

## EDITORIAL

IN AN ESSAY PUBLISHED IN *THE RAMBLER* IN 1750, Samuel Johnson wrote that “it is, indeed, at home that every man must be known by those who would make a just estimate either of his virtue or felicity; for smiles and embroidery are alike occasional, and the mind is often dressed for show in painted honour and fictitious benevolence.” This passage clearly praises the home as a privileged site where truths can be revealed, as people set aside the deceptive appearances and mannerisms that characterize social relations in the outside world. James Boswell’s *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) noted, however, that Johnson also praised the virtues of “fictitious benevolence,” as “the want of it never fails to produce something disagreeable to one or other.” These passages suggest that he may have relaxed his earlier commitment to the sharing of “home truths,” no matter how unpleasant or disagreeable, as he later displayed a greater appreciation for the value of manners and politeness, for which he is more popularly known today.

A similar shift can be seen in contemporary discussions of truth and falsity, as recent studies have shown that deception is both extremely common and potentially beneficial. In his 1991 essay on “Lying,” for example, Leonard Sax described this practice as a necessary “social lubricant” to avoid conflicts and not hurt other people’s feelings, and he even argued that “an individual obsessed with being totally honest, might, in fact, become a social isolate.” David Nyberg’s 1993 book *The Varnished Truth* similarly described lying as a valuable skill, as “deception and self-deception are necessary both to social stability and to individual mental health,” and “sometimes it is unhealthy and immoral not to deceive.” In response to a survey conducted in the U.K. in the mid-2000s, which found that most men lie to their partners, columnist Barbara Ellen similarly argued that lies are essential to romantic relationships and that women who claim they want their partners to tell them the truth are being “disingenuous,” as “home truths are bullets and should be used sparingly, if at all.”

Our autumn issue features a special section that addresses this theme in various ways. Aaron Rabinovitz's story "House Fire" focuses on a mother who misremembers an event from her past, and the exposure of this mistake reveals a disturbing truth about a child lost to cancer. Sophie Crocker's story "Noble Truth in the Red Room" similarly deals with the complex relationship between a mother and a child, who is being raised in a strange boarding house and appears to be suffering from a mysterious illness. The arrival of an outsider exposes unsettling truths about this disturbing and potentially dangerous home, from which the child longs to escape. Andrew Plimpton's story "Snow" is also told from the perspective of a lonely and isolated child, who discovers a shocking truth that disrupts her already somewhat unstable understanding of the distinction between fantasy and reality. Adam Cavanaugh's story "Preface to Rural Ecology" describes a young couple who move to the country to pursue their individual interests in painting and botany, yet a series of mishaps reveals disturbing truths about their growing alienation, which they are struggling to conceal from one another and possibly even from themselves. Lastly, MJ Malleck's story "Intimate Objects" also focuses on an unhappy couple whose alienation is masked by the "fictitious benevolence" of their everyday routines. When the husband falls into a coma following a home accident, the wife turns to a mysterious outsider, who offers insights into the truth about her husband and their relationship. The stories in this section thus repeatedly depict the home as a site where disturbing truths can be revealed, and it is often unclear whether these revelations are harmful or beneficial.

Our autumn issue also features an interview with Canadian writer Andrew Davidson and two new chronicles: Stephen Low's review of the Canadian Opera Company's new production of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Jerry White's retrospective on the history of film criticism.