

Literature on Screen: You

September 23, 2020

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Bethanne Patrick: Hello everyone. Welcome to PEN/Faulkner's first Literary Conversation of the season, which is Literature on Screen. My name is Bethanne Patrick. I'm a Vice President and Programs Committee Chair for the PEN/Faulkner Foundation. I'm so excited to have you with us here tonight and I want to tell you a few things about PEN/Faulkner and our mission before I get into the introductions for our amazing, absolutely amazing panel this evening.

For those of you here joining us for the first time, you should know that PEN/Faulkner is a literary foundation based in Washington, DC. We're a non-profit. We have a mission of celebrating literature and fostering connections between readers and writers to enrich individuals and the community – and communities, I should say. We fulfill our mission by administering two national literary awards – the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction and the PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in the Short Story – as well as through education programs, which bring free books and author visits to DC public and public charter schools.

Literary Conversations is starting its new series tonight for the fall of 2020 and we're on our all-new virtual platform, so this is very exciting and it's great to see such a robust audience here with us.

A couple notes about the webinar before I introduce our panelists. There will be a short Q&A session at the end of the event so at the bottom of your screen – a lot of you know Zoom already and know it very well – there is a Q&A submission button. You can put your questions there. Don't worry, you can also upvote your favorite question, and that is a great way if someone has already asked something that you'd like to know the answer to, to make sure that that goes to the top of the heap. So, we'll make sure we get to as many questions as we can with these panelists.

We are very proud to have adopted a Pay-What-You-Will model for these Literary Conversations to increase accessibility to our programs. That is so important to us and so important to our communities as well. It's a tough time so consider, if you're able, making a donation to PEN/Faulkner. We're going to put up a link in the chat – don't worry, you won't see it on the screen, but it will be in the chat – and any amount you can give will go directly towards our ability to give great programs like this more accessibility, more visibility, and it will let us plan even more fun things. So, I hope that you will consider making that donation.

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Now, time to get this conversation started, and I'm so excited. We're honored to have some incredible panelists joining us tonight. First and foremost, our featured author Caroline Kepnes, who is the *New York Times* best-selling author of *You* and *Hidden Bodies*, and a third novel *You Love Me*, which is continuing the story. And those books – actually *You* and *Hidden Bodies*, excuse me – have been adapted to the hit television series produced by Lifetime, which is called “You.” You can find it on Netflix now. And Caroline previously wrote for *Tiger Beat*, *Entertainment Weekly*, she's been a writer on TV shows including “7th Heaven,” “The Secret Life of the American Teenager.” She's working on a fourth Joe Goldberg book, so that's really exciting.

And speaking of Joe, who is quite a character, we are very excited to have Penn Badgley here with us, who stars as Joe Goldberg in the show “You.” And he's been in “Greetings from Tim Buckley” and “Margin Call.” We've also seen him in “Easy A,” “John Tucker Must Die,” and, of course, I would be remiss if I didn't mention CW's hit “Gossip Girl.”

Finally, leading tonight's discussion is our wonderful moderator Chris Klimek, a journalist and critic whose work appears in the *Washington City Paper*, on NPR, and in the *Washington Post*. He is also a panelist on NPR's pop-culture happy hour. So, without further ado, please join me in welcoming Chris, Penn and Caroline.

But one tiny, tiny little thing, we've got a couple of clips from “You” to show and they might be a little choppy. Please excuse us on that. It is not technical difficulties, it's just the way they show through Zoom, and I think you'll love them anyway. Certainly, you're going to love the conversation. So, Chris Klimek, take it away.

Chris Klimek: Hi everybody. I hope I am visible and audible.

All right, so I'm going to start with a question for Caroline, which involves a very brief recap of recent history. Okay, so, that's *You*, her novel about Joe Goldberg who, among his admirable qualities, is also a murderer and a predator who hacks his victims' emails and social media accounts to help him get away with his crimes. This was published in 2014. The sequel, *Hidden Bodies*, comes out in 2016, that same year we had our first presidential election where hacked emails and manipulation of social media are critical factors, and when it's all done, we have our first Twitter president.

A year after that, stories in the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* alleged decades of predation against multiple women by Harvey Weinstein, and then the dam breaks and #MeToo is a movement. So, there is catching the wave of the zeitgeist, and then there's the hundred-year wave that Patrick Swayze talks about in *Point Break*. That's my literary reference, this is PEN/Faulkner, so I wanted to go high-minded early.

So Caroline, do you have a satellite dish in your brain or a tuning fork or a Ouija board? How do you tap so directly into what so many people are thinking and feeling and experiencing at that moment in time – 2016ish?

Caroline Kepnes: I do, yes, I found it in the woods when I was a kid just looking around and it's all in there. I think I overreact to things in the moment and get very, like, scared about things so it leads to me imagining things like, what is the worst thing that can happen. It's a disappointment when life kind of follows suit.

As you eloquently put it about the last few years, but something about our way to communicate changed so much in a relatively short amount of time – like for me, I went from someone who didn't like to text at all, I was one of those people like, "I won't do this, I like the purity of the voice!" And within a matter of weeks, I was someone who was like, why are they calling, why don't you text me. When you feel yourself going through that kind of change, it gets the train going, like, well, what else is possible?

Chris: Yeah. So, you were reluctant to adopt texting? I mean, I'd think as a writer, you know, you would like that control – this is your medium, this is your format.

Caroline: I liked the voice. I feel like I'm very stubborn about technology and very resistant at first. I was the same way about Instagram, about all of it. I've been like, that person who went along with it after a while, after it became an inconvenience. But I had a birthday where no one was around and I didn't have texting and I went through those few days of like, why does everyone hate me? And it turned out they didn't hate me; they were texting me. And I was like, okay I have to get text, I accept it. But the worst part was that within weeks, I was one of those people who only wanted to text.

Chris: Well, I don't know, you don't get inflections on a text, but I guess you quickly adopt the prose equivalent with jokes or emojis or whatever.

Caroline: But it's the idea that I really could be anyone. Like, when you're listening to someone's voice, you think you could hear a tremor if they were upset, if someone was holding a gun to their head. There's something about the written word. But when it's just plain old text, that is creepy to me, but I love it.

Chris: I found out today I'm getting a new neighbor in the apartment across the way. I was copied on an email from her and I had to stop myself from Googling this person. So, these books you've written have really gotten to me. They are picking up on something in the –

Caroline: Could you do it? Could you do the Google?

Chris: No, I did not. But I mean, I could be doing that at 8:31 pm. Alright, Penn, you are Joe Goldberg on the show. Well, let's start with the basic question. What's up with season 3? I know it's coming, but has the pandemic disrupted production? Have you shot? When will we see it?

Penn Badgley: I don't know when we'll see it, but I was supposed to be in LA months ago. I will – I think I will be in LA in November. I mean, I'm moving ahead as though I will. And then we'll

shoot the thing, and it'll come out when it can. Some, you know, I would imagine 2021, but an actor really is not the person you should consult about release dates.

Chris: When you got this part, did you find it helpful or necessary to go read Caroline's books? Or did you prefer to just get the script, and do your work based on that?

Penn: This the first time that I worked on something that would even have source material like that. I think it's amazing to have source material, you know, because a script is not a book at all. A book is a finished product, it's everything it's supposed to be, whereas a script is never meant to be read by anybody who's not making the thing. So, a script is not going to have what a novel would have, not even close, you know. Even a finished product of something, some motion picture, you don't have the richness of a book. And I think part of what seems to have made it so successful is Caroline's use of the first person. You know, or rather it's that second or third person, whichever –

Chris: I think the first novel is second person, right? I was trying to think.

Penn: It's "I" but it's "you." It's the "you" that's so incisive. I mean, the title really does sum it up so well. And there are endless pronoun jokes that we're able to make when we're talking about the show. You know, when you say "you," it has a lot of meaning. So, to be able to dig into that, I mean, I find Joe on the page far more troubling than I do on the screen. I said before, I think there's a number of reasons why you – it wouldn't be the experience that we all want it to be if you really brought Joe from the page to life without any kind of a transliteration, you know. Or translation, I suppose.

So, I mean, for me, the first book is more important than the second because the show, like I think the world of the show continues to become its own translation of it, you know, its own adaptation, its own version. Caroline understands this too, she writes for television, or she has written, right? Is that right, Caroline?

Caroline: Yeah.

Penn: And I think it's appropriate, you know, so it's like the first season, Joe from the page was much more on my mind than in the second. In the second I think it was already diluted. I can't worry too much about too many things. I just have to do what I know that I'm doing now, you know. So, the first book, I mean, you know, and because I was reading the first book with the pretext of having to bring Joe to life, the first book was hard for me, you know. And it was compelling, it was as compelling for me as it was for anybody. I mean, it's hard to put down, it's hard to pick up.

Chris: I apologize for interrupting, but – so you accepted the role before you had read the novel?

Penn: No, I accepted the role while I was in the middle of it. And you know, I've been vocal, privately and publicly, about how much I struggled bringing him to life. It's very different for me than it is for Caroline, or even for Greg and Sera who create the show, you know. It's been said that that might be what makes me a good person to portray him. I don't revel in it too much. But, yeah. I was like 3/4 of the way through when I accepted the role, and then when I came upon the ending, it was, you know, a moment of reconciliation –

Caroline: And then they ride off into the sunset madly in love.

Penn: Yeah, ride off into the sunset.

Chris: I think there might be some [unintelligible] here in my copy. I don't remember that part.

So Caroline, do you hear from readers, either at readings, public events, or correspondence – particularly women, although it could be men too – who have been victims of stalking and/or cyberstalking, and if you do, what do they want to talk to you about?

Caroline: Yeah, so over the years, there's been a lot of catharsis there, in reading about the experience of – reading the story of someone who gets caught up in that and doesn't know it, because I think people feel very criticized when they go through that. Everyone loves to say, how did you not know that he was a jerk or how did you not see this, and so when you climb into the perspective of the person doing that act and invading someone's life and breaking every boundary, and see how convincing they are, I think that it's like, I've heard from people that it's really nice – nice is the wrong word, but it's comforting to read, it's kind of liberating to say, okay this is how it happens, it's a very slow breakdown of how someone's able to do that. That a little charm will get you a long way.

Because that was one of my drives in every book, and like he's still sensitive, he reads a lot, he's a really good listener, he pays attention. It's like all of these things that we've all been conditioned to look for in a man, plus, but they're all taken to a dangerous place.

Chris: You don't want our partner or prospective partner to pay quite that much attention. Like, 5% of that would be great.

Caroline: Right, but at the same time, I feel like – when you've asked before, to me in 2013, I was and I'm always aware of the changes in language that are happening, like to me when I was a child, following someone was bad on every level, like if someone was following you. It's a dark word. That means there's danger. It also means on a personal level, if someone is a follower, that they're not thinking for themselves. And then when following became an act of friendship, something about that was kind of unbalanced to me and it's something that comes up in every book. Like, well, what do we want? What do we want from people, how much do we want them to follow us? And then also we have to understand that we don't get to make those rules, it's just not the way humans are built, they're going to do things we don't want them to do. Like Joe, being the worst possible version of that.

Chris: I certainly relate to that and to your point earlier about not being resistant to the vocabulary of social media. Like, I remember 2009 was the year I got on Twitter and realizing that these short little posts are called tweets, I'm not going to call anything a tweet, I will call it a post, or something. And you just instantly accept it and your aversion to "follower" and "following" that – yeah, I had that too, and now we don't –

Caroline: We didn't know what we were getting into. I remember I keep it in my, like I never erase it, I went on Twitter for the first time to search for a *Bride Wars* sequel and I love it when it pops up because it's just such an indicative of how much things have changed.

Chris: So as a result of having written now two best-selling novels that have been adapted into a very widely seen, popular Netflix series, you are – I mean, you've become something of a public figure, and I'm going to ask Penn to answer this as well because obviously he is the face of Joe. You know, you are less likely to be recognized on the sidewalk than he is, but both of you, I mean, you're public figures to varying degrees. I wonder if, you know, I would expect that that alone would change the way you engage with social media but given that your subject here really is an interrogation of social media. Have, say, the last three to five years changed the way you engage with it, the way you use it?

Caroline: For me, yes, because I hear his voice in my head when I do anything, that I'm like, "oh, he would attack this," then I'm like, he's a judgmental, you know, murdering jerk and he's not a real person, but it's – yeah, it's all very different for me. I'm curious about you, Penn, with that.

Penn: That's probably one of the most kind of significant questions that runs through my mind at any given day or any given moment. I'm not saying it's the most important question in my life, but it is one of those questions that nags at me all the time. Yeah, the last three to five years have affected my use – well, I didn't have social media five years ago, I don't think, I think I've gotten – that's not true. I got it just about five years ago, 2014, I think? You know what, I actually got it a few months before Black Lives Matter first became, you know, a movement, a hashtag, a moment, so many things. And so, for me, the only way I've ever really used it –

Oh, that's the dog barking at my other dog. He's saying, "don't get political, don't you dare!"

Chris: They sound skeptical of social media too.

Penn: Okay, so yeah, I mean, I think for a public figure, you don't, you just can't have the same relation with social media, and I think that's been a blessing for me personally. I've never used it in the way that most people can. I've never considered it anywhere remotely close to valid interaction, or no I shouldn't say valid, but a meaningful interaction. I've, so – Now, on the other hand, it's immensely useful for people who actually typically are under-represented, you know, so I think while it's an incredible tool for others, the sort of tool that it is for a person in my position is really, really questionable. I mean, I think the way that a lot of celebrities wield it is – I

don't wield it that way. I haven't posted in months, but to me, like... I don't think I can continue answering this question because I'll just take up the rest of the allotted time, but we can go back to it.

Chris: I mean, just a brief follow-up to that, so we use the time frame of, you know, five years ago. We can even go back to 2014 when *Hidden Bodies* was published. Both of you, Caroline and Penn, you were already successful at that point. You had established yourselves in your careers, you know, Caroline hadn't published the book yet, but you'd been a writer for TV and a journalist. Penn, you'd been on "Gossip Girl" and "Margin Call," and these things. I wonder, had your career been in a more nascent stage, would you have the luxury of not using social media? It seems like in creative professions, you know, you are the product, in a sense. You know, you're not – I mean, you're going to work for different entities but it's not like you're punching a clock or anything. I imagine that – certainly I feel like, as a writer, I kind of have to maintain something of a Twitter presence, you know, whether –

Caroline: It's wonderful in that way, if you're good at it and you like it and it's natural to you, then it's great. It's a way for people to find each other too, especially writers and readers.

Penn: Totally. I mean, it's a tool, this is the thing. People connecting is always, well I'll go ahead and say, it's usually positive. But honestly, like human beings connecting, that is an inherently human capacity. But the particular manner in which we are manipulated into interacting and connecting on these specifically capitalist platforms called Twitter and Instagram and Facebook and what have you. That's not, you know, when people say social media, I think we should stop general – I mean I do it all the time too – but I'm saying like, we shouldn't generalize and think that social media is only this way. It's only this way when it's created by the same seven 24-year-old white dudes, you know, without consulting anybody, but the other six – seven, the other six 24-year-old white dudes. You know, it's not – we've barely scratched the surface of what all this technology could really do for humanity. It's only been accessed by the incredibly elite few, you know, like such a small section of what even represents the privileged white man, you know. So, I think, you know, what was the question? These are the things that, like I said, I think about –

Caroline: It's still so new, that's my thing, it's like, it's still so relatively new and we don't know the long-term effects of it. We're in it, we're in the experiment.

Chris: I imagine most of our audience knows this already but I mean, I'd like to us to have like a sample, just of the voice and tone both of Caroline's writing and of the show, so we have – she has a reading from *You*, the first novel, and we're going to see a clip from the pilot episode of the show and season one as well.

Caroline: I happen to have the book right here so if you guys want me to read it.

Penn: Oh, you're going to read from it?

Caroline: A little bit.

Penn: Oh great, okay.

Caroline: Is now a good time to start?

Penn: By the way, this is – everybody should just – this is the real Joe. This is Joe's voice right here, more than mine, the real Joe Goldberg.

Caroline: There are two Joes.

Penn: We should learn how to say it in unison, give people a real ASMR.

Chris: Okay, I'm muting as well. Here's Caroline Kepnes.

Caroline reading from *You*: YOU walk into the bookstore and you keep your hand on the door to make sure it doesn't slam. You smile, embarrassed to be a nice girl, and your nails are bare and your V-neck sweater is beige and it's impossible to know if you're wearing a bra but I don't think that you are. You're so clean that you're dirty and you murmur your first word to me—*hello*—when most people would just pass by, but not you, in your loose pink jeans, a pink spun from *Charlotte's Web* and where did you come from?

You are classic and compact, my own little Natalie Portman circa the end of the movie *Closer*, when she's fresh-faced and done with the bad British guys and going home to America. You've come home to me, delivered at last, on a Tuesday, 10:06 A.M. Every day I commute to this shop on the Lower East Side from my place in Bed-Stuy. Every day I close up without finding anyone like you. Look at you, born into my world today. I'm shaking and I'd pop an Ativan but they're downstairs and I don't want to pop an Ativan. I don't want to come down. I want to be here, fully, watching you bite your unpainted nails and turn your head to the left, no, bite that pinky, widen those eyes, to the right, no, reject biographies, self-help (thank God), and slow down when you make it to fiction.

Yes.

I let you disappear into the stacks—Fiction F–K—and you're not the standard insecure nymph hunting for Faulkner you'll never finish, never start; Faulkner that will harden and calcify, if books could calcify, on your nightstand; Faulkner meant only to convince one-night stands that you mean it when you swear you never do this kind of thing. No, you're not like those girls. You don't stage Faulkner and your jeans hang loose and you're too sun-kissed for Stephen King and too untrendy for Heidi Julavits and who, who will you buy? You sneeze, loudly, and I imagine how loud you are when you climax. "God bless you!" I call out.

You giggle and holler back, you horny girl, "You too, buddy."

Buddy. You're flirting and if I was the kind of asshole who Instagrams, I would photograph the F—K placard and filter the shit out of that baby and caption it:

F—K yes, I found her.

Calm down, Joe. They don't like it when a guy comes on too strong, I remind myself. Thank God for a customer and it's hard to scan his predictable Salinger—then again, it's always hard to do that. This guy is, what, thirty-six and he's only now reading *Franny and Zooey*? And let's get real. He's not reading it. It's just a front for the Dan Browns in the bottom of his basket. Work in a bookstore and learn that most people in this world feel guilty about being who they are. I bag the Dan Brown first like it's kiddie porn and tell him *Franny and Zooey* is the shit and he nods and you're still in F—K because I can see your beige sweater through the stacks, barely. If you reach any higher, I'll see your belly. But you won't. You grab a book and sit down in the aisle and maybe you'll stay here all night. Maybe it'll be like the Natalie Portman movie *Where the Heart Is*, adapted faithlessly from the Billie Letts book—above par for that kind of crud—and I'll find you in the middle of the night. Only you won't be pregnant and I won't be the meek man in the movie. I'll lean over and say, "Excuse me, miss, but we're closed" and you'll look up and smile. "Well, I'm not closed." A breath. "I'm wide open. Buddy."

"Hey." Salinger-Brown bites. He's still here? He's still here. "Can I get a receipt?"

"Sorry about that."

He grabs it out of my hand. He doesn't hate me. He hates himself. If people could handle their self-loathing, customer service would be smoother.

Chris: I think we're supposed to [unintelligible] like this because clapping is bad on the microphone – harsh on the ears. But it was outstanding. Alright, so we're going to roll the clip from the pilot episode now, so we'll all have to briefly stop our video and mute ourselves, and we'll see the clip.

[Clip from "You" Season 1, Episode 1]

Chris: Are we all back?

Caroline: We all do the clap, the thing you do [unintelligible] –

Chris: Caroline, I meant to ask you, now that you run in these best-selling author circles, because in my mind you all hang out together –

Caroline: They're all right over here, someone has their hair and makeup, so you know...

Chris: Have you found yourself in an elevator with Dan Brown at any point?

Caroline: Not yet. I haven't been in an elevator in so long.

Penn: Dan Brown lives on an island.

Caroline: I hope so. I would like to go there. No, I love that book. I had one of the best reading experiences with that book. It's a question I've got a lot over the years, you know, people are like, how much I hated it? I'm like, no, stop.

Chris: Alright, so we got a little bit of this, both in the passages that you just read, and in the part of the Netflix show that we just saw. But Joe is forever making these really caustic observations about the world and in general that are really funny. He'd be great on Twitter if he was on Twitter himself. But you know, specifically, the targets of these observations are very often things that you know very intimately – Brown University, New England, MFA programs. And then in *Hidden Bodies*, in the second series of the show, we get to Hollywood and show business. Does writing a character like this give you a license to say things that you always wanted to say, and you just know, you've bitten your tongue?

Caroline: I lived on Bank Street, I went to Brown, so a big part of this did feel initially like Beck was me looking back at my young self and, like, being very critical. And Joe is like these two extremes, like he's someone – no one's ever going to be good enough. And I think that we've all spent time, maybe not all of us, but with that person like that who is just kind of never going to be pleased but you want to please them for some reason. Even though there are things wrong with them that are not your job to fix so...

But the bottom line with coming up with all of it was that I had lost my father and it was a really long, slow build-up, and I was kind of like gearing up for this big loss and that was the life-altering experience to me, where you're taking – You're trying to notice and appreciate every tiny moment, and you never can enough, and when you know someone's going to die and there's nothing you can do to change it, I was in this extremely hyper-analytical overthinking state of mind, and this was a really healthy, like, refreshing way for me to do something with all that energy after a loss. When it's like, okay, that person is never calling again. It's part of an adjustment to a new world and here's this character who lives very much in his head – and more in his head than he does in the world, to a degree. Like, when you say about Twitter, that was one of those things [unintelligible] Joe where he's like, oh he's someone who, he's so happy to just talk to himself. And there are limits to how much anyone on the planet is ever really going to get to him, and he doesn't know that about himself. And that, to me, is one of the tricks that makes him complicated.

Chris: I mean, this is a fictional creation that is as contradictory and complicated as a real person. And really, in *Hidden Bodies*, particularly in the second book, that richness just expands in really, really surprising ways, so I'm very eager to read the third book now.

Alright, so I want to ask Penn, so Joe has this, you know, he is a skilled and self-educated criminal, but also one who operates very effectively on instinct. He is great. For example, when

he's being questioned by a cop who stops him for jaywalking after he's just left the scene of a far worse crime than jaywalking. He can pick locks, he's good at establishing alibis for things. Even though you're getting this from a script, does having that kind of knowledge in your head kind of change the way you move through the world? Like, you know, if a stranger approaches, would you be more skeptical of their intentions that maybe you would be prior to this role?

Penn: No. I mean, I really leave Joe on set in that way. You know, I think if anything, I think Joe has had a positive impact on me because to whatever degree I can identify with him – and of course we all do, somewhat, or a lot you know, I mean it's like which side of Joe obviously, very few of us identify with the part of him that is actually murderous, but I think we all identify with, as Caroline was saying, like – when we suffer, we tend to overanalyze, you know. In our sadness, our vision is actually clouded. Sometimes we might think it's more – sharper, it's clearer. But I think actually sadness brings a veil of a kind, and we do become overly analytical. And so, to me, as much as I understand him, I also think, huh, where I understand and identify with him, that's – I have some accounting to do there, you know, some self-accounting. So, I think playing him has, if anything, had that, I don't know marginally positive effect on me like that. And then, just, you know, a brief aside – Joe's not, I don't think, that skilled of a criminal. He gets by. I think what he does is he reveals how dumbly easy some of this stuff is if you just had the lack of conscience to do it. And then some of the stuff, at least in the show, I'm actually speaking strictly in the show because I think in the book, the world is inherently, because it's a book, so much more detailed and vivid, and you have the time to make everything real. For instance, in that clip, what Caroline read versus what we saw, you know, maybe 5-10% of her words were really in there, because that's all the time we have.

Caroline: I would like to [unintelligible] 500 hours long in the next season.

Penn: Right, I mean, yeah. But that's just the way things get translated. So, to me, what is lost in translation but then we create our own version is, I think a lot of what Joe does in the show, sometimes, is a little outside the realm of what would be practical and simple and easy. I mean, as the person who has to do some of it, you realize how realistically like – this wouldn't play out in real life, but we're telling a story here. So, I think I see Joe way more as like, when it comes to skills he's bumbling and fumbling most of the time except for building an incredible box. The guy built a box like no one can.

Caroline: How did he do that by himself? Yes, that's –

Penn: I mean, I'm wiry and sinewy strong, but he's a whole other level, he's very, he's got forearms.

Chris: I rode my bike past this storage place yesterday and I looked at it, and I was like, wait, no one ever looks in one of those –

Penn: I mean, he's actually quite competent and amazing in ways that we explore less in the show. I think sometimes with the show, it's exploring how he – people just let him get by in a

way, people just don't suspect him. They don't expect this from him. He smiles somewhat sweetly, probably more sweetly in the show than he does in the book, and he gets by. And then yeah, you know, there's some lock-picking and there's some stuff that would require a lot of dexterity, and he's not a [unintelligible], I guess.

Caroline: It's a good combination of motivation and self-pity. It's kind of like the past few months there've been jokes about everyone being locked in their home, kind of like what he does to people, and I don't know, I find that entertaining in that one respect. He's someone who feels cornered and so he's had to figure out how to do things, and now a lot of people are in that mindset. That's one good thing about him that I've heard before.

Chris: That leads into another question that I had. This is a guy where, you know, a pivotal part of his background was, he was locked in a cage with a bunch of books, you know, so he is extraordinarily well-read. Beck in *You*, in the first novel, talks about how he's read more than anyone in her MFA program, and clearly his deep reading is one of the things that makes – feeds his sense of superiority of the people around him. But he also references pop culture a lot, you know, and not just [unintelligible], it's a Woody Allen movie, so it's kind of – it's elevated in a way, more so than "Pitch Perfect", which also comes up a lot, or [unintelligible]. How do you decide what's an appropriate reference that Joe would have in his head and is there anything where you're like, that's a Caroline reference, that's not a Joe reference necessarily?

Caroline: In the first one, when it's all new, it was just spontaneous, like I had watched "Pitch Perfect" so many times and I have been really out of it in terms of pop culture and a lot of the songs in that movie, I thought they were from that movie. And I didn't understand that they were like – so it was this wonderful, like, nesting situation of like, oh wait, that comes from something else! And it was wonderful, I love that movie. So that helped me justify watching it a lot and it felt like, genuinely right for the book. Over the past seven years of this, there are times when I'm writing about something that I'm like, no no no, like I like that. You know, that's not something he would know about, and then I'll be like, no but what if a girl told him about it? And no... Like, it's always in the back of my mind but I don't sit down with a list of like, these are the things I want to mention. It all happens organically. [unintelligible] is something, I did see it in the theater, like 4 times, I love that movie so much. I loved the idea of what he would think about their idea of friendship, and friendship is a big theme of the third book.

Chris: I'm actually going to ask Penn to answer this as well, but I want to start with you, Caroline, just because you are a former entertainment journalist who worked for *Tiger Beat* and *Entertainment Weekly*, who has now become a very successful creator. So, do you read reviews of your work, and if so, what is the first and last name of the bonehead who gave you the dumbest review you ever had? Half of that is a joke.

Caroline: I don't read them unless someone specifically sends me something and is like, here's this, I think you should read this, especially if they wrote it. But I feel like overall, it's just not a good idea, you know. I'd rather read reviews of a book that I read and loved and see what other people said about it than read reviews of work – For me, once it's done and it's published, it's

done. I've learned from it. I want to write something new. And it's like, there are just better things to read than reviews of my own work. But in the beginning, I read them. In 2014, I was like, "oh my god!" This is real? You know, people besides my mum are reading it?

Chris: I like to imagine that the creators can't read them, like they just, I don't know. They're just blocked. It's mortifying for me to think about. What about you, Penn? Do you ever look at reviews?

Penn: I do. I mean, in a selective fashion, you know when you have a publicist, they spare you. As an actor, you are parts of interviews, you know it's like, it's part of this culture and industry around it, so in a way you're almost forced to interact with it and participate in the realm of critique. And I'm down for that. I think with this show, I have a totally different experience with this show than I do with other work. There's something that I find valuable to the conversation around it as opposed to just doing the work and leaving it at that, you know? For all of the reasons – I mean that's why I'm here tonight. Everything that you've – the questions you've touched on and Caroline's answers.

The themes of this project – I was going to call it book, then I was going to call it show, whatever you want – whatever this is now. The themes are obviously what a lot of people are thinking about, so to me I think as much as we can, you know, enliven and elevate those conversations in every opportunity we have, like, that's great, that's a cool thing to participate in. Not normally the case that I think – I think it'd be nice if actors and public figures participated less and sort of made room for others, you know what I mean? But in this show, I don't know, I have a unique relationship to Joe and the project so I'm happy to kind of like, dig in with others. And I'm really interested in what people think about it.

When we first made the – when we were shooting the first season, you know, all of my – in my over-analyzing, in my fears and my insecurities, I was really unsure sometimes about what we were doing, you know. And I would often ask the women I was working with, and then once it was finished, I was really interested in the women in my life – journalists, whoever they might be, on social media. I was really interested in what they were thinking and are thinking, and I continue to be. But that is different. As an artist – if you can call me that – reviews and all that... It's just, it's a dangerous place to go.

Caroline: There's no winning.

Penn: Yeah, right.

Caroline: Because then if you don't, it's like you feel so appreciative that people want to talk about it and have these conversations.

Penn: Totally. It's a –

Caroline: I just want people to feel free to say what they want without, yeah.

Penn: I agree with that.

Chris: I used to say that I thought – a thoughtful, unfavorable review of anything was more useful to the creators than just no review at all. Then I actually tried it out on a playwright once, and she was like, no. Absolutely not. If you don't have anything nice to say, just keep it to yourself.

So, Caroline, your credit on the series is consulting producer. What does that role entail?

Caroline: That means, for me especially, when things were getting started, Greg and Sera were so inclusive and so – talking through everything, and I had such trust in them, everything has been beautiful, so I – something just went blank. Oh no, it didn't. Yeah, I consult as a producer, which I'm trying to find a way to say that. I don't have to do much, you know? I support it. I read. I give my thoughts.

Chris: You're reading teleplays before they're shot?

Caroline: Yeah, this season is weird because I was working on *You* 3 forever and I really wanted to get it done and be completely immersed in that world, so I'm behind on my reading. But I feel like, it's like Penn said – now it's its own animal and there are going to be changes and it has its own life, you know. It's like when you're a kid and you've got all the dolls set up. That world – things are happening in there and no one can change them. It evolves over time. When I watch the opening of that show, that season one, I'll always get teared up.

Chris: Penn, did you have a –

Penn: Yeah, I wanted to ask Caroline a question. I think I've asked you this before so, as much as you can share on a public forum. How – maybe it wasn't hard for you, but I feel like it'd be very hard to pick up number three and four after – you know, you made one and two in their own bubbles, like the show didn't exist. Then the show exists, it takes on its own spirit entirely, in a sense. It's so informed by what you've created, but as you've talked about it's also its own thing. How many people, good or bad, take it or leave it, might not read the book for the first time thinking of my face and voice, which is mildly horrifying, you know? Like, so for you, starting three, actually I don't know when you started three, but at least finishing three and starting four, is it – I think it'd be a Herculean psychological task to not let what the show has become influence what you're doing.

Caroline: Yes. Thank you. Seeing you, I have to remind myself that you're not, you know –

Penn: Right, right.

Caroline: Especially, I feel like last year when everyone was taking over the language, which I loved to see, like it was so much fun to see people say, "You walk into the dentist," and this and

that. Everyone's writing their version of it, and there's the show, and there's you, and it's fundamentally different from the book, especially season 2 ended on such a different note. And the characters make different decisions in life –

Penn: Well, exactly that, too.

Caroline: So, it's been a lot of like, breathing, and then the one good thing I like about writing is like, for me, every session is starting off like, oh, this is hard, this is hard. And I can feel sorry for myself. And on that level – well, yeah. I've never done this before. I've never written a third book. I've never written a character in a voice that's now, I could also just go sit down and watch it on TV. It's mind blowing. So, I'm like, okay, get over it, then start writing. And the more that I write, the more that I get into it, the more – just the same thing that happens with the show – the more it becomes its own world. And then I found myself going in and Joe-ing it up, like he's meaner than that or he's, you know, or he's – he'd have more time to dwell.

In the show, it was interesting to read chapter one and see that scene, to see the language, like what falls away, like the [unintelligible] mention, which I totally get, but it's like, that breathing in a book, it's just different. Your [unintelligible] in the books is exclusively in Joe's head. So, I have to tell myself that he's not Paco, like that didn't happen to book Joe. I love that story so much. For me, it's like, if book Joe had a Paco, he wouldn't be book Joe, do you know what I mean?

Penn: Exactly, not even remotely close. Book Joe like, no. There's no Paco, definitely no Paco.

Caroline: So, this is my favorite challenge of my writing life.

Chris: Let's get into that a bit more, and I'll throw out this kind of vague warning to listeners, you know, maybe you've just seen the show and you intend to read the books and you haven't yet, or vice versa. We can't really talk about the changes made in the adaptation process without getting into some specifics so I'm going to trust you to be the own judge for when you need to put your hands over your ears for a moment.

Penn brought up Paco, this young neighbor of Joe's in season one whose mother is in this relationship with this abusive dude, and Joe kind of takes Paco under his wing and gives him some books to read and takes care of him. Something similar happens in season two where there's a character Ellie, another minor, who Joe wants to protect. And in each case, Joe, who usually kills out of self-interest rather than a desire to protect himself, ends up killing someone out of a protective impulse. I mean, that seems like a pretty drastic change to a character. So, I wonder, did the showrunners or anyone else ever say to you, Caroline, we need Joe to be a little more likable if we're going to put him on TV, or anything like that?

Caroline: I'm glad you said the word likable, because it wasn't about likability, but in the book it's like, he has these internal conversations and especially in *You*, he's talking to typewriters and he addresses – he has a name for them. And I feel like visually, that would've been such an extreme way to go. For this to work as a show, we needed a Paco, you need this character, you

need to see him make decisions in real time where it's not, like you can't have a tender moment with a typewriter.

Chris: Didn't you win a typewriter in a writing contest? Like a *Sassy Magazine* contest early on?

Caroline: I did, yes, *Sassy Magazine*.

Chris: But there are limitations to the relationship, is what you're –

Caroline: Right, so I feel like it worked. It's one of those things where, oh they're changing my baby, then count to ten, think it through, it works beautifully. And now to me, it's a part of the show, it's a part of how you see TV Joe growing and finding his best self. In that way, I think that they are similar. In the book, when you just said Joe kills out of self-interest, I'm like, no he doesn't think that, though. He thinks he's doing something good for the world. He thinks of himself as kind of a veterinarian who, in some cases, is sparing someone. I'm not saying I agree with that. But that's his perspective. So, I feel like it's a different way of telling the story of how that psychology works on TV, that it just works better in that place.

Chris: But also, on TV, you get that device of seeing the contrast between what Joe is thinking and the way he's interacting with the world because we have that great first-person narration. And like Penn said, it's heavily distilled from what you wrote because the word count just has to be drastically winnowed, but you can get a lot from the timing, those juxtapositions.

So, this is a question for Penn – when you are doing that voiceover, which I assume happens in a recording booth somewhere in a different time, long after you're off the set, are you watching the footage? Are you getting direction there in the booth? How does that work?

Penn: Actually, it's different than what you're imagining, though what you imagine is normal, I think. I recorded before. I'm not kidding, I often record – so, keep in mind, television is like a, it works like a machine once you get into a season, so you're moving at a very fast pace. I – a number of episodes in season two, I think, I was cold reading as I was doing the voiceover because we need to record, say, two to three episodes in this given time because I was also in nearly every scene of the show, so it's a time management thing. Especially now that we've worked out the kinks in terms of like, I just know what it is, I ask the lights to be low, voiceover recording booths are some of my favorite places in the world, they're very dark, as you can see behind you, there's a lot of foam.

So, the sound of a recording space is just so dead. It's so intimate. It's womb like, it's very comforting to me. And I started out in voiceover, as a 9- and 10-year-old, which is a whole other story. So, I really enjoy it. I just open up the script, there's no director, there's literally just a producer behind me and an engineer. Every now and then, they'll ask me to like, repeat a line or – Stephanie, is she – she's not an Executive Producer, she's a – there's a lot of different functions a producer serves in a lot of different ways. So, this particular producer, she's like an overseer, she's not often on set. This is the space that she's in. If anything, she's like my sort of

creative partner in those spaces and she's very hands-off, because I think what I do more than anything in the show is voiceover, you know? I go to work some days on set rather than in a vocal booth, I don't have any lines. Like, I'm literally looking at things all day.

Or I might say, you know, there's a lot of scenes where you think Joe's all up in the mix, but he's not. He says a few things. A few things. So, you know, I'm not memorizing lines. I'm just there, I'm just watching. And it's a lot of energy but so – the recording is actually a space where I come alive very differently from – When I'm Joe, I'm actually moved sometimes very little. I'm just still and kind of stoic and, you know, you can give me a good or bad review in terms of what that is in a performance but it's the voice where I really, I think – I don't know, to me, far more experimental. And a lot is left on the cutting room floor but it's very, it's very fun and it's so different from any other role I've ever done, in that way.

Chris: That's just fascinating to imagine you there on the set where, as you say, you're not saying much, you're not moving that much, because Joe – it seems like he's a character who wants to control his life to a maniacal degree and when he gets enraged and frustrated, you know, it's when he can't control what's happening around him.

Penn: Well, that's true, so Joe, as many people, has, you know, a lot of different sides to him. In some ways, he's – there's some days that are very physical. I go in and not only am I like, abusing people, but I'm running and this. And it's always in these very stiff leather, wooden-sole boots, and I have kind of high-waisted pants, tucked in and a belt. So, Joe's like, at the end of the season I have like, back problems. Joe's like a tight – he's like a tight sphincter, you know? Like, he's so wound up.

So, me, though, when I go into the vocal booth, I'm like, barefoot, loose-clothed, I'm like myself. But in order to be him, I actually use my body a lot and just channel it all into my voice and into that microphone, and I really know how to use the distance of the microphone and it's, it's just such a different task. And I frankly, I kind of prefer it. It's so much more – when people aren't watching you, you know, you can do more. I even find as an actor tears and just emotions come more spontaneously in that setting than they do on set with people watching and a camera and expectations on Twitter, you know.

Chris: Nothing good about expectations on Twitter.

Penn: Yeah, right.

Caroline: I've heard that that little group of words is bad, yes.

Chris: So, I'm watching the clock here. I think we can probably skip the clip we were going to show from season two because I sort of accidentally described everything that happens in it. But I know you have a passage from *Hidden Bodies*, the second book, which I think is a looser basis for season two of the show than *You* is for season one, there's more –

Caroline: Yeah, I picked the moment that we do see in the show.

Chris: Ah, okay. Would you like to do that now, to read the passage from –

Caroline: I have the book right here.

Caroline reading from *Hidden Bodies*: The first song I hear in LAX is that ditzy fucking Tom Tom Club song about getting out of jail and it sobers me up, hard. A UCLA brat bashes into me with her oversized suitcase. People are pushy and tourists are slamming into me, all of them on an exodus to get pictures of Sean Penn, who is in baggage claim. In New York, people fight to make a train to get home or to make it to the squished aisles of Trader Joe's. In LA, people fight to smell an actor, an old man.

I've received two electronic communications since I landed.

One is from Harvey: *Wow! You have perfect credit! Most people who move here have horrible credit!*

It is my destiny to know people who abuse punctuation. The other message is from Calvin: *We have a Blu-ray so bring any movies you wanna watch during shift.*

You aren't supposed to watch movies in a bookstore and I get into a cab and the driver taps the address of Hollywood Lawns into his GPS and I wonder if Amy took a cab or a shuttle. I wonder when the wondering will stop. I hate this part of the split, when that girl just *lives* in your head. I need to get laid and we take La Cienega and the city gets glitzier as you go north and I see women in nighttime dresses walking around in the day, like this is okay. I see homeless people like from *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* and I see the Capitol Records building and my heart quickens when we reach Franklin Avenue—Amy, Amy, Amy—and when I emerge from the cab I step in dog shit.

"Fuck," I seethe. My head pounds, the sun, the vodka.

The driver laughs. "People in LA, man, they like their doggies."

Hollywood Lawns looks like the building in *Karate Kid* and the dogs trapped in the small apartments bark as I walk up the stairs.

The FOR RENT sign beams: MONTH TO MONTH. I wonder if Amy lives here, in this very building. You never know. She is just the kind of lying transient who would gravitate toward this; her sublet in New York was *week to week*. I should have known then, but your dick makes you blind.

Harvey looks older in person, waxen, with arched eyebrows. It's hard to look at him and I let him talk to me about his act and I agree to get drinks with him. He tells me my apartment is on the

first floor, right by his office, and I brainstorm future excuses to avoid time with him. He warns me about ridiculous shit. “One thing you gotta know about the ‘hood, newbie, this isn’t New York. You can’t be jaywalking. They will ticket you and those tickets will add up.”

“I knew LA was anti-walking but that’s fucking ridiculous,” I say.

Harvey smiles. “You sound like me when I see Joe Rogan on TV. Downright ridiculous. Am I right or am I right?”

Conversations about Joe Rogan are not a part of my life so I don’t encourage him. The way you don’t laugh at a child who swears.

Chris: So, this – we’re in this century, we’re in this golden age of antiheroes, like from “The Sopranos” to Walter White, you know, Vic Mackey, Hannibal Lecter, who of course comes from novels and movies but then you know, most of his screen time was on a TV show where we’re sort of, we the audience are kind of implicated in these terrible crimes because we want this antihero, this protagonist to escape justice at least long enough for us to have this exciting ride with them. And you are particularly good at coming up with characters who I want Joe to kill...

Caroline: Thank you!

Chris: Benji, Peach, Forty, so you know I will confess to having homicidal ideation towards all of these characters. What is the secret to that? To making someone who is not homicidally inclined at least briefly and in the realm of the imagination want to wish someone dead?

Caroline: For me, it’s moments when I’ve seen someone hurt someone I love, or someone that I don’t know. Things I’ve watched and read where like, I’m mad for someone, I’m outraged, you know, when you go to that place when someone is being their absolute worst self. And you know that for a fact. It’s – normal people say, “Okay we all have our story, like that person is doing that for a reason.” The Joe part of it is living and pausing in that moment and allowing that person to just keep going and being terrible, terrible, terrible. And then to me, making it, you don’t understand why Joe is doing... and not that you would do it, but we all know that feeling when someone is just being absolutely horrible!

Also, we all know how if you fester in that and you let that dictate your actions, you’re getting into trouble because you’re thinking you’re so wonderful all the time and no one is. And that’s what comes down to it for me, like I also have to love something about all of them. The [unintelligible], “oh god I guess I can enjoy you for a little bit.”

Chris: Yeah, and this is another thing that I think gets richer and more complicated in *Hidden Bodies*, the second book, the dynamic between Forty and Love, a few pages after you want this guy dead, you’re feeling guilty about wanting them dead and that element is very true to life, it is like a relationship you have with someone you really know.

Caroline: Right, and that was all part of Joe's identity too. To me, he always considers himself the victim, the one in the right, the only one with a moral compass. But the other part of that logic is that if he's moral, no one else can be. No one else will ever go through what he's been through. No one will know how hard it is to be him. So that's what I mean about his kind of, all humans – like, none of them quite get to him. But he wants them to get to him.

Chris: Yeah, so we've been talking over the last hour or so about the way that the upcoming third season and the third book coming out in the spring, presumably will deviate even farther along separate tracks than the extant books and seasons of TV. So, I mean I'm thinking about literary characters who've had these long afterlives on screen. You know, they are still making James Bond movies, you know, James Bond does not belong to Ian Fleming who's been dead for, you know, 60-some years. Sean Connery does not own [unintelligible], and I actually want you, Caroline and Penn both, to weigh in on this. Can you think of Joe Goldberg as a creation that could potentially outlive either of you?

Caroline: Yes... I would love that.

Chris: Yeah?

Caroline: I hope once the world is different, if the world is still around, my dream is always that there will be a *You* slot machine one day.

[Laughter]

Caroline: It was one of those things when it started where I'd keep asking my lawyer and she's like "Stop asking about a slot machine!" and I'm like, "Never! I'm not gonna stop!"

Chris: Your merchandise demands are very specific. Would you accept a pinball machine, or does it have to be gambling?

Caroline: I know but like, I want it to be a slot machine.

Penn: She's clearly thought about this, Chris. Leave it alone.

Caroline: And I think Penn – Yes, I have!

Penn: Yeah, and I think it couldn't have my face on it, I'll say that much.

Caroline: No. [Laughter]

Chris: No amount of money will...

Caroline: But imagine the bonus round would be your voiceover, you know?

Penn: Yeah, right. [Chuckles]

Caroline: Walking around...

Penn: This idea of Joe having a legacy, I mean, yeah, I'm curious what that's like. You know, I have played another character who has a, you know... to say legacy, I don't know, it sounds dramatic if I'm speaking about a character I've played, but you know "Gossip Girl" is what it is and my character Dan Humphrey is who he is and there's some – would someone call that a legacy? Well, if there is one, it's interacting with Joe now, creating his, and I think that's kind of fascinating. Um, I don't imagine that I will – I don't know that a third icon is in the future and whether he'll interact with these two so, the idea of Joe in ten years, I think, will be really interesting to me because I guess I'm curious given the last, you know, 4, 6, 8, 10 years, or we could extend it to the origins of the American institution, you know.

I don't know, I think like, are the next – what, you know, what will the future behold for us all that we'll look at a character like this, and what will he show us and what will be relevant still, what will be less relevant? That I actually – I've never really thought about it to be honest, but it's really interesting to me so I'm looking forward to that, but of course we can't know until we're there.

Chris: Yeah, Joe truly is a product of his time.

Penn: Yeah, and I'm sure many elements of him will be timeless and then I think, well, with the show I think far more than the book, the use of social media and its visual, I don't know, just that skin – I wonder how that will hold up.

Caroline: And I – just how it's impressing people now as they read and discover who they are. Like, I just think about being younger and reading *American Psycho* for the first time and those passages about Whitney Houston and feeling like "THIS! I connect to this" and it's nice to hear from people who are writing, and this makes them want to do that. So, for me that's the best part of the legacy.

Chris: Alright, well, that's a good place to transition to our audience questions because I've been getting to ask all the questions for an hour plus. Um, Penn and Caroline can you see a question window or should I...?

Penn: Oh right, when I pull it up, does my face go away? Not that that's a problem...

Caroline: Q&A...

Chris: Still see your face.

Penn: Okay, cool. I'm just scrolling through.

Chris: Alright, well I'll...

Caroline: 77 of them. Yeah how do we...?

Penn: Yeah there's so many of them, and they're all kind of good. This one here... there's one here that gets – yeah, a lot of them are getting at things we've already talked about. Um, I don't know.

Chris: Alright, can I pick one out?

Penn: Please.

Chris: For Penn – Hi Penn, I'm a public school teacher and your fans all know you are a big reader from your roles in "You" and "Gossip Girl." What are some of your favorite books that had the biggest impact on you during your high school and college years?

Penn: You know, when I was, this is towards the end of those years, but when I was 22, I read a book called *King Leopold's Ghost* by, I want to say his name is Adam Hochschild? It's spelled like HOCHSCHILD but I'm not sure how you say it out loud. He has a follow up called *Bury the Chains*, they're both nonfiction, they happen to be the last – no, once I – that year I read *The Brief Wondrous life of Oscar Wilde*, which was the last book of fiction I read until, like, I was 29 and I read *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler.

Chris: Oh, I just got that!

Penn: Yeah, it's oof. That is a chilling...

Chris: Eerily timely novel...

Penn: Ah, yeah, there's a lot there man, it's really interesting. So, the reason I bring those up is because I think, like, for my brain, my mind, I lost interest in fiction in my 20s and it was kind of like because this book, *King Leopold's Ghost*, you know, and forgive me for what I'm saying, it's sensitive, but it's like – it brought to sort of horrific, vivid reality... I feel like it's such a topic – chattel slavery... American chattel slavery, but then this was its iteration in the Congo as a Belgian colony at that point. And it just – it like, it was so important to me that at that point I was like... I don't, you know, and this is a very kind of pretentious Joe thing to think in a way, even though he loves fiction, was like – I don't feel like I have time. I don't feel like we have time for fiction. I'm not saying that I still think that or that was ever true because good fiction is true and good fiction does incredible things for us. Um, but yeah, so, I don't know, I mean, I feel like... that's a book for ya. [Laughter]

King Leopold's Ghost and *Bury the Chains*, which was about abolitionists in Europe and America. So, they're really informative and timely now. They never shouldn't have been timely; they always should be timely, but I think now, given the sort of national discourse around racism

and America's past in particular, these are great books. Written by a white man but, you know, he's on to something, and he's a historian, one you can put on your shelf.

Chris: Right, so we have a thematically linked question, especially since Joe is so aware of the wealth of people around him. What do you think would be different in the character's lives without white privilege or material wealth? I guess either of you could take that one.

Penn: Joe doesn't exist without white privilege! [Laughter] I think, I mean, you know. Sorry, Caroline, I'm not speaking about the Joe that you created from your heart and mind, I'm talking about the Joe that lives on the screen, who is very different, I think, in some ways. I think Joe is too charming in the show, personally. I think – I always wanted to make him creepier. I wanted to go harder like he is in the book. But you know, some things would just be a little too gruesome for serial television. So, you know, I think that Joe on camera is, to me, the best thing he is, is an allegory for white supremacy in a way. That's what I got in touch with in season 2 a lot, personally.

Caroline: Yeah and I was going into it with the classism of it. I – something he talks about in the third book is being a child and seeing *Hannah and Her Sisters* for the first time, why that movie resonated with him was seeing people that lived in a city he thought of as his and living this completely different life. And I think that's what interests me whether you grow up in a city or in a, you know, wherever you grow up, and you see people that were born into different circumstances. And I think he's someone that wondered, "well what would I be like if I'd had that?" and "what would they be like if they didn't?" And these are kind of unknowable things, but that's the experiment and that's part of his thing of testing people – is seeing what people are made of if you take away that privilege. So that was my connection to the privilege with it.

Chris: Since Penn just talked about the screen portrayal of Joe being a little softer and less threatening than the prose portrayal, here's a question for you both – What do you think about the difference between Beck's death scene in the books and in the series? I think they're both good, but I feel like her death in the book was even more creepy and cold, and that keeping it that way in the show would've been a huge reminder that besides that... Joe is still a monster.

Penn: Yes, no exactly! He kills her – sorry, spoiler alert – twice!! [Laughter] Okay?? He's a fuckin' monster! But in the show – sorry for swearing, whatever, okay – that's to me where the conversation, for me as the person who portrays Joe, what I get excited about as you can see is like, Joe on the show and then what people like about Joe on the show and are willing to tolerate watching on the show is very different from your experience with Joe of the books.

So, to me, you know, this is a super relevant question. Like, what are we losing or gaining in this translation? And to me, I think like I prefer, in that sense, I prefer the books. I think the books don't let you – you know what you're contending with, you have to take responsibility for what you're doing in the books, you know? And I feel like, as a viewer of the show, you're, you know – it's towing the line and that's the nature of the medium, you know? I think. It's tough. It's tough not to watch something and glorify it – it's just hard.

Chris: Yeah, I'm trying to remember if this was the showrunner of – it was either Sean Ryan and “The Shield” or David Chase and “The Sopranos” maybe, but someone I know. I saw an interview and they were saying they could not, like, it was so hard for them to keep coming up with evil things that their character could do that the audience would not forgive them for. You know? Because they just felt such identification that was – as the show got towards its conclusion, it was just more difficult and more necessary to remind the audience this is not a good person.

Caroline: It's a decision about what to show you. Like in the book, the first time that he... In the story of *You* that we see him kill someone isn't until – spoiler alert – Peach, because the first time he does it there's a little... the energy there is a little accidental of like, oh well it was a liar, I thought he was lying! And, oh, he's dead, like he fully knows that someone might die but that was, to me, part of the book... The literary seduction of it and this character that, like, you're not having that slaughterhouse scene early on. And it is hard. It makes the story different and you end up killing [unintelligible] off-screen and when it's kind of like... [Shrug]

But then I look at “The Sopranos” and I watched that. I loved that like everyone, and Tony does terrible things, but very different mediums – that way and especially in this...

Penn: Actually, I have a question, Caroline, and please be very honest. When you saw the pilot and then when you saw the episodes in the first season and then now, I guess like, how... I know that so much of it you like, you love that you get to create this thing that you've been creating and you're grateful that it's also become the show, I get all that. But I'm wondering, like, when you – my Joe, like me as Joe, did you, are there times when you watch and you're like, it's just like, he's just too charming – there's just... that smile's sweeter rather than chilling. I wonder if you know the reality of bringing Joe to life is like, he's a, you know, he's a chilling sociopath, he's a psychopath, he's a – can you be both at the same time, I don't know – but I wonder, you see the reality of this kind of person.

You know, it's not Zac Efron as Charles – or who did he play? Ted Bundy. Me as Joe, you know, maybe not even Joaquin as Joker or not even James Gandalfini as Tony Soprano. I wonder if, you know, we're getting... we have a lot of men playing serial killers and we might be making all of them too charming, I wonder. Different levels, I'm not comparing myself to these other actors, right? I'm just saying, like, this is something I just think about. It's in my mind cause I gotta do it. I'm curious, Caroline, what did you think?

Caroline: Yeah, I mean there are moments where like, I feel like he could be a little meaner so that we could then question – it would only make it land more when we feel for him.

Penn: Yeah, I completely agree.

Caroline: And then later he does something, and we think, “okay, that's what I would do.” Cause I feel like, to me, the tighter the walk between a moment of “what a horrible person he is

right now” to “okay, I get him,” like, in that way when he can be more critical of people. I feel like in the books he is more, when he doesn’t like people, he has a lot to say about them. And in the show, he’s very generous with – when he meets people and he thinks they’re nice! It’s something that comes up a lot. “Oh, he would love these people if he could just get rid of everyone around them.”

[Laughter]

Caroline: So I feel like some of the antisocial energy is lost and that’s what, to me, makes it a little scarier in the read because the whole idea is that you wouldn’t know that all of this is going on in your head if you met you! And sometimes in the show it’s like “well, you just seem nice!” and sometimes you really are nice! I’m like “oh, he could be a little bitchier.”

Chris: This is what you get for casting a charming lead.

Penn: Well, I should be acting more!

Caroline: But then when I separate myself and watch it on its own – it’s, you know, it’s fun!

Chris: Here’s a good one for Caroline – as a woman, do you find it hard writing from a male perspective?

Caroline: Yes, that was initially – I started writing from a female perspective and I wanted to go away, I wanted to feel like I was doing something that I could not do. I wanted the challenge. I wanted to feel like I was maybe failing on every page and I feel like it’s good writing advice I’ve gotten over the years for people like, do something you don’t think you can do that you technically *should* be able to do. And that was for me – one of my comfort zones was Beck, and putting him in a city where I lived, and putting her on a street where I lived. So, all of that was familiar and was like, my security blanket of trying to go into the male mind.

Chris: Yeah, there is an episode of season one where the narration switches over to Beck briefly, right? And I think I maybe got to that before I’d finished the novel so, like, I kept expecting to come to a chapter of the novel where Beck is our narrator now.

Caroline: Nope. [Laughs]

Chris: Yeah, well...

Caroline: No, I mean, I love Elizabeth and I love that in the show but, very much no – it’s always Joe’s story that’s part of, to me, like the point of it.

Chris: Yeah, no, it is his world. Oh, here we go – Caroline, any chance we can expect Santino Fontana, who we haven’t talked about yet, but he is the Joe of the audio books. Will he reprise the role of Joe in the audiobook version of *You Love Me*?

Caroline: I believe so, and I feel so spoiled to have Santino and Penn, I mean, it's ridiculous, but also, in this book there's a lot of singing and they can both sing! So this is like... So that's one of those things I think might have gotten in the back of my head cause I wrote song lyrics, which is something I've never done before, and was very kind of gun shy about doing – but then I'm like, oh, I realize I have Santino and Penn... Maybe.

Penn: Can Joe in the books sing? Would you imagine Joe could sing? Like, back in 2016...

Caroline: No, it doesn't come out like he wants it to.

Chris: Yeah, I mean if you were a good singer, would any of this happen? I mean, maybe Peach and Benji, maybe they'd all be still alive if he could carry a tune.

Caroline: Yes, but I think that like he, in his head it would sound good. But you're hearing it from his perspective...

Penn: And that's all that matters.

Caroline: [Laughs] Right, exactly. There we are! Ugh, you can tell I was working on it today.

Chris: I'm fascinated to learn that you're writing lyrics.

Caroline: Well, I already wrote them. Those are in the book, like there's no going back, they're in there.

Penn: Wait, I have a good one, I have a good one here. This is a question for Caroline, and me, I suppose. Why does Joe never wear shorts?

Caroline: Where I grew up, where I am, like people – men wear shorts, especially like evenin', October, November – and it's something since I was a kid that I noticed, is like – it's a strong men thing, of doing, like, the colder it is, I'm still gonna wear shorts, I'm gonna wear them in the snow in March. And one of my early identifying things is like, Joe is like the opposite of that. But also, at the same time, he's willing to be uncomfortable.

Chris: Well, I'm just gonna say that fall has just arrived in Washington, DC where I'm speaking to you from – a swampy, humid city where it is exactly the opposite thing, where you see dudes who will wear black jeans in the middle of July.

Penn: Yeah, right?

Chris: Cause they're not gonna break. Um, I am not one of those men.

[Laughter]

Chris: Okay, question for Caroline – I read in your bio that you won a *Sassy Magazine* writing contest – that may be where the typewriter came from. The question continues – *Sassy* is a foundational feminist text for so many of my friends. Did it influence you and your writing?

Caroline: Hugely, immensely, best magazine of all time. Every month when it came out was the most exciting day of the month. At some points, my parents would take me to Boston to get it, cause it was out and I couldn't get it yet cause Cape Cod things are a little slower. Just the best. Christina Kelly, Jane Pratt, like my earliest heroes, I mean, I feel like that's what the internet is for kids now, but at that age, that magazine was a portal to the future, to another world, to so many wonderful things. So, when I got – when they liked something I wrote that, was a wonderful moment. And when I got the typewriter too. So, from – and the other, the story was about a girl who's dead from a drug overdose and in school, they made me go talk to a guidance counselor, and I'm like "it's fiction! I'm making this up!"

Chris: Um, what else do we have here? Okay, uh, Joe's response to *Love* – alright so this is a deep season two question – Joe's response to *Love* revealing her true self and their similarities drew a strong parallel with how women and minority groups are typically judged more for the same transgressions. Was this intentional? Could you talk a little bit about the theme of judgement in both books and both seasons?

Caroline: Whoa, Penn! Is that for... Whoa!

Penn: Yeah, I mean, this is something I think about a lot. You know, I should say that, you know, I don't wanna speak for Caroline, but there's nothing about the show that is overtly meant to state anything about white privilege and white supremacy and all, you know, all the complex historical attending factors. But the reality is pretty clear if we look into the real world. Serial killers overwhelming – vastly overwhelming majority – almost to the point that you could say all of them are white men. You know, are there other groups of people around the continents who are responsible for the death of many? Yes. But this is different from, let's say a tyrannical, you know, a dictator. You know, something that's more military, political, what have you.

This is a man, let's say a person cause – a person who is so locked in their opinion of themselves and others that they're not, that it ultimately leads them to the belief that extinguishing some other's right to exist, removing some other person's right to exist, is what they're gonna do, let's not even say best or worst. That's what they're gonna do. There's no one who's even allowed to go there other than white men in our world. There's no theoretical world free of white supremacy, it just doesn't exist. There's no America that ever existed without it, you know? So, therefore, these stories check out in reality. So, to me, Joe is, if you wanna pull it out of Joe, it's in there! It's totally in there. You couldn't have this show with a black lead, male or female.

Chris: Someone just asked exactly that question – sorry, please continue.

Penn: Right. And it's questionable if it could even be a woman. Like, the fact that Caroline wrote it is very different from what somebody would actually do. So, to me it's just like, that is part of what this whole project is and is doing, and now, of all times, I think it's prescient. You know, I mean, there's a lot else to consider, it's not necessarily my place to address it all here certainly, but I think, you know, it's like – what does that mean for Joe in the future? I think, especially on the show because again in the book, he is more chilling. He just is. On the show, you know, how far are we willing to go to forgive him? Um, I wanna test that more and like, make him more repulsive, personally. You know, because that's the drug of white supremacy, right? Like that's like, how many mental gymnastics are all people indoctrinated and used to performing whether or not they want to – to forgive someone who checks all the boxes that Joe checks.

Caroline: Yes, and if you were going to go out and kill someone and you could make a list of things to do to make it easier, what would the first thing on your list be? It would be to be a white man. That's just... like that's a given.

Penn: Yeah! Yeah, I mean... Was that enough of an answer to the question?

Caroline: Yeah, it's a big question and it's the kind of thing I wanna – go talk where you are and like, sit down...

Chris: Yeah, we could do 90 minutes just on this.

Penn and Caroline: Yeah.

Chris: Alright, we're just gonna do two more questions before we wrap it up here. You're both busy people and you've been very generous with your time. Here's one of them – Caroline, I personally knew from page one that *You* was wildly different and compelling, but I'm curious. Did the book sell quickly or did you have to shop around quite a bit for the right editor to buy it? Please keep writing books.

Caroline: Okay, thank you, I will keep writing books! And it all happened relatively quickly. It was very exciting. It was in January or December – I should know this by heart, but I think it was January – and yeah, it was a dream experience. But I mean, I feel like sometimes it happens that way for people. Other people, they try and sell that book for years, and then, you know, you just want it to happen.

Chris: So, this is a follow-up from me. Did anyone close to you read the novel and look at you and say, "oh my god, this was inside of you?"

Caroline: Well yeah, when I was writing it, I would send it to my mom and her sisters and my cousin and they're all reading it and having these weird talks about blowjobs and I'd be like "what is happening??" And they – I mean, they're family, so they know me, but one of my aunts was like, "you're now a freak, Caroline!" I'm like, "Alright!"

Chris: You've also thought very methodically and specifically about how to commit crimes.

Caroline: I haven't though, that's the part I feel like – that's the part that, for me, was part of the exercise, like, that's as alien to me as saying, oh what it's like to be a man. So, that was part of the fun – thinking, like, how would you do this? I remember something with the gas company in *You*, like, oh you really could do that! You really could call and say there's, you know, a gas leak and they would come, and they would open the door! I've always like – I like thinking, imagining. I really like imagining things like that so... but not doing.

Chris: Alright, so I'm trying to choose something with a suitable sense of finality from our long list of very insightful questions. Sorry to everyone who submitted a question that we didn't get to.

Penn: Pressure's on!

Caroline: Oh, there are so many... Yeah.

Chris: Okay, someone asks – was there anything in season two, from *Hidden Bodies*, the novel, that you had hoped would be included in season two, that was not?

Caroline: I mean, I wanted the Vegas trip so badly part of – like, I would've loved to go on that trip. That's, again, that's adaptation – things change, situations change. But yes, any author, I think, would pick up the book and say, yeah everything in here, ideally everything would be, but you know, it wouldn't work in television, so there's a lot of like, I've had years of getting used to it – to the process – but, yeah, Vegas and a lot of the stuff on boats, but you know...

Chris: Yeah, do you think you're more receptive to it now than you may have been, like on the first season or earlier in your career, about rolling with those changes?

Caroline: Yeah, and right away I said to Greg and Sera that I had written a short story and I adapted it and made a short film before I read the book. And I'm so happy that I did that because when I started to make the film, I was like, "oh this is so easy, I'm just gonna take the short story and plop it into final draft," and no. The whole process, the writing, I changed everything! I mean, there were things in the story that changed violently, so I felt like I had really experienced personally in that – and that is why I wrote a book, because in a book you do control every single thing in a way you can't, like Penn said, the script is not the final product.

So yeah, they're all working together, you know, on a daily basis and, as you asked before, the job with a consulting producer, to me, as the author, consulting producer – it's to say, you guys go do it, you know?

Chris: Yeah, well, I need to thank you both for being so forthcoming, so generous with your time. This was a huge treat for me having just mainlined two seasons of the show and read the two novels in rapid succession.

Penn: How are you doing? [Laughter] It's like 80 collective hours of just...

Caroline: What are you doing tonight?

Chris: I'm probably gonna watch the HBO Max series "The Doghouse," which is a reality show about matching rescue dogs with receptive families and –

Penn: Yeah, right.

Caroline: Oh, that's nice.

Chris: It's just friendly dogs and happy people who want to be dog owners. I think that would be a good chaser for 20 hours and 800 pages of *You* and *Hidden Bodies*.

Thank you both so much. This has been such a privilege to talk to you, and I know everyone watching on Zoom appreciates it too. Thank you.

Caroline: Thank you!

Penn: Yeah, thank you, thanks for having us.

Chris: So, I need to introduce a pal of mine – this is Gwydion Suilebhan, who is the Executive Director of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation. I have him to thank for my participation in this – it's been super, super fun and – I know Gwydion from his many years as a playwright here in DC. He is going to come on now and talk to you a little bit about the PEN/Faulkner Foundation. Again, thank you so much. Goodnight!

Gwydion Suilebhan: Hello everyone! Thank you so much. I can't thank Caroline and Penn and Bethanne and Chris enough. It means so much to us that you are here, and it also means a lot to me that YOU are all here watching, participating, making this another incredible Literary Conversation. We couldn't do anything we do without you. And that's why I'm going to ask to have the link dropped back into the chat for you to contribute if you can.

I just want to let you know that even 15 dollars puts a brand new book in the hands of a student in Washington, DC, for whom access to meaningful stories is really hard to come by in regular circumstances, and these days is even harder, so anything you can do to help us make that happen for that student would make a tremendous difference.

[Donate to PEN/Faulkner using this link! bit.ly/penfaulkner]

We are incredibly grateful. We hope you had a terrific time tonight. Thank you so much, and we hope we'll see you again.