ROYAL FLASH

A Six-Decade Roman
For decades, Milton Gendel ran in the most rarefied circles of jet-set Rome, charming everyone from British royals to reigning tycoons (Agnelli, Getty, Onassis), his camera almost always at hand. With a retrospective of Gendel's rarely seen photographs, JAMES REGINATO gets the 92-year-old American expat talking about the life behind his witty, subtle images, whether visiting Stavros Niarchos's private island or a kerchiefed Queen Elizabeth at Balmoral.
with the very crème of international society and the art world.

Almost everywhere he has gone, Gendel has carried a camera and snapped away, producing remarkably intimate depictions of some of the most rarified people and settings of our time. During a 10-day holiday at Balmoral in the summer of 1976, for example, he captured a kircapped Queen preparing supper for the corgis (hamburger) and a killed Prince Philip slumbering in a wood after lunch at a shooting party.

While occasionally exhibited in galleries, Gendel’s work has not been widely seen or published. But a two-part retrospective opening in October in Rome—at the Museo Carlo Bilotti and the American Academy in Rome—will finally bring him proper attention.

His story is far from over, however. “He’s 92, but you’d never know it,” American Academy president Adele Chatfield-Taylor told me before I arrived to meet him in Italy. On a bright spring morning inside the sprawling Palazzo Primoli, I see what she meant. Tall and limber, he looks decades younger than he is, with a full head of shiny chestnut-brown hair (not dyed, as Gendel recalls Gore Vidal, cutely telling people a decade or so ago). Articulate and eloquent, Gendel still has all his wits about him.

Over the past half-century, Gendel has rented a series of spectacular apartments in some of the city’s most venerable palaces. Shifts in the affluence of the noble families who own these places have every so often necessitated a move. This winter, he had to make a fairly hasty exit from a stately enfilade of high-ceilinged rooms at the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, where he had lived since 2007, coincident with a bitter rift between the siblings who inherited the palace.

Many a Roman dowager fretted about what accommoda-

garet into his story. “Very handy around the house. Unfussy. Weren’t the types to whistle for the maid—they had good nanny training.”

Who is Milton Gendel, and how is it he was so cozy with the Windsor sisters and, as it happens, innumerable other notables of the 20th century? An American born in 1918 on West 82nd Street in Manhattan to a pair of Russian-Jewish émigrés, and a resident of Rome for the past six decades, he has led a charmed life for sure, but it’s always been hard to give him a job description.

Following his wartime service with the U.S. Army in China, he docked in Naples on Christmas Day 1949, on a Fulbright scholarship. Work in Italy with the Marshall Plan followed (sparking rumors that he was a spy), as did positions with Olivetti and Alitalia at the height of their corporate glamour, and a correspondent’s post with ArtNews that began in 1954 and continues to this day. Along the way he has romanced a series of highborn women, married some of them, and mixed

During those lush, dolce vita days, when Rome WAS AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS GLAMOUR, Gendel was in the thick of it.

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PARADISE RE-FRAMED

Even as a teenager, Milton Gendel moved in smart circles. While he was an undergraduate at Columbia University, his best friend was Robert Motherwell. Gendel recalls one of their professors, the eminent Meyer Schapiro, giving important advice: "Look, Motherwell, I don't think you're a scholar. Why don't you go back to painting?"

In the early 1940s, the two classmates plunged into the city's art scene, which was small but vibrant, animated by artists of the Surrealist movement, including Andre Breton and Max Ernst, who arrived in New York sponsored by Peggy Guggenheim.

Motherwell and Gendel were appointed chief editors of FYP: a Surrealist magazine launched in 1942. But their titles were one of the really great figures I've ever known. Decent, farming, and attentive to every detail. There was a beetle that went out in the name of the company that he didn't O.K."

Following Adrian's death, in 1966, Gendel remained at the company for many years and then joined Alliana, as a consultant.

Socially, Gendel had been moving in lofty circles almost as soon as he got off that boat. During those humid, slothful days, when Rome was at the height of its international glamour, Gendel was in the thick of it, thanks, initially, to having become a favorite of Contessa Anna Ludovica Pucci Binti: "a social and cultural phenomenon," as he describes her. A niece of Pope Leo XIII, she married the wealthy Jewish American Cecil Blumenthal, who had changed his name to Blitz, and made their spectacular estate outside Lucua, Villa Reale di Marlia, once home to Napoleon's sister, a social Valhalla. "She was like a platoon sergeant, and she played that place like an orchestra."

Another doyenne whom Gendel befriended, Lady Diana Cooper, also gave him important introductions. She fixed him up with the woman who would become his next wife, Judith Montagu, a highly charming and intelligent Englishwoman. Her "official" father, as Gendel puts it (more on that in a moment), was Edwin Montagu, who served in H. H. Asquith's Cabinet.

The couple, who were married in 1962, had in 1958 moved into one of Rome's most beautiful residences, the ancient Palazzo Pierisio Caetani, on the Isola Tiberina, the little boat-shaped island in the Tiber and the site where Romaine civilization.

For the years that they occupied the place, during which time their daughter, Anna, was born, an invitation there was considered one of the hottest tickets in town, for locals and travelers alike.

"It was like inhabiting what had been the very core of Rome throughout twenty centuries," Gregor von Rezzori wrote of the island, while John Julius Norwich called the palazzo "the most wholly desirable house in Rome" Micheleangelo Antonioni filmed the opening scenes of L'Avvenire inside.

The Gendel household's longest-running visitor was Princess Margaret, Judy's very close friend. They met just after World War II, when Judy was a major of artillery, running an anti-aircraft gun in Hyde Park. "They were both quick and witty, so they hit it off immediately," says Milton.

For 20 years, she was a houseguest every summer, but Dickie Margaret cherished for their informality—something she could rarely enjoy at home, or at her other habitual stop in Italy, La Piazza, the imposing Florentine villa of Sir Harold Acton, the wealthy English connoisseur.

"I didn't get this thing about royalty at first, so all the Americans to me came out," Gendel explains. "At Harold's, since he was..."
English he was very formal with her—even though they were good friends—and she responded in kind. So there was none of that familial domestic rapport she had with us. After the first few years she stopped bringing a maid with her. She'd be on her knees with a suitcase, or doing very domestic things, which would have been unthinkable in the Acton household, on her part and his. She welcomed that, as long as you didn't forget the forms, such as calling her 'ma'am.'"

While Scotland Yard insisted that a detective accompany her on her trips, she insisted on being discreet. "The Italians would lay on a team, but she absolutely forbade any sirens on the cars. She liked seeing the sights, human and otherwise."

In the early years, she traveled with her husband, Antony Armstrong-Jones, the Earl of Snowdon. "She and Tony were wonderful the first few years. He could be hilariously funny, have you rolling on the floor. He was full of bright ideas and could do anything. He built their country house practically by hand," Gendel recalls. "But he was volatile, and I think he got fed up being married to one person. He wasn't made for that sort of stable relationship and got bored. The breakup was terrible for her. She couldn't imagine why he behaved the way he did."

Obtaining a divorce in her situation was difficult for numerous reasons, not the least of which was Snowdon's standing in her family. "Tony was very well considered by the Queen and the Queen Mother," says Gendel.

During that summer holiday at Balmoral, the marriage was near the edge.

"She was complaining about Tony's behavior, and going on about trying to get him out of the house. I said, 'Well, Tony has a bit of the Devil in him.' She said to me, 'Would you mind telling that to my sister?'"

"Go ahead—she's right around the corner," Margaret said, producing a reluctant Gendel. When he did find the monarch, she was eager to show off another acquisition. "Look what the Queen of Tonga has sent me," she said, pointing to 100 yards of tapa cloth, an unwoven textile of the Pacific Islands, made from the inner bark of a monocorous tree. "I'm trying to figure out what to do with it."

When Gendel delivered the message, the Queen let her guard down somewhat. "That might explain a few things," she said with a chuckle.

"The sisters both had a great sense of humor, which they got from their mother, who had a very light touch. Margaret was very entertaining, and liked playing the piano. If she hadn't been born royal, Margaret could have been a soubrette—someone in the musical comedy."

But her real virtues, Gendel observes, went further: "She was absolutely rational about life itself. She had a grip on what's real. When Roddy [Llewellyn] fell in love with her, she said, 'He's the world dying for a Margaret Thatcher biopic? Probably no more than it's dying for Harold Wilson or John Major biopics, the dramatic possibilities of the Falklands War notwithstanding. But wait. A Margaret Thatcher biopic starring Meryl Streep? That's P.M.-tainment! How she wrested the part from one Dame or another remains a mystery whose solution is known only to the actress and her director; we're just thrilled she got her mitts on it. (And now America is finally even for Vivien Leigh playing Scarlett O'Hara.) Did we mention that we love Meryl Streep? Love-love-love her? That there's literally no other performer we'd rather see on-screen? Even Jessica Alba? Streep, over the last decade, has evolved from being the Greatest Actress of Her Generation to also being the slicest and wittiest and lightest aloof, ventilating the von Sydow heaviness of her younger roles with a bit of Astaire fresh air. Limited footage available from The Iron Lady suggests Streep's Thatcher will fit somewhere between the poles of her Julia Child and her Miranda Priestly—a Tony leader who can debase Labour M.P.'s as if they were whole chickens, or stiffen wobbly American presidents with a witheringly arched eyebrow, and yet never lose sight of her inner Python housewife. The director is Phyllida Lloyd, who three years ago put Streep at the center of the 21st century's finest musical Mamma Mia! (Seriously. You can have Chicago and Dream Girls, though we'll keep Hairspray too.) Along for the ride, Jim Broadbent will risk being historically interesting as Denis Thatcher. Did we mention that we love Meryl Streep?"

—BRUCE HANDY
Kathleen Mortimer

began to seep into Moscow. Kathy wrote
Mary the first moment she had news of the
camps, heard from Bill Lawrence, the New
York Times correspondent. Returning from
Majdanek, Kathy wrote as if she were still
reporting for Newsweek of Lawrence's de-
scription: "the [victims'] articles were care-
cfully categorized, women's corsets, nail files,
shaving brushes. I'm sort of glad I wasn't
there to see it. Bill Lawrence, the biggest
skeptic among correspondents here, told us
about this with tears in his eyes."

In 1944, Harriman commandeered a pri-
vate railroad car for Kathy and 11 other cor-
respondents to cover the exhumation of mass
graves at Katyn, near a former P.O.W. camp
for Polish officers. "I was lucky I had a cold," she
wrote, "so I could take notes seeing 1,000
corpses.... All of the other reporters were
so ill." Kathy and her fellow journalists ac-
cepted the Russian explanation, that German
soldiers had slaughtered the Polish officers.
In fact, it was later learned, the Russians had.
The episode would later, in the context of the
Cold War, be considered a notorious in-
ternational incident. At the time of the Yalta
Conference, Kathy would write, "I don't trust
Stalin. Nobody does."

Not long after the war, Harriman was ap-
pointed Truman's secretary of commerce.
Pam went to work as a columnist for Max
Beaverbrook and appeared in New York, try-
ing one last time to get Averell to leave Marie.
At El Morocco, Marie stared at her and then
looked the other way. Pam had kept herself
busy by having a brief fling with the hand-
some Standard Oil heir Stanley Mortimer,
who had just broken up with his wife, Babe.
She was with him at El Morocco and intro-
duced him to Kathy, then reporting on the
United Nations for Newsweek. Later that eve-
nuing he became ill. The two women helped
him back to his apartment. Pam promptly
twirled off into the night, but Kathy stayed.
She and Stanley were married four months
later. Babe Mortimer married Bill Paley, and
they all remained friends; Kathy helped raise
her stepchildren, Stanley III and Amanda.

Soon after Marie died, in 1970, Pamela
Churchill Hayward surfaced again and rigged
a seat next to Averell at a dinner. He was then
79 and deeply depressed, feeling out of the
game, but Pam immediately revived their
sexual chemistry. They were married in Sep-
tember 1971. By then she had a long list of
conquests behind her—including Fiat heir
Gianni Agnelli—and had developed her repu-
tation for purloining the property of her hus-
band's children and heirs.

Pamela Harriman created a new career
for herself. She helped Bill Clinton get to the
White House—he called her "the first lady of
the Democratic Party." After Ave's death, in
1986, she was for years a Washington power
hostess, opening her N Street town house for
a merry-go-round of political-strategy ses-
sions. As a reward, Clinton appointed her am-
bassador to France. In 1994, allegations of
mismangement of the Harriman trusts made
front-page news when the Harriman family
sued Pam and her advisors, citing egregious
mismangement of their assets. At stake was
at least $30 million, lost to bad investments in
a "conspiracy to breach fiduciary duties;" ac-
cording to the court papers. Prior to the
suit, Kathy had reportedly flown to Paris
and quietly presented Pam with a long letter
of allegations at the American Embassy. The
suit was eventually settled.

Visiting Arden this past June, I found
perhaps a clue to Kathy's kinetic for-
titude. It was here among the lakes and
stone cottages and 40 miles of horse paths,
a world unto itself, that the extended Har-
riman family met often for celebrations
and rituals. Entering by a long road off the
Taconic Parkway, I was thrust back into
an Edith Wharton childhood where Kathy
grew up in a cocoon of privilige, with a pri-
ivate polo field, a track for trotting horses,
and a dairy that had supplied nearby West
Point since the Spanish-American War.
Whenever Pam, as Mrs. Harriman, visited
Ardern, she would be besieged with dogs
and the family's homely way of life. The
Carrère and Hastings mansion had long
ago been given to Columbia University,
and the family stayed in modest cottages
on the grounds, just as Averell always
preferred. One Thanksgiving, Kathy had
to snatch the pâté for hors d'oeuvres out of
the mouth of one of the dogs. Putting it
back on the platter, she turned to her step-
mother without missing a beat and said,
"May I make you one?"

In private, Kathy rarely complained
about Pam, even when the Harriman heirs
brought suit against her. At Arden, on the
day I went to visit, Kathleen Harriman
Mortimer was celebrated by her family and
friends as a woman from another era who
never surrendered her principles.
I thought of a letter Kathy had written to
Mouche from Moscow on August 8, 1945.
"Tonight the Soviets declared war on Japan.
I'm about to go out on the town.... Among
other things it means that the end of my
session here is in sight! What next???

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Milton Gendel

important to Margaret. "She adored her sis-
ter. When away from each other, they were
on the telephone every day, sometimes more
than once a day." When gathered together,
the clan could appear quite ordinary, too:
"One time when we were having a picnic in
a cottage at Balmoral, Philip squirted a tube
of mustard that hit the ceiling. 'Will you stop
that?' the Queen told him. 'I've just had this
place painted.' When they are domestic,
they are really domestic."

During their marriage, the Gendels trav-
el ed in the uppermost echelons of society.
"It's like a union," Judy used to say, Mil-
ton recalls.

Their close friends included all three Cus-
ingham sisters. "Babe was as nice as she was beau-
tiful; Minnie was adorable; Betsy was the
most picturesque, perhaps," Gendel explains.

All three were very outgoing and hospita-
ble, not competitive with each other but mu-
tually supportive.

Gendel can come up with a comment
about nearly every personage you can men-
tion. Gianni Agnelli? "I remember when he
was having the big affair with Pam
Churchild and, in the process, spoiling ro-
ten little Winston, giving him motorboats.
He succeeded in spoiling the little brat."

Peggy Guggenheim grew on him: "In
New York, I thought, She's just an old both-
er. But in Italy, I began to see her point.
She knew what she was doing. And the sto-
ries about her libido were all true. I knew
one man she chased around the table."

He preferred Onassis to Niarchos: "Ari
was much more civilized than Stavros, who
was rough stuff. Once, on Spetsopoula,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 197 with the wom-
an he married, she accepted that and was
very kind to both of them. She really had
a very good character."

Good family relations were tremendously
Johnny Depp

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 175 it will be far less vulnerable to an unjustified fate.

"Can I do better? Maybe not. I'm not sure."

"You're not going to kill off your own movie?"

"I'm not sure. You know what I mean? I worked like a coxsucker on it, but—"

Anything can happen.

So we'll see. Can this Lowlives of the Caribbean attract, as it so deserves, just some of the attention and get that the likes of Pirates of the Caribbean got?

Who knows? Our talk drifts, carried along by the tow of the wine and the night. When I first met Johnny, I think he believed he was part Cherokee and part Irish. Years later, through genealogical research, French blood entered into the picture. I remember Vanessa Paradis announcing to me, "Johnny's French!" Depp from Dieppe, a Cherokee with French blood. The French blood was supposed to have come through his mother, Betty Sue. It made sense.

"What are you now?" I ask him. He doesn't answer for a moment. "You're getting all serious," I say.

"Don't bother me."

"Do you ever think of yourself as anything?"

"I mean, it makes more sense, the Dieppe."

"There were a lot of American Indians that had French names. Is that something you would prefer to be?"

"Indian?" he suggests. Another taste of that good red wine. "If they'll have me."

"How do your siblings—besides Christi, there's a brother and another sister—feel about the fact that you never seem to physically age?"

"They seem O.K."

It's getting late. Not many hours remain until Johnny has to be back on the set. Even I'm getting slightly drowsy. But the Ritz Club, the blackjack tables, more wine await us. Johnny slowly rises, goes to put some cold water on his face and fetch a necktie. I light a smoke, sit with my wine, and rest my eyes. Eventually it occurs to me that Johnny has been gone for a while. I push myself up off the couch and call his name. No answer. I look around for him.

He is dead-out asleep in the toilet, the perfect picture of the wages of exhaustion. I don't want to wake him. I just stand for a moment wondering. He has a beautiful château and secluded grounds in France. He has an estate in Los Angeles. He has an idyllic island of his own. But does he have a hammock?"