



SNAPSHOT

'Nature Vigoureuse' (2008) by Martine Fougeron

Esparon, a remote hamlet in the Cévennes region of southern France, is perched on a rock. At the end of the 1950s, it was adopted as the summer sanctuary of French ex-pats living in New York: the grandparents of photographer Martine Fougeron.

Her two-part exhibition sets a documentary of her parents' arrival in the Cévennes, shot on 16mm Kodachrome, alongside 17 large format photographs depicting her two sons' transition to adulthood between 2005 and 2018. The pictures are part of Fougeron's long-term project *Nicolas & Adrien: A World with Two*

Sons, a series of intimate portraits of her sons and their friends growing up in New York and France.

Fougeron sees the hamlet as a "mountain circus which rises like an amphitheatre". Scenes by the river, forest and holiday home convey the family's attachment to nature — a peaceful refuge for its acrobats, who tumble and twirl through four generations.

Georgina Findlay

'Martine Fougeron: Summer Time' is at the Art Institute, Château d'Assas, Le Vigan, France, to Sept 17

The long road of parenthood

Jo Ellison
Trending



In a brilliant take on the late novelist Cormac McCarthy, who died last month, the writer Kathryn Jezer-Morton describes *The Road* as being the best parenting book of all time.

It's an unlikely angle and one that might at first seem facetious. *The Road*, McCarthy's odyssey about a father and son walking across a post-apocalyptic landscape in the wake of an unspecified disaster, is more generally celebrated for its spare prose and vivid expression than as a viable alternative to nap-training manifestos and toddler-taming manuals.

But for Jezer-Morton, who was caught up in the infrastructural collapse of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the novel's brilliance (and its most valuable lessons) is found in its immortal "relevance". As she writes: "It eschews the typical narrative terrain about heroic American ingenuity in the face of adversity and, instead, focuses almost exclusively on the emotional work of being loving and brave while fearing for your life."

I have never been caught up in an infrastructural collapse, and read *The Road* while lying on a comfortable bed. But, as with Jezer-Morton, it stirred in me an almost primal fear. As I reached the book's conclusion, I put it down, crept into my then five-year-old daughter's bedroom, picked up her sleeping body and put her in my bed. McCarthy's novel of dystopian survival had been so terrifying, the only comfort I could think of was to hear my daughter breathe.

Every day I'm grateful for that privilege. The most fundamental hope for any parent is to see their children thrive. As parents we are all on the metaphorical road, trudging towards some distant "safe place" in which we can dispense with all the worry associated with taking care of other

human beings. And if we're lucky we will never reach it, because the very act of worry is an indicator that — right now — everything is basically OK. One hopes the hazards on our road will be small, innocuous dangers especially when for so many others, escaping warzones or natural disasters, the road can be a fact of daily life.

Parenting is all about positivity and hope and reassurance; things at which I am generally quite bad because I'm British and over-cautious, but which I try and conjure because I know that, as a parent, it's pretty much my only job. And so I throw around my worldly

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wisdoms and hope she doesn't do anything too stupid — such as hitchhiking without a mobile phone, which I myself did when I was 17. I want my daughter to be resourceful and independent, to know she will be able to fend for herself. And although I would still happily sleep with her next to me, the time is fast approaching that she must face the road alone.

Last weekend, we reached our own crossroads, a school prom, and the final hurrah for an education that has now reached its 12-year end. My daughter got her hair curled, put on a slip (which apparently passed as a prom dress) and went off to a night of revelry punctuated with live songs.

People have long warned me of empty nest syndrome and all the attendant feelings that might hit with her impending adulthood. But I have been slammed by that dreadful, crushing cliché that the end of all this childhood has been too hideously

brusque: I'm sad the old routine has been suddenly uprooted, I feel quite abject about the inky pencil case and the crumpled nylon blazer now abandoned by the stairs.

How could it be possible that she can be a full-sized person when, if I close my eyes, I can still feel her pudgy infant body when I bounced her in my arms?

Early summer is a cavalcade of markers. I find each as melancholy as the next. Walking around Washington DC a few weeks ago, in glorious sunshine, every public space had been repurposed to stage commencement ceremonies: the city was humming with cars being packed with the detritus of student living and teens in mortar boards. I found myself spontaneously crying on every corner. I couldn't work out why the sight of so many young, fresh, accomplished people made me feel so depressed. Was I envious for the road that now awaited these young folk? Or was I feeling a more existential doom about the crappy world that will belong to them?

Having reached the age at which I can observe at least two younger generations, I join the chorus of old folk who feel increasingly agitated by the news. So much debt and inflation, AI omnipotence, smouldering skylines, mass extinction warnings and an ever boiling planet. Sometimes it feels like Cormac McCarthy's vision of the future has become a bit too real. But only a total psycho would drag that to the dinner table. My job is not to catastrophise, but to maintain what Jezer-Morton calls "an emotional baseline of determined love".

And so I took a billion pictures of my little prom queen, popped the champagne and sent her off to start on her own path.

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How British liberals turned American

Janan Ganesh

Citizen of nowhere



Years ago, before he took the Russian petrodollar, Gerhard Schröder was the guest speaker at a conference of Britain's Labour party. In the lag between each sentence and its translation, members of the audience competed to laugh (if he had made a joke) or cheer (if he had made a solemn point) to show they understood German. Ostentatious, I know. But of the time.

You see, back then, a British liberal was, or meant to be: abreast of continental politics, claret-drinking, Tuscan or Provençal in their summer travel plans. The whole mental orientation was Europe.

This didn't, or didn't always, mean anti-Americanism. But there was an awareness of the US as Other, in its expectations of the state, its geographic separateness, its religiosity.

How did that polite detachment from America turn into what is now total, cringing, round-the-clock absorption in its public life? Leave aside the "woke" thing. Even middle-of-the-road liberals in Britain live in a world of *Daily Show* clips and piled-up copies of the *New Yorker*. This wasn't happening a generation ago. And the photo negative of it is a serene incuriousness about the mental life of their own continent. When did something European last penetrate the British cognoscenti? Prime-era Michel Houellebecq? Or the Scandinavian TV dramas? This is a Brexit of the mind.

And of the tongue. "Elton John is living his best life and I'm here for it!" How lost do you have to be as a British adult, how impressionable, to speak like this? Or to say "oftentimes", "at

this point", "not OK"? There was a fine essay (as it happens, in the *New Yorker*) about the protean richness of multicultural London slang. How odd that some people in the same city prefer to converse, and tweet, in the register of an Amherst common room.

This Americanisation would be easier to understand if the US were an ever mightier force in the world. But it has a smaller share of global output than it did in 2001, when I heard Schröder speak. The dollar accounts for a lower share of currency reserves. America's military now has a rival worth losing sleep over. There is less cause, not more, to face west. Yet America's

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psychic hold on the British *bien pensant* has tightened over the period.

Last week, breaking my general policy against west London, I attended the launch of Tomiwa Owolade's *This Is Not America* in Holland Park. Its argument — that US race relations don't map on to Britain's — has needed saying for years. The prose has the tranquillity that doesn't tend to come, if at all, until middle age. (The author is in his twenties.) And so the book deserves to succeed in its central mission.

It has no chance, of course. Something has changed in liberal Britain, and it predates Brexit. All my life, it was the right that was immersed in Americana. The left has joined

them. There is nothing in this for the US. First, being obsessed with America is not the same as being pro-American. British liberals still disagree with the US line on Israel and much else. They just do so with a rising vocal tone at the end of each sentence.

Second, the temperature of US politics is high enough, without foreigners gawping into the fishbowl. What an awkward predicament for a nation: to be scrutinised as though it were a unique world power while having the actual clout of just one of two, and in time, depending on India, perhaps three.

So, no, I didn't see what Colbert said about that thing last night. No, I am not caught up with *Pod Save America*. I recognise no US TV anchors except the one on CNN with the lovely sad eyes. And I lived there for four years. In fact, I have friends from Virginia to Venice who are less across the politico-media life of their own republic than some people in De Beauvoir Town.

Compatriots: this behaviour is weird. And unbecoming.

Perhaps a great power's cultural influence, like an ageing gigolo's charm, is the last thing to go. Long after Britain lost its might, there were people in Hong Kong and Zimbabwe moaning about their servants and describing things as "just not cricket" in a way no one in England had done since 1913. *Plus anglais que les anglais*, was the phrase for these tragicomic people and their affectations. How things come round. Don't be more American than the Americans.

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