

ARÓN PIPER

by CHARLIE GRAY wearing TIFFANY & CO.

CB How did your personal and professional backgrounds help you to create and shape Sammy and Cyril? TC I think Gaël immediately immersed us in his universe by giving us many references to prepare for the roles, whether it was films like "Les Nuits de Fauve", "Brokeback Mountain" or "La Pudeur ou L'Impudeur", which are very strong on the subject of illness, or books by several authors like Cyril Collard or Hervé Guibert, Jean Genet as well, and poems. Then, Gaël is a filmmaker who deeply loves his actors and desires to film based on what they can naturally convey and what they can create by being together. So, it was really up to us to naturally create our own trio, of course, influenced by the references Gaël gave us.

For me, regarding the illness, given my past experiences, it seemed essential to convey a kind of physical pain and its evolution throughout the film. So, I also worked on my body and the way I moved in the scenes where the character was ill and, in the scenes where Sammy was becoming less and less healthy. I had worked on this in a film like "Suprême", where this work was vital to bring the character to life.

VB It's true everything Théo said about these references. Gaël, since he is someone who lived through those years and knew people who were sick with AIDS, who died of AIDS, he experienced all of that. So, our biggest reference was him. Also, besides all the references that Théo mentioned, he gave me the film "My Own Private Idaho".

So, it's true that those were major inspirations. And then, you asked how our personal experiences influenced us, I think that, in reality, we never approach a character or a project by chance. If we do it, it's because it tells us something about ourselves. And it's the meeting between ourselves, our experiences, and what is written, along with the collaboration with the director and the partners, that brings to life what you see in the end. So, I think we all brought something from our past love stories, whether they were successful or failed, and from the contact we've all had with death or illness. It's what makes us who we are and it's what gives the interpretation. But these things can be conscious or unconscious. But in any case, it's there. We all carry our baggage. There's the baggage we create beforehand by working on everything Théo talked about, and there's the baggage that is there from our own life experiences. TC This also develops between us during the shooting.

VB Absolutely! And from our interactions and all those things. So, I think that all our life experiences and all our personal experiences are present in the project no matter what because they inhabit us.

- CB What was it like to be in the shoes of young people experiencing death?
 - How did it affect you personally?

VB In my case, my character Cyril is not dying. He is HIV-positive, but he is not sick. He knows that his days are numbered, but he knows that it's not tomorrow and that he is not in the terminal phase of the disease. Nevertheless, he is still HIV-positive, so it completely changes his outlook on life. I enjoyed uderstanding this character through his love for life, he is a free person, and being HIV-positive has made him even freer. So, how does portraying such characters impact us? I think it forces us to be in the present, which is an intrinsic quality for being an actor, but I think it forces us not to anticipate things, not to dwell on them, and to be in total happiness in the present. As for the relationship with death, I think Théo has more to say regarding his character.

TC What it created in me is that I quickly thought, 'How lucky we are today to have the knowledge, to know how to protect ourselves to avoid the worst, and especially to be able to love without any fear of death'. And I think it seems so normal to us today because, even though these diseases still exist and are still relevant, we talk about them much less because we are much less in the unknown, and that's what's most terrifying. The most terrifying thing is not knowing. Today, we know, and we can lead our lives as we please in almost total freedom without fear of unknown factors. So, for the young people who didn't have this chance before us, let's live for them, enjoy life for them, and out of respect for them, let's also be responsible. Because without them and without what they had to go through, maybe we wouldn't know, and we would still be afraid.

CB Totally, and we didn't live through that time when it was truly an epidemic. We hear about it, we see it in films or documentaries, but we didn't actually experience it. So, experiencing it, even if it's somewhat false because it's a film, must create an impact on you.

TC Yeah, projecting yourself into that puts you in a kind of anxiety. And when you come out of that, out of the filming, out of the role, and you look at the life around you, you say to yourself, 'I have all the cards in my hand, I'm very lucky'. So, yeah, we have to respect that.

VB It's true that our generation grew up in the '90s, but we were kids, so we didn't live through it, we didn't go through it. And it's true that realizing it today and having that perspective, looking back and understanding the magnitude of what it was, it changes our relationship with the present and our relationship with life today, quite simply.

CB The film centers around strong emotions – there is love, but also sadness, fear, jealousy, and betrayal. While filming, how did you paying the through this mix of emotions?

While filming, how did you navigate through this mix of emotions?

VB All the emotions you just mentioned had a common denominator; the pleasure of being together. No matter what we had to act out for each other, we were united, and it's true that every day at least one of us had something significant to perform. Since we were connected by something even off the set, the three of us supported each other, gave each other space, and listened to each other. So, whoever came in on Monday with a big emotional scene to play arrived quite calm because they knew they would be supported by the other two. It was a team effort; we were together and working towards the same goal. That alone made things much easier. When we had joy to express, tears, anger, or betrayal, it was always joy and pleasure in the end. It was all life, and it was pure happiness to be together and to do it together. Personally, there was never a day I found it difficult. Of course, some emotions are more complicated to find or reach, but it was never laborious because whether it was Théo, Lou, or Gaël, who was the leader of it all, we were in such a pleasant environment that it was just delightful. Even if we put ourselves in states that in real life might be considered unpleasant, here it was not at all.

TC Yeah, exactly. First of all, we were together. Every morning when we arrived, each of us knew very well what was going to happen that day, what we had to do, what we had to film. I remember that sometimes I felt like I could just see it in the other's eyes. You knew there were big scenes, and that we hadn't slept, or we had only slept three hours because we were thinking about it. You could see in the other's eyes that today when we said hello, we had significant, complicated things to perform. I remember that the anxiety of certain scenes hit me 24 hours in advance. I remember I had

INTERVIEW BY CAROLINA BENJUMEA

ON THE 23RD OF NOVEMBER 1991. 45-YEAR-OLD EREDDIE MERCURY ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD TESTED HIV POSITIVE AND HAD AIDS. THE VERY NEXT DAY, HE DIED, AT THAT MOMENT. HE BECAME ONE OF THE THOUSANDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC. ANXIOUSLY WAITING TO KNOW THEIR FATES. HE BECAME THE FACE OF THOSE WHO SUFFERED FOR BEING FREE WERE PLINISHED FOR LOVING. AND DIED OF THE UNKNOWN. "VIVRE. MOURIR. RENAÎTRE" TELLS THE STORY OF A GENERATION THAT LONGED TO EXPERIENCE FREEDOM, LOVE. HAPPINESS, AND YOUTH BUT WAS ABRUPTLY HALTED BY A SILENT ENEMY, DIRECTED BY GAËL MOREL AND STARRING THÉO CHRISTINE, VICTOR BELMONDO AND LOU LAMPROS, THIS FILM DELVES DEEP INTO THE HUMAN THIRST FOR LIVING, THE FEAR OF DYING, AND THE NEED TO BE REBORN. I SAT WITH THÉO AND VICTOR, AND WE DISCUSSED THE FILM. THEIR AMOUR À TROIS. THEIR FRIENDSHIP. BUT MOST OF ALL, HOW FOR THE YOUTH OF THE '90S. LOVING MEANT DISEASE, YET, IN THE END, LOVE WAS ALWAYS MEANT TO BE THE CURE.

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posted the fake positive HIV result at home, and in the evening, I would look at it and tell myself, 'Okay, tomorrow I'm going to tell the mother of my children that I'm HIV-positive'. These are quite intense things that condition you and put you in a certain state well before filming, so I think you're already in that state when you arrive on set. Gaël also used a term I really liked; depending on the scenes we had to shoot the next day, he would sometimes send us a message the night before, saying that 'tomorrow we were going to transform words into flowers', for the love scenes and the beautiful scenes, or that 'we were going to transform them into stones', for the very difficult and hard-to-play moments.

CB Oh that's beautiful! And the relationship that the three of you had, felt so close and respectful on screen. Was it easy to find that friendship, love, and camaraderie between you?

TC Yeah, very easy. We already knew each other a little bit but, I don't know, there was a kind of harmony when we met, everything just worked really well. There was no selfishness from anyone, and we were there to play together, to make this film as a trio, and to tell this story together.

VB It was the first time I was part of a trio, and I didn't really know how it was going to go. Honestly, there was such harmony between us because there was respect and kindness, and also because I think our personalities matched. We are all very different in terms of personality, but it worked out well.

TC We bonded well

VBThere was something, as Théo just said, a really strong bond, so there was no issue in creating that complicity.CBToday's society is much more open to the subjects of sexuality and diseases than before, but were

you hesitant to portray these characters where sexuality and the subject of polygamy play a central role? VB I never thought about it, honestly. When I read the script, I saw a great love story, just love, so those weren't questions I asked myself beforehand.

TC Me neither, but if I think about it, I see it as my role as an actor, also, representing my generation and the different evolutions it can undergo. In real life, I'm the first to advocate for freedom, not worrying about what people might think or say. What matters is feeling comfortable in your skin. So, for me, it's very important to convey that message of sharing and tolerance. I'm already very proud to be part of a generation that is evolving in that direction, and the opportunity I had to portray Sammy allowed me to express all of that through my art and work. So, I was very happy and proud, and not at all scared.

CB What was the most emotionally difficult scene to film?

VB Go ahead, Théo, you have a few, I believe.

TC There are a few... I mean, there are many. There's the scene where Sammy trips and knocks over Nathan, and then isolates himself in that alley in Italy. That was challenging; I thought about it a lot. But I think what touched and moved me the most at times was that we were filming with a 3-year-old child, and sometimes he could really confuse reality and fiction. There were several times when he saw the makeup for my illness and watched me struggle to walk, because I wanted to stay in character and look sick, and he asked me, "When are you going to go to heaven, Daddy Sammy? When are you going to die?". He believed it, I could see it in his eyes; it was a genuine question, and that was disturbing. Of course, we reassured him very quickly; we weren't playing around with that. I'm against tricking a child to get what you want. They have such vivid imaginations that sometimes he surprised me with statements like that, and it broke my heart when he said it. The cutest part is that in my mind, I understood him as my son, and suddenly it transported me to Sammy's situation with his child, realizing that his dad was going to leave soon. That's quite powerful.

CB Oh no, that's sad! He actually played really well his character.

VB Yes. The film is filled with emotion throughout, so the emotion was always present. The difficulty, given the chemistry between us, with Gaël, and the technical team, was never immense. My character only really breaks down once, and that's during the divorce when she tells him they are getting divorced. That's perhaps the only moment he cracks, or something comes out. But it's true that he is a very reserved character who shows very little.

If I had to mention the scene that moved me the most, it would have to be the one after the wedding, the ring scene. I remember that during the entire scene, I was only looking at Théo; I was fixated on him, reflecting on everything we had gone through together, and I thought, 'He's going to die'. I remember not expressing that because it wasn't the focus of the scene, but I was deeply affected that day by everything happening just through our looks.

CB After playing such an emotionally charged scene, how do you feel once it's over? Do you take time to reflect on what you just did, or do you quickly move on to something else and laugh? What is it like after a scene like that?

VB It depends. Personally, when it's over, it's over, and I try to disconnect from what I just experienced. There are moments when you need to maintain an emotion because you have another take to do, so you try to stay in that emotional state. But once the entire sequence is finished and we've done all the takes, for me, it's behind me, and I don't take it home with me.

TC It's something you deliver and express, but you don't want to take it home with you. Of course, it depends on what we're shooting next because once you call upon something you'll keep it, as it will add more depth to the scene. I remember the alley scene; it was at the end of the day with Victor. We hugged and went to grab drinks at a restaurant in Italy, just enjoying and laughing — completely the opposite, because you need to come back up to the surface.

VB That day I felt really moved by that scene. Every time I watch the scene, it all comes back. Maybe that's when I was most touched, but not by me - I was moved by Théo.

CB Did you have someone specific in mind that you used as an inspiration for your character and that you wished to honor with your performance?

TC Yes, some references placed us in a certain universe and, for me at least, set the stage. But I didn't think, 'Oh, I'm going to do this like him in that film'. When I play a character, I strive to make it unique. There are people I wanted to honor while playing Sammy and bringing him to life with as much truth as possible — those I mentioned earlier who left us due to illness, who experienced this for real and shared their insights. It's also for their loved ones who witnessed it from a distance but still very painfully, and it was also to honor Gaël, and my fellow actors Lou and Victor.

VB It's true that the two main inspirations were Guybert and Collard, especially Guybert for Cyril. But as Théo

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Necklace talent's own VICTOR hort sleeved bright blue silk shirt FENDI White ribbed cotton tank CDLP

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said, we always try to give a unique presence, a unique interpretation. I agree with what Théo said, it's for all the Sammys, for all the Cyrils, and for all the Emmas.

CB This question is for Théo: At the beginning, we perceive your character as a very strong, virile man, but as the film evolves, we see someone very sensitive, delicate, and devoted to his family. How did you manage to create this balance between the manly side and the sensitive side of Sammy?

I don't think there are two sides. Sammy can be in love with women just as he can be in love with men; he TC doesn't question his feelings - he just loves. I simply did the same as him: I loved Lou as my wife, Elios, who played Nathan, as my son, and Victor, as my partner, I don't think Sammy goes from being masculine to less masculine. In the beginning, we see him in a well-established relationship where they live together with their kid, they're happy, and they love each other a lot. And then when he meets Cyril, he falls in love again. When you fall in love, that's when all your fragility and delicacy come out because you become vulnerable. Suddenly, you're vulnerable again to the desire for someone you love and don't want to lose. It's like walking on a plank of wood with emptiness on both sides. So, whether it's with Emma, Cvril, or Nathan, I found that fragility you're talking about in those moments of Sammy's vulnerability. stemming from his love for Cyril, the fear of telling his wife, the fear of illness, the fear of dying, and the fear of leaving his son and not being able to raise him and see him grow up.

Exactly, at the beginning we see a family man who protects his wife and child and worries about CB them, and then we start to see a Sammy who falls in love.

TC Yes, it's as if he falls in love again, he feels a bit younger. That's what love does to you; when you fall in love, you feel like a child, with stars in your eyes, ready to do crazy things. I think this is the moment when Sammy becomes vulnerable again and rediscovers what it means to fall in love and be passionate about someone. That passion within him gives a new breath to the character. I don't think he changes in mind or mentality; those are things you can't control.

CB This one is for Victor: Your character gets in the middle of a relationship, yet we do not perceive you as a mean character. The viewer ends up feeling a lot of empathy for Cyril, caring for him, and even tually feeling bad for him once Sammy dies. What was the most important aspect for you when creating the character of Cyril?

VR Honestly, it's the purity and sincerity of his love. He doesn't choose who he falls in love with; in life, we don't choose who we love, it just happens. He loves Sammy with sincere love, so, I didn't want to get into any questioning of whether it was good or bad. I didn't want to judge him; he simply fell in love with someone, and that person fell in love with him too. Sammy loves him, even though Sammy is in love with two people, I believe... Stop me, Théo, if I'm wrong. [Laughs, ed.]

TC You're not wrong. [Laughs, ed.]

I just wanted to focus on the sincerity of his love. He also feels love for Emma, and that's what's important for VB me to explore. Cvril doesn't act like the person that Sammy loves doesn't exist. He also loves Emma with a different kind of love, whether it's friendly or familial, but he loves her too. So, he fully considers her. Moreover, I believe that if Emma's character had said to him, "Listen, I want you to disappear from our lives", Cyril would have respected that. It's also because Emma gives him that green light; she tells him, "I'm okay with you living this story, but I don't want to see it". So, he goes for it, respectfully he says "Alright, I've fallen in love with someone, and that person is taken". Instead of doing it in secret, he talks to the person he's already with, and that person essentially says they can live their love story. In that same scene, it's Cyril himself who says, "I'm going to disappear for a while; I'll leave you alone". And she tells him, "No, live your love, but I don't want to see it". For me, it was about those three things: the respect for their relationship. The purity of his love, and the love for Emma as well, which is a different kind of love.

CB There is one scene, much talked about among the public, where you are running together on the street with the song "Modern Love" by David Bowie in the background. Can you explain the making of this sequence? What was the aim, and what feelings did you want to portray?

TC For me, even though it's short, it's a scene of revolt and rebellion. You have Cyril and Sammy running with all their might toward their love. Because just before this, there's Cyril's announcement of his HIV-positive status, which might make us think that nothing will be possible, or that even Sammy might leave and run away. But no, because when Sammy loves, he loves. So, if there's even a single possibility that this love exists, let's take it. In this case, that possibility is represented by a condom dispenser, but it's more than that. After the announcement of HIV, we see smiles; in this scene, they're running hand in hand through Paris, not caring about what people think or the problems it might bring them. Because at that time, being public about it - two men in love in Paris - was much more complicated, as Gaël told us. In this scene, we didn't think about it. There was something quite intense. At that moment, we started running and laughing. And on top of that, to the tune of "Modern Love", which for me is an ode to universal love. The message of this scene is, as I said, rebellious: we love each other, and there is nothing on this Earth that will ruin that.

It's a great love scene. What it tells us is that love always triumphs, simply. We shot it with a certain urgency, VB and it was fantastic. Technically, there was a camera in a van following us as we ran. There was a certain need to film this scene that completely matches what the characters are experiencing. We had to go fast. At the same time, it was bubbling with love and joy. So, the way we filmed it helped us get into that fast-paced love mentality. It's also a response - not an homage, but a response - to a scene from a film by Léos Carax called "Mauvais Sang", which conveys a very different message and has a completely different outcome. I think Gaël wanted to provide an answer to that scene by saying that you can be HIV-positive, you can love each other, and you can make love, and love always triumphs. I believe Gaël was committed to this scene also as a response to Léos Carax's film.

What did you learn about HIV that you weren't aware of before? CB

I had already worked on this for theater projects, so I had guite a few details and knew what we would be TC talking about, the importance it held, and the trauma it caused in society. Of course, it reminded me that it was truly terrible and a real plague that plunged an entire society into fear, anxiety, and an inability to love and be free. What stands out most when I think back to the filming is that when I held Sammy's positive test in my hands, at that time, a single word on a simple piece of paper could destroy your life. Really.

«IN REAL LIFE. I'M THE FIRST TO ADVOCATE FOR FREEDOM. NOT WORRYING ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT THINK OR SAY. WHAT MATTERS IS FEELING COMFORTABLE IN YOUR SKIN. FOR ME. IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO CONVEY THAT **MESSAGE OF** SHARING AND TOLERANCE.» THÉO CHRISTINE

Grey





VICTOR Short sleeved bright blue silk shirt and burgundy corduroy trousers FENDI Bee my love white gold bangle CHAUMET Black leather boots HERMÈS



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THÉO Green leather jacket and trousers KENZO Black patent ankle boots TOD'S Necklace and earring talent's own



VB What I learned is the terror that arose from total uncertainty. HIV still exists today, unfortunately. I knew it was terrible in the '90s, but I was completely unaware of the state of uncertainty. People were literally making love, getting sick, and in the hospital, they were told, 'We don't know why. We don't know what you have. We don't know how to treat it. We don't know how long it will last. You could die tomorrow or in a year. We have no idea'.

TC It was as if it were a punishment.

CB

VB 'You loved each other. Now, the sentence has fallen. Today, there's nothing we can do about it'. That's what they were told. In the beginning, they didn't even know it could be transmitted through sex.

There was total terror: What is happening? What is happening to us?

Some people at that time could party with someone, and the following weekend, that person would be dead. And they didn't know why. So, that radicality... I hadn't realized how violent it was during that period.

TC There was a parallel. Love was leading to death, while love is one of the most beautiful things, if not the most beautiful thing in the world, it was being translated into one of the worst things in the world.

VB It was like, 'We loved each other; we didn't do anything wrong. So why, today, are we ending up in the hospital?'. It was crazy.

I know, it must have been a horrible time to live. So, what features of a character do you consider most important to understand when portraying a role in a film?

TC I call it the character's breathing. It's about understanding what he means, why he says it, and identifying the character's thought process — what he states and the reflections he goes through to say his lines or act a certain way. You need to find a reason for everything and understand the mentality, and the need of your character to do or say those things. I refer to this as their breathing. It's one of the first things I work on. After that, you can add compositional elements like physical changes or movement in the body, but the first thing is what I just told you: it's breathing, really understanding your character's mentality. And that's so essential, I think. When I play scenes without understanding them, it's something I really hate and can even make me sad. I don't like playing things if I don't understand what I'm doing and why I'm doing it.

VB It aligns with what Théo is saying. For me, the most important thing is the what and the why, not the how. The how comes from the what and the why. So, in a word, what Théo calls breathing, I call the character's motivation. Where does the character want to go? Once you know where he wants to go, what his determination is, and what his quest is, you understand at every moment why he is there, why he says that, and why he does that. Why and what is the motivation behind it all.

- CB It's very interesting. I know that you, as actors, read the script very well before accepting a role, but have you ever had a character where you just can't connect with the story or the person?
- VB Generally, we don't do the film when it's like that.
- TC Yeah, honestly no, if I feel that way, I won't do it.
- VB It's intrinsic to understand a character for the role.

TC Yeah, if you feel that way, there's a problem with the writing or it just doesn't resonate with you. You need to be able to not accept everything and sometimes realize that there might be someone who can do it better than you, because it doesn't speak to you, and you don't necessarily have the desire to tell that story either, you know?

CB And what do you believe is the most rewarding aspect of being an actor?

VB The encounters, for me. In every sense of the word. The encounters with the stories and characters, with those who create them, those who bring them to life, those thanks to whom we can make them live – the technical teams, the places, the locations. It's a constant discovery in this profession and a constant rediscovery. There's no routine; we never shoot twice in the same place, and we never make two films with the same people. It's a continuous rediscovery.

TC It's true, and that's why if we do this job, it's because it's never the same; we're always discovering new places, new people, and we grow as well. It helps us grow both personally and culturally. We discover so many things, learn a lot, and encounter different perspectives. It's incredibly rewarding. I also have a sort of humanistic approach, where people are very important. I think that as storytellers, we have a responsibility. We're given a voice in films that many people, especially young people, will watch and observe what we're trying to convey. So, our job is also to inform ourselves, to work hard to ensure that we are as accurate and as close to the truth of what we're telling as possible.

When people see themselves in the story and come to tell you how much it resonated with them, that's when I feel my mission is accomplished. If those who have lived it can identify with what you're portraying — even if it's fictional — that means you're in the right place. It means that even without having lived it firsthand, by working hard and immersing yourself in it, you've managed to touch them and make them believe in what you're presenting, perhaps even understand it differently. I think we also aspire to be inspiring and to be able to change mindsets that might be too closed or too narrow on certain topics, like racism, xenophobia, and the fear and hatred of others. It's important; if I'm making films and the people who lived through those experiences come to me saying, 'That's not quite right', it can be disheartening. We have a responsibility. We're fortunate to have this job and to be able to speak to thousands of people through it, so it's important to be as accurate as possible.

Then there are also films with a much larger element of fiction, like entertainment. I haven't done much comedy, but in those cases, I simply want to see hundreds of smiles when people leave the theater and make sure they have a good time.

CB Now I would like to finish by knowing what other roles you are looking forward to doing in the future. VB For now, I've done quite different things from one another, especially this year. So, if I can continue in that direction and explore different worlds, characters, and ways of doing things, that would be great. Maybe a true comedy – a really good comedy – or perhaps a real period film set, before the 20th century. But I've always had this desire to play everything and explore all the worlds that cinema can offer us...

TC Because there are many! In the near future, I want to work internationally, especially in English. Otherwise, I'll take what fate brings me if the role resonates with me and I feel drawn to it from the very first reading.

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THÉO Brown cashmere belted car coat and pleated trousers LEMAIRE Black flannel shirt AMI PARIS White ribbed cotton tank LOUIS VUITTON Necklace talent's own

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Talents: VICTOR BELMONDO @Agence Contact THÉO CHRISTINE @Agents Doubles

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VICTOR Green shearling car coat, grey check flannel zip collar polo shirt and green flannel joggers BRIONI

Hair SIMON CHOSSIER @B.Agency and BRICE TCHAGA Make up SALOI JEDDI Photography assistants IGOR KNEVEZ and ELISE BOUILLY Fashion assistant EVELYNE KUOCH