running for president didn't necessarily know that Bill Clinton existed, let alone know how much baggage accompanies him in the national consciousness. After the election, I wondered how differently it might have played out if adults didn't also see Hillary and Bill as so intertwined.

Did the scales tip more toward it being difficult to envisage Hillary's life and how she would act in certain situations or fun to imagine living through Hillary's eyes?

It was both, depending upon the section. I did a lot of research, which I found both fascinating and challenging, but I also wanted to imagine a private or personal (albeit fictionalized) version of her - hanging out with friends, getting organized before bed, texting her brothers.





Are there certain public stereotypes of Hillary that you wanted to explore in *Rodham*?

I find most of the stereotypes of Hillary not to be grounded in reality, or to say more about people's discomfort with powerful and ambitious women than about Hillary herself. Certainly I was interested in examining that discomfort and seeing how sexism plays out in nitty-gritty, daily ways in women's professional lives. With regard to stereotypes about Hillary's personality, although I do see her as tough in the sense that she's withstood a lot of criticism, she seems very warm to me. She's had many long, close friendships and (I've never met her) is supposed to be quite loyal and thoughtful.

There are some very funny and astute Trump moments in *Rodham*. How did you approach his character in the book?

In a concrete sense, I watched some of his speeches and transcribed his words and also read his tweets (I don't follow him on Twitter) to try to capture his verbal patterns. I found this distasteful to do, like exposure therapy.

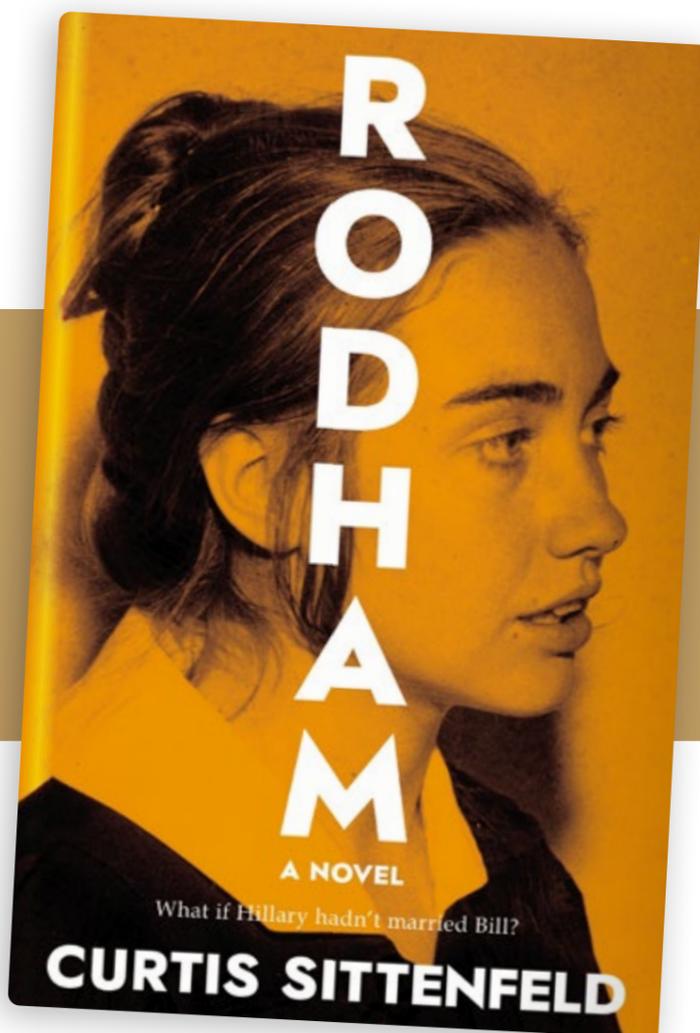
On the more macro level, I'm very interested in questions about fate versus free will. And one such question is whether there's a parallel universe (or more than one universe) where the circumstances of a person's life would be totally different or even just a little different. Or if circumstances rather than people's personalities were different, would our roles in one another's lives be dramatically altered? I don't see Donald Trump as having clear political views, and I perceive him to be very influenced by those around him so I wonder if he could ever have been steered in a different direction. One final tidbit: There are various news reports that Bill Clinton (who denies this) encouraged Trump to run for president in 2015.

How do you feel when you think of Hillary reading the book?

I'd welcome her feedback, even if she found the book 90% preposterous.

When writing a book like *Rodham*, how do you decide when you've added enough attributes true to the characters we know that you can start taking your own license for the good of the novel as its own fictional work?

From the beginning, I knew I needed to take creative liberties. My challenge was to strike a balance between reality and fiction without going too far in either direction. Diverging from the historic timeline by having Hillary turn down Bill's proposals allowed me to look in a new way at current events, but if I had completely changed her life - by, say, making her a lawyer in a random suburb with a husband, three kids, and a dog - at some point she would cease to have any relationship to the real Hillary. I needed to maintain certain echoes of her real life, such as her commitment to politics, to maintain the good kind of tension.



[SHOP NOW](#)