

SAM PECKINPAH

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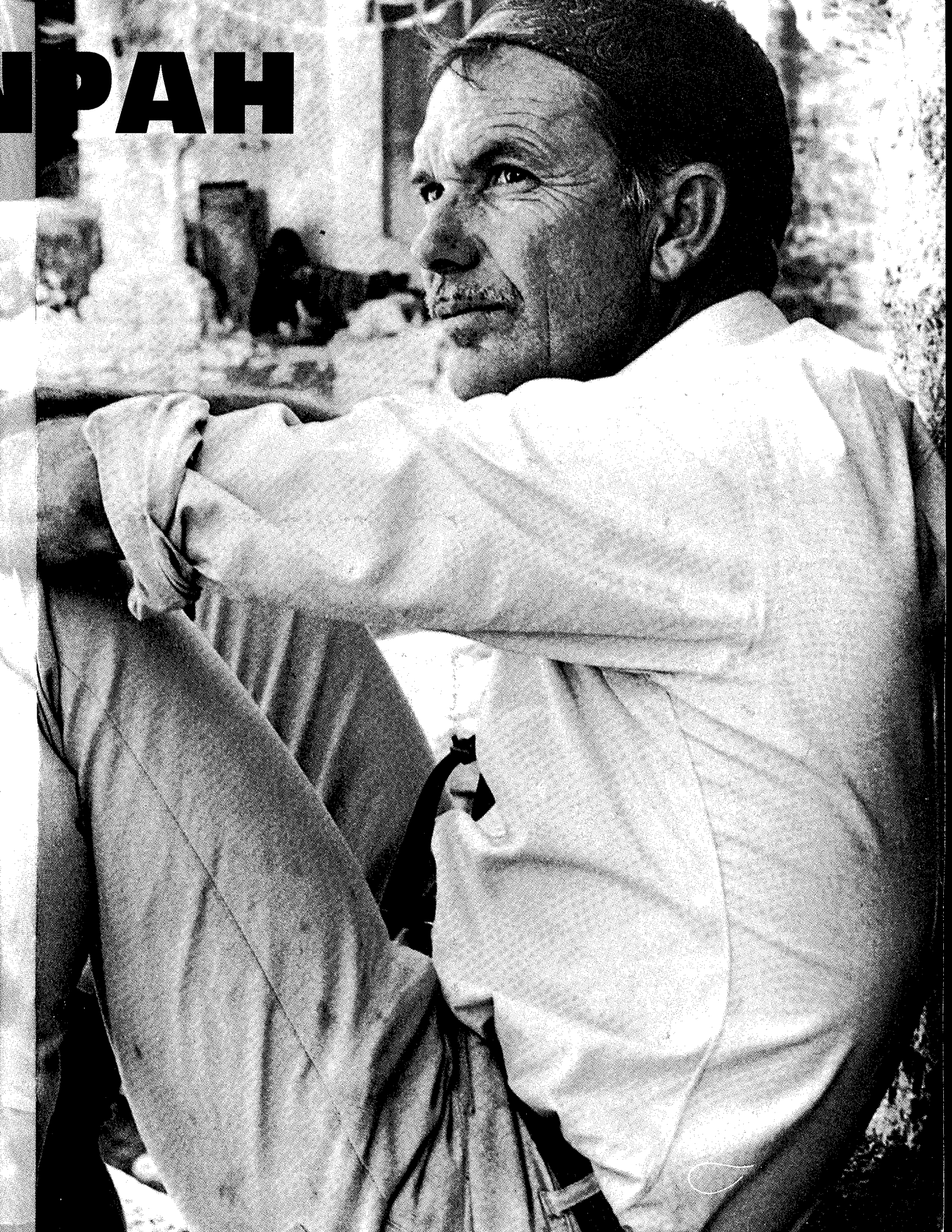
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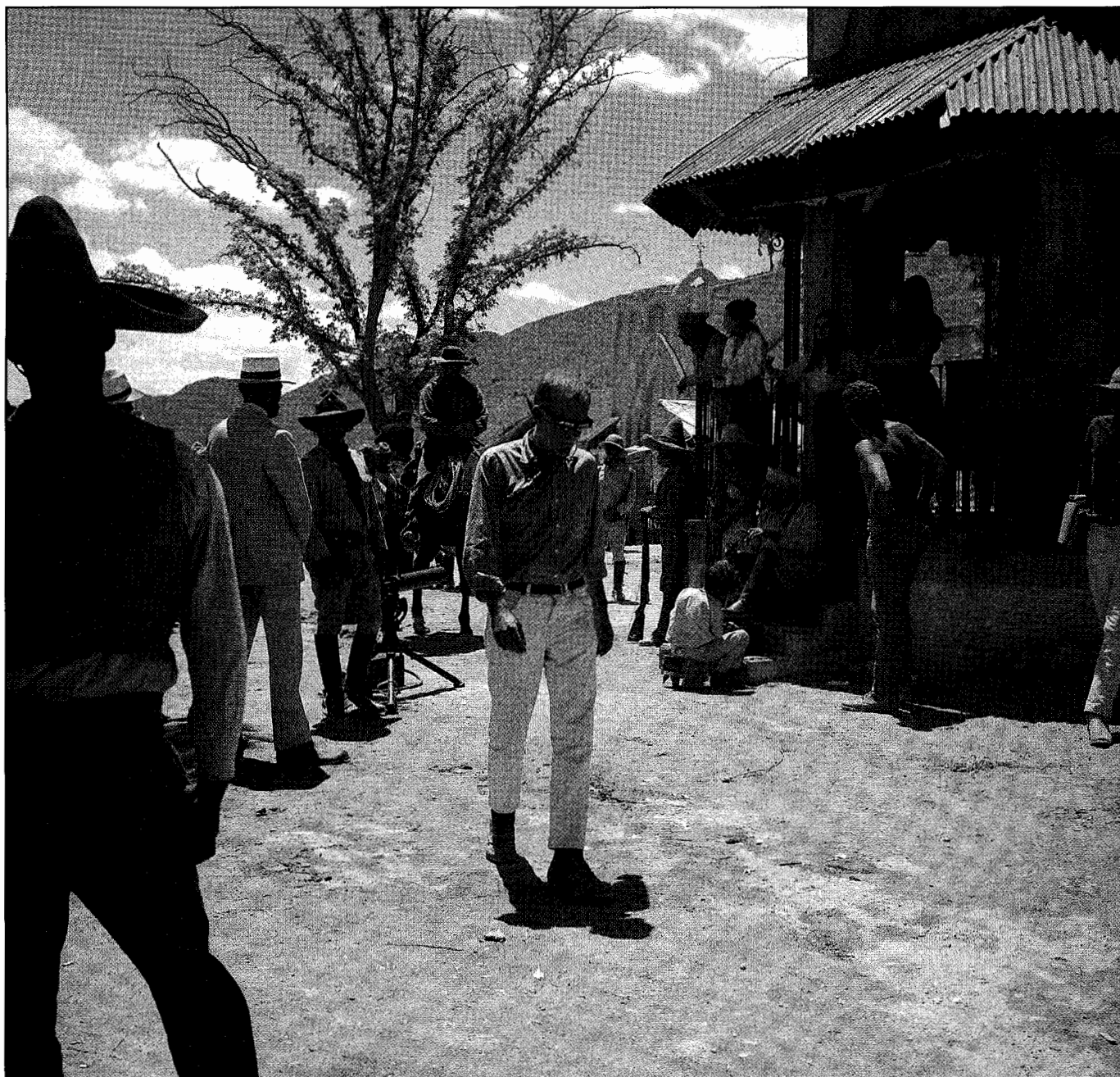
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ПРАH



SHOOT!



John Cutts talks to Sam Peckinpah

The opportunity to welcome this reprinting of John Cutts' 1969 interview with Sam Peckinpah gives me the great pleasure of acknowledging a professional debt: this was an invaluable source of information for my own book on Peckinpah. Indeed, prior to the publication of Garner Simmons' excellent career study (*Peckinpah: A Portrait in Montage*) and David Weddle's superb biography (*"If They Move, Kill 'Em:" The Life and Times of Sam Peckinpah*), Cutts' piece was one of the two main sources of information about Peckinpah's career through *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*; the

other was Richard Whitehall's roughly contemporaneous interview, 'Talking with Peckinpah' (which appeared in the Autumn 1969 *Sight and Sound*).

Many writers besides myself used these two sources, whether they bothered to cite them or not. To be sure, some of the information remained to be corrected or supplemented (i.e., Peckinpah's Great Aunt Jane may have been a "full-blooded Paiute," but she was no blood relative; and no one has been able to verify Sam's version of his leaving the Liberace show early in his career). But interviews such as this

have a value that transcends their merely informational function by providing us with a glimpse, something like a snapshot as it were, of the director when he was as close in time as we're going to get to the actual creation of the films themselves.

Cutts' snapshot is not only splendidly vivid - from the perspective of my own, admittedly limited personal acquaintance with Peckinpah, it has the ring of authenticity - but caught its subject during the best years of his career, just as he was finishing his greatest film and working on perhaps his loveliest. - Paul Seydor

The following took place at Sam Peckinpah's Malibu beach house. A charming, if somewhat crowded, hideaway on that particular Saturday afternoon. For in addition to Peckinpah and myself, there were at least eight children, nine adults, and a wandering python. It was a warm spring day and I felt even warmer due to a touch of flu. Ever the considerate host, Mr. Peckinpah insisted on mixing several personally guaranteed flu cures - all of them containing large amounts of whisky and gin. At the end of the afternoon Mr. Peckinpah presented me with a signed photo bearing the message 'I wouldn't have it any other way' (a line taken directly from *The Wild Bunch*). A sentiment, Sam lad, that fits my viewpoint just as well. My thanks again for everything - good talk, the considerable pleasure of your company, the potency of your flu cures, and most important - for introducing me to that damn snake of yours before the gin and whisky began to take effect.

Let's begin with some background details. There's a rumour that you're part Indian - is that true?

Well, I had a great aunt Jane who was a full-blooded Paiute. Other than that, I'm a Californian, born and raised here - as were my parents and grandparents. My grandfather, Charles Peckinpah, started a sawmill up in Madera County outside Fresno in 1873. There's a mountain there, the Peckinpah Mountain, where my father was born. My other grandfather, Denver Church, ran cattle out of Crane Valley about ten miles away. Old Denver went broke thirteen times, not that it worried him any; cattlemen, superior court judge, district attorney, congressman, he had quite a life. Lincoln Peckinpah, Rice Peckinpah, Mortimer Peckinpah - aren't those great sounding names? It's a very colourful family.

With your family roots so firm in the soil, how come you were attracted to the theatrical life?

I have no idea. I always wanted to raise cattle - though by temperament I'm completely unsuited, my ranch now is a disaster area. As a kid I used to read a lot (even when working on my grandfather's pack station up in the high country), used to see as many movies as I could. Maybe the only thing I knew for certain was that I didn't want to be a lawyer. I took a directing class at Fresno State after leaving the Marines, and that led to enrolling at USC for a master's degree in drama.

After this I sorta drifted: I became producer/director for the Huntingdon Park Theatre, then I went to Albuquerque (wife and baby in tow) to do summer stock as an actor, then I came back to LA to work in TV as a stagehand. KLAC was the station and I stayed there two and a half years until I was fired as a floorsweep on the Liberace Show because I refused to wear a suit. It was at KLAC that I put together some experimental films - making them on my own time and money (I started at twenty-five dollars a week, and graduated to eighty-seven fifty). Not that they were any good. More like homework, you might say.

Didn't you get a job with Allied Artists about this time?

Right. A friend got me in to see Walter Wanger, who got me a job as fourth assistant casting director. A gopher really; you know, go for this, go for that. Then I got upped to dialogue director - with Don Siegel on *Riot in Cell Block Eleven* in fact.

*Aren't you supposed to have acted as well during this period? There's a story that you can be seen in Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.*

I played four different parts in *Body Snatchers*. Peckinpah, man of a thousand faces. I was also stunt man on the picture. Let me think, I was a meter reader, a pod man, and a member of the posse. In addition, Don also had me on it as a writer for two weeks. My best performance, though, is in *Wichita* (directed by Jacques Tourneur). There's this great scene I have with Joel McCrea. He comes into the bank and I'm behind the counter. He looks at me. I look at him, and then I say 'Forty dollars.' Great stuff. I'm also in *The Annapolis Story* as a helicopter pilot if you look close enough.

What came next?

I sorta drifted into television writing. While at Allied I met Charles Marquis Warren, and when he became producer of *Gunsmoke* he asked me to do a script for him. As I remember, it took me five months of day and night writing to get the first one finished. But once the first one was behind me, I breezed ahead writing, I think, at least a dozen *Gunsmokes*. From this I turned full-time writer, working on The 20th Century Fox Hour, then I created two series of my own in *The Rifleman* and *The Westerner*. The first time I was allowed to direct anything was on the *Broken Arrow* series. I'd written about four segments, so as a gift they let me direct the final show before it came off the air. It really went to my head. There was one scene I must have photographed from at least eighteen different angles. I was never so frightened in my life. Don't let anyone kid you, it's bloody murder learning how to direct.

How did you make the switch from TV to movies?

"Whether it's too violent or not, I simply don't know. I tried to make it as tough as I know how. As tough, and as honest as I know how. And as far as I'm concerned, the two are quite compatible."

Well, I'd developed such a marvellous relationship with Brian Keith on *The Westerner* series that he kinda took me along with him on *The Deadly Companions*. Anyway, the producer of the picture, Charlie Fitzsimmonds - Maureen O'Hara's brother - took me on as a hired hand director. It wasn't the best deal in the world for either of us. He wanted someone he could push about. I wanted to make a picture as best I could. I offered my services as scriptwriter, which he promptly refused. Every time I'd volunteer for anything, he'd tell me to go back in the corner.

Brian had sense enough to know we were in trouble with the script, so between us we tried to give the thing some dramatic sense. Consequently, all of his scenes have a certain strength, while those with Miss O'Hara (with whom I was forbidden to talk) come off not at all well. At the end of the picture, Mr. Fitzsimmonds took over the editing, scrapping my original cut. He then got into such a mess that he had to return to my original pattern - although I defy anyone to make sense of the ending. If it hadn't been for Brian and old Bill Clothier, the cameraman, it would have been unbearable.

*Was it because of *The Deadly Companions* that you were invited to do *Ride The High Country*?*

I think it helped. Though I think *The Westerner* series helped more. By the time I came to the pictures, they had a story by N.B. Stone, and Bill Roberts was working on a screenplay. They also had two agreements from Randolph Scott and Joel McCrea to play the leads (though not to play the parts they eventually played: one lunch-time they switched roles - Scott going from good guy to bad guy, McCrea from bad guy to good guy).

It was a small picture by MGM standards at least, but there was a great excitement about it. We had a good crew - Lucien Ballard as cameraman, Leroy Coleman as art director (he was marvellous: at one point he stole the sails used on the *Bounty* to make the tents in the mining camp scene), and Frank Santillo as chief cutter. The shooting schedule was tight - we had twenty-four days. I think I went over by two days owing to being snowed out of two locations.

It's funny to remember, but during the shooting Sol Siegel, the then-head of MGM production, called me and said 'Stop shooting like John Ford. Learn to behave.' Well, not knowing what the hell he meant, I kept shooting the way I had from the start. Later, on putting together a first assembly, he called me up again and said 'You gambled with that funny style of yours - and you've won. I like it. Go ahead and make the final cut.' All of which cheered me enormously.

But then MGM underwent a management change - Sol Siegel being replaced by Joe Vogel. Well, the new management took a look at the picture and they hated it - no if's or but's. They loathed it. I think it was the wedding scene in the miner's camp that did it. All those raddled whores. Anyway, Vogel told me that it was the worst film ever made and that he would not release it - unless he was forced to. I was then kicked off the lot, not being allowed to work on the dubbing or the scoring. Though the version that came out was mostly mine - except for twenty-eight feet cut from the brothel scene.

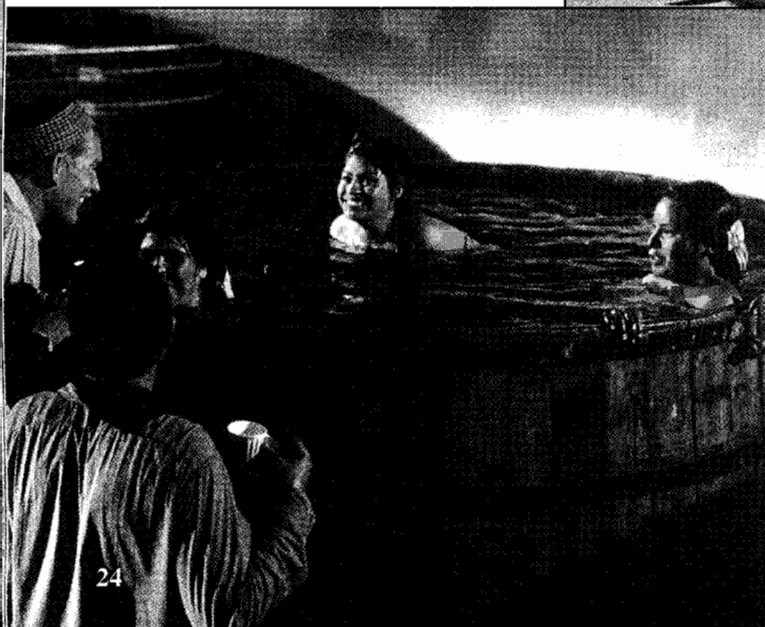
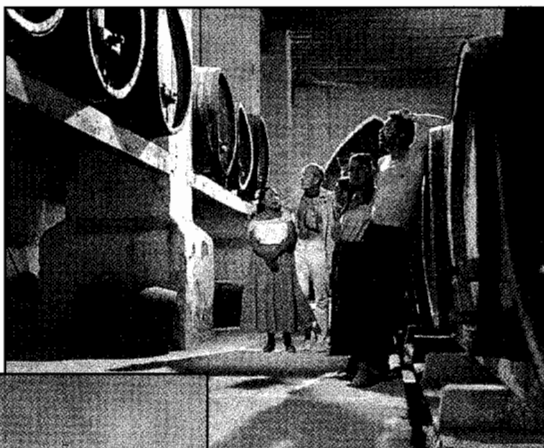
Then, when MGM had to release the picture owing to some overseas booking commitments, a miracle happened - it began to find its audience. The critics were kind - especially in Europe - and pretty soon the film began to get the playdates it deserved all along. It was a delayed victory for all of us.

What had you been doing while waiting for High Country to come out?
 What I always do in moments of despair - I head back to TV and write westerns. While waiting for *High Country* to emerge, I did two hour-long features that Dick Powell produced: *Pericles on 34th Street* and *The Losers*. The first was a drama, the second a rowdy comedy with Lee Marvin and Keenan Wynn as a couple of con men on the run. Keenan and Lee had a ball, and the whole thing was a joy to do. I had a good time.

What came next - Major Dundee?

Yes. Columbia wanted a picture to be made under three million dollars to fulfil a commitment they had with Chuck Heston. They had a script of sorts - something that Chuck and I both saw potential in providing I could do some re-writing. The producer assigned to the picture, Jerry Bressler, gave his blessing to what

"Wild Bunch is not a pretty picture. It's the story of violent people in violent times. Violence to the people in the movie is not just a means to an end, it's the end itself. I make that point very clear."



we wanted to do - though when it came time to shoot, he double-crossed us by ordering fifteen days' cut from the schedule.

Was this when you were actually shooting the picture?

No, two days prior to starting. I said what he was asking was impossible, that I would rather leave the picture there and then. To which he replied: 'Look, I'm acting under instructions from New York. Leave it to me, I'll take care of it.' But he never did. When I saw the final release print, which is to say Columbia's final release print, not mine, I was sick to my stomach. I tried to have my name taken off it, but by this time the machinery was too far along. What I had worked so hard to achieve - all of Dundee's motivation (what it was that made him the man he was) - was gone. This was material I'd both written and shot and cared very much about, but which Bressler or Columbia had thought unnecessary to the total effect of the film.

It's hard to say who the villain was - maybe Jerry, though he was under tremendous pressure from the studio at that time because he was involved in another picture that wasn't turning out well... something with Lana Turner, *Love Has Many Faces*. *Major Dundee*. It gives me the shivers thinking back on the arguments I had with Bressler and the studio. Maybe I should have argued more strongly going in, telling them in no uncertain terms as to what sort of film I was after rather than taking it for granted that they would let me have my own way once I'd shot the material.

It's an odd picture. Marvellous in parts, plain bewildering in others. But from the moment Heston gets involved with Miss Berger, it never plays as a whole. That whole Durango episode: Dundee finding degradation in the arms of a whore and that fly-by-night escape, just baffles the hell out of me.

Well, Berger was wrong, totally wrong. She's a nice lady, but I should have fought her casting from the start. She was wrong and it hurt the picture. As for Dundee's degradation, that's all mine. But where it fails, where it refuses to make sense, lies in the fact that all of Dundee's motivation, the why behind it all, is all gone. I shot a series of progressive incidents in which Dundee kept failing in what he was doing - punching

up the difference between what he set out to achieve and what he achieved. I looked at him very closely, zeroing right in on his locked-in approach to his own ego. All of which was cut and junked. I figure I must have shot about forty-five minutes of Dundee under the microscope. The picture ran beautifully at two hours and forty-one minutes by my cut. Heston was superb. The release print was chopped to two hours and fourteen minutes.

In order to gain some extra shooting time, didn't Heston offer

to return his salary to the studio?

Yes, he made the offer, and they accepted it - they took back their money. It was a very gallant gesture. And you know something, Columbia never had the grace to even have a public preview on the picture. There was a showing for some exhibitors, and that was it, all the final cuts came from that.

What came next, The Cincinnati Kid?

Yes, I prepared the production, spending about four months on it. None of it pleasant, I might add. Marty Ransohoff was the producer, and to put it politely, we did not see eye-to-eye. There was a time when it no longer made sense even to meet with him on story conferences. Steve McQueen too. Steve and I used to meet, talk, then we'd type up a memo for Marty. It was

a very strange relationship. I only started to shoot with the agreement that Marty wouldn't come on the set. Anyway, I started it, shot for four days, then got bounced. Then they hired a new director and made the picture they wanted to make all along.

Rumour hath it that you set out to provoke Ransohoff by shooting take after take of Ann-Margret in the nude. Untrue. I did a damn good riot scene, then another long scene between Rip Torn and a Negro prostitute in bed, and that was it. Oh, I was also shooting in black and white. They had wanted colour, but I didn't.

Coming so close on Dundee, it was obviously a bad time to get fired.

God protect me from you English - the world's greatest understaters! But you're right, I couldn't get a job anywhere, couldn't even get into a studio. It was a long, hard period. Then some TV things came along - including the opportunity to write and direct a version of *Noon Wine*.

What about the script to The Glory Guys?

That had come earlier, about five years previous. Did you ever see it? How about that casting! The same people who made it did another favourite movie of mine - *Geronimo*, with Chuck Connors in the title role. One of the funniest movies ever made. A positive riot.

What about Villa Rides?

Well, the success of *Noon Wine* sorta took the curse off me. *Villa Rides* was a straight writing job with little chance of me directing it. I was flown to London to meet Yul Brynner, but he hated the script so much I came home by the next plane. Bob Towne was later hired to do a rewrite on it.

Wasn't there a time, probably before all this, when there seemed a possibility of you and Disney getting together?

He called me over to write a *Shane*-type picture called *Little Britches*. And I finally came up with the best script I've ever written. Walt read it and said 'too much violence and not enough dogs.' Well, the violence I plead guilty to, but as for not enough dogs... End of project, though like most things I work on it'll turn up someday. Did you know I wrote the first script on Brando's *One Eyed Jacks*? I worked with Brando for about a month. Very strange man, Marlon. Always doing a number about his screen image, about how audiences would not accept him as a thief, how audiences would only accept him as a fallen sinner - someone they could love. As it was released, I think I've only one scene left in the film - the one where Marlon knocks the shit out of Timothy Carey. The rest is all Marlon's.

Let's come smack up to date. You've now made two films back-to-back for Warners-Seven Arts. How did this come about?

Through the courage and wisdom of one man - Kenny Hyman. When he took over as production chief of Warners-Seven Arts, one of the first people he sent for was me. Kenny had seen *Guns* and loved it. He's that sort of person; if he digs you, the studio is yours. Now, Kenny had a project of his own called *The Diamond Story* he wanted me to do, but when that fell through because of some casting problems, he agreed to let me go ahead on *The Wild Bunch*.

It's a western about the betrayal of friendship. An all-guy western with Bill Holden, Bob Ryan, Ernie Borgnine, Eddie O'Brien, Albert Dekker, Ben Johnson, L.Q. Jones and Warren Oates. It's about a gang of American bandits who steal a US ammunition train and attempt to sell it to some Mexican revolutionaries. It's about a convict (Robert Ryan) on parole who is ordered to track down all his former friends and gangmates.



And it's very, very violent. During the first preview, thirty-two people walked out during the first ten minutes.

This was during the bank hold-up scene?

Yeah, the picture begins with a bank hold-up that goes wrong, that ends in slaughter. *Wild Bunch* is not a pretty picture. It's the story of violent people in violent times. Violence to the people in the movie is not just a means to an end, it's the end itself. I make that point very clear. The preview cards were wild: at least thirty per cent said 'Outstanding. The best picture I've ever seen'; and the rest said 'Disgusting. The most violent picture ever made'; then they'd say 'Highpoints: the battle scenes, the best ever seen.' I think a lot of people are going to be shocked - least I hope so. I hate an audience that just sits there.

Tell me about the picture that followed The Wild Bunch.

It's a comedy of sorts called *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*. The story of two guys, a gal and a stretch of desert. Jason Robards and David Warner are the guys, Stella Stevens plays the gal. At the moment we're still editing, still trying to sort out what we have. I'm trying to figure out a way to use a split-screen technique in it. Not fussy like in *Thomas Crown*. More like it was done in *The Boston Strangler*.

A couple of quick, final questions. You're supposed to be a tough man to work with.

I work very hard, if that's what you mean. Or maybe you heard how I fired two dozen people off *Cable Hogue*? Well, did you see that trade ad the cast and crew took out for me? There's a difference between the things heard here in Hollywood and the way things happen on location you know.

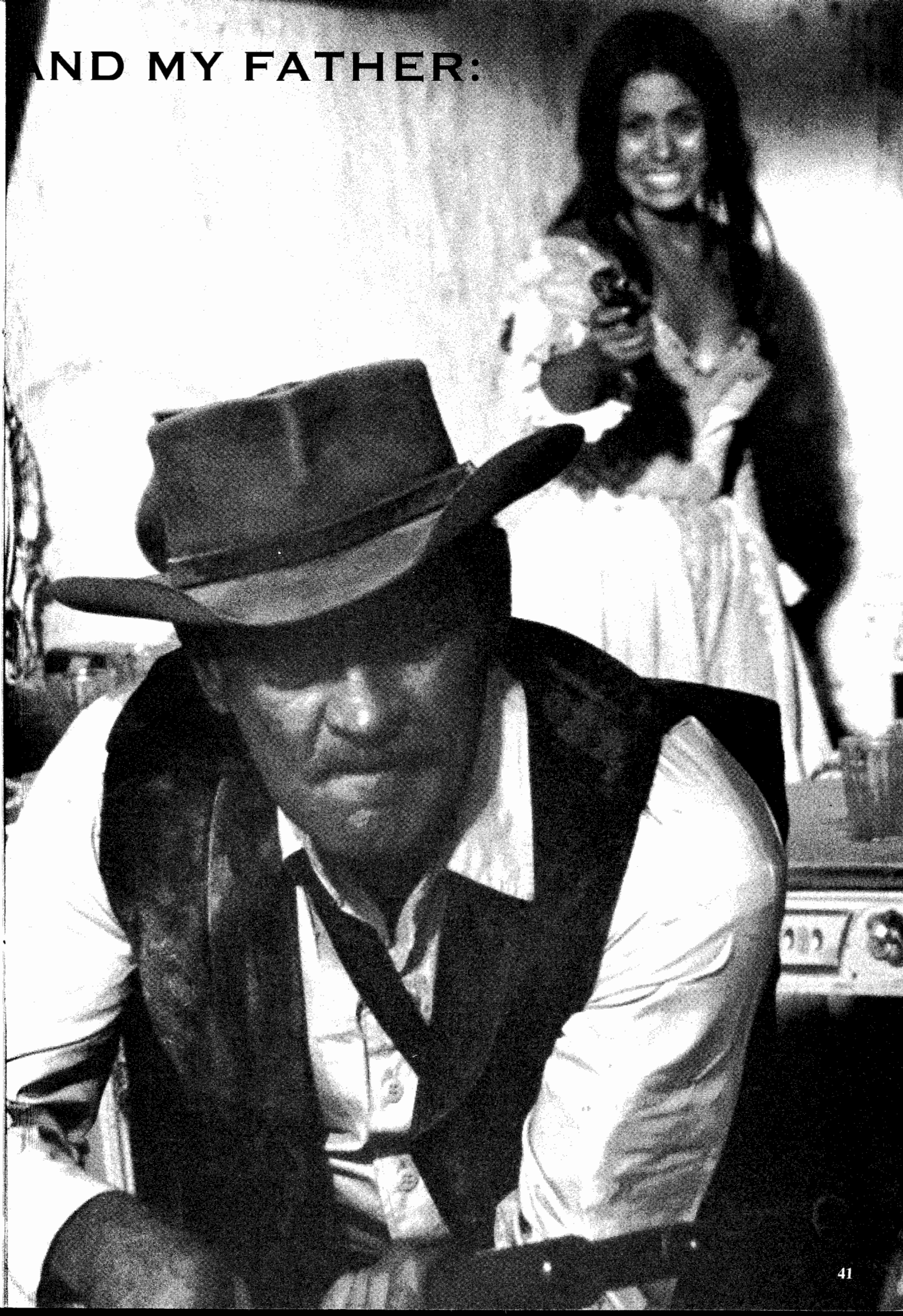
How fast do you work? Do you overshoot?

I shoot about 22 to 1, and I cover very well. I have a low take ratio - about two to one. I like to use more than one camera - sometimes as many as three or four.

Any ambition you want to fulfil?

An awful lot is going to rest on how *The Wild Bunch* makes out. The studio seem to share my enthusiasm. Whether it's too violent or not, I simply don't know. I tried to make it as tough as I know how. As tough, and as honest as I know how. And as far as I'm concerned, the two are quite compatible. ■

, AND MY FATHER:



PECKINPAH ONCE SAID THAT SOME PEOPLE WANT TO WALK OUT ON HIS FILMS "BUT THEY CAN'T. THEY CAN'T TURN THEIR FACES AWAY. THEY WATCH, AND THAT MAKES THEM MAD."



to *Basic Instinct*, which has a woman making love to a man and ice-picking him to death as they climax (and this in just the first three minutes!). I reminded him that at the end of *Total Recall*, also rated R a few years ago, the villain's forearms are caught in an elevator and shorn off with a degree of goriness and sheer gratuitousness that are and always have been absent from Peckinpah's art; and throughout the rest of the film hundreds of people are murdered, mutilated, or otherwise slaughtered in disgustingly graphic detail yet with so little feeling it never occurs to us that human beings may actually be killed when they are shot with automatic weapons. I even went so far as to suggest that if this is the sort of fare the parents the MPAA recruits believe within the "ken" of children, then I do not consider them fit judges of films I'd want any children I know to see.

It was an angry letter, written for effect. In truth, I do not believe the people who rate films for the MPAA are necessarily more benighted or less sincere and intelligent than the rest of us. It is certainly easy enough to grasp some of the changes in our society and the world at large that resulted in the stronger rating for *The Wild Bunch*. Domestic society has become more violent than almost anyone except artists and visionaries might have imagined in the late sixties, even factoring in the Vietnam War, the protests, the march on the Pentagon, Chicago, the burning cities, the Manson murders, the various fill-in-the-blank liberation-front radical groups, Kent State, and three assassinations throughout the decade. Since then drugs, gangs, poverty, gross and grotesque inequities in income, justice, opportunity, and education; the dissolution of the inner cities, which more recently has begun to affect the suburbs; the inevitable presence at last of international terrorism in America - all this and more have conspired both to de- and over-sensitise all of us to violence, whether actual or in fiction and the media.

I do not agree with but I believe I can easily enough understand the thinking that finds fun-and-games, comic-book violence okay but genuinely serious artistic treatments of violence disturbing or dangerous, hence both censurable and censorable. The pop stuff is generally believed to be so obviously outrageous as more or less to have a built-in distancing factor, while the violence in serious films and fiction is considered to be more "real," hence more threatening. And whenever the subject of violence in the arts comes up, Peckinpah, his films, and *The Wild Bunch* (and sometimes *Straw Dogs*) in particular are always cited, always at the epicentre of the debates. Those familiar with his work realise that the vast majority of his critics haven't really seen much, if any of it. If they did, they could never accuse him of half the things they do, particularly of trafficking in gore, which he never does. The actual amount of gore measured in length of time is, maybe, twenty or thirty seconds' worth in all fourteen of his films combined.

The most notorious single instance remains the throat-cutting in *The Wild Bunch* (literally a split-second), which is thoroughly justified by its content and thoroughly justified by its context and absolutely essential to the story. Then there is the moment in *Straw Dogs* where one of the villagers shoots his foot off with a shotgun. A friend of mine absolutely insists we see a blown-off foot. What we in fact see is a close-up of a shoe - not a bare foot - with its toe blown-off, but no flesh, no bone, no dangling tendons and shredded veins (a la Verhoeven and some of the Landis and Cameron films, all rated R). And in *Bring Me The Head of Alfredo Garcia*, the titular object is never seen except once: in a tight close-up, from the back, and all we see is hair. (Ironically, a few people actually faulted Peckinpah his courage for *not* showing the head more graphically! There are some games an artist can never win, and this is one of them.)



But all of this merely begs the question, which is why Peckinpah's violent films are experienced as so much more violent when he is far from the worst offender or even, as far as the gore goes, an offender at all. Peckinpah himself once said that some people want to walk out on his films "but they can't. They can't turn their faces away. They watch, and that makes them mad." This is no doubt true. One great difference between him and his imitators lies in how deeply, passionately, and intensely *felt* his violence is and how securely it is tied to character, to milieu, to story, and thus to meaning.

I saw *Total Recall* about a week after I had seen *The Wild Bunch* again. The truly shocking thing about the contrast - far more so than the obvious stupidity of the one vis-a-vis the epic grandeur of the other - was the absolute lack in Verhoeven's film of any feeling associated with the violence or any pain with the bloodshed. There was no horror or disgust, there was no agony, there certainly wasn't any beauty, there wasn't even the loony joyfulness we sometimes find in the otherwise deplorably overrated films of John Woo. Nor was dissociation of feeling the point, which would be artistically valid and interesting: feeling, some human connection or significance, was simply, totally, completely absent, and the filmmakers seemed wholly unaware of the vacuum.

Something of the same is true of the celebrated recent film by Quentin Tarantino. *Pulp Fiction* is, to be sure, a far superior film to *Total Recall* and all the Cameron-Schwarzenegger-Stallone pinball games that masquerade as action films - it's intelligent, for one thing; and it's got genuine wit and a real, if superficial, grasp of character - but does anybody watching it actually feel himself or herself *implicated* in the violence up there on the screen? It's what it advertises itself to be - *pulp* fiction, and given the amount of gore that flies, one must assume the pun on "pulp" is intentional. Unlike a Verhoeven's or a Cameron's,

Tarantino's violence isn't irresponsible. As a friend of mine pointed out, "at least he shows consequences. You blow somebody away with a gun there's a big mess and someone has to clean it up." True enough, but once that is granted, the film, like *Reservoir Dogs*, still doesn't cut very deep, and neither has much resonance...

With Peckinpah every bullet, every hit, every fall pricks or stings or hurts with real feeling and the action is always charged with an ambiguous, volatile tension. I have no idea which is better or worse for children and teenagers or, for that matter, for adults: comic-book violence or serious violence. As I am not in favour of censorship, I cannot condone suppressing any of it. But I do know that those people on the ratings board who sat down and watched *The Wild Bunch* and returned an NC-17 did not miss the point. Or, rather, they got the point and missed it too. Movies are supposed to be entertaining, they are even supposed to be moving, but they are not supposed to be disturbing.

Nor is *The Wild Bunch* disturbing only for obvious reasons. I believe if all the film does is show us that violence is horrible, it would have received an R; if it were strenuously moralistic about it, possibly even a PG-13. But Peckinpah did something far more courageous, expressed something far darker and more subversive: the excitement of violence, the thirst for violence that brings us to violent entertainment in the first place. Nor did he do it with the sobriety of a moralist or the detachment of a lecturing preacher, analytically dissecting and describing the syndrome (like, say, the sanctimonious Stanley Kubrick in his didactic *Clockwork Orange*). He was too honest or too ravaged an artist - at this level they come to the same thing. No, he did it the only way he knew how: from his soul and from his guts, as the obsessed, anguished, angry, passionate poet he was, descending into the maelstrom of his own darkness, the only control he was able finally to exert the artistic control



of channelling all the rage and fury he found into this ferocious, apocalyptic poem, which is at once profoundly subversive and profoundly redemptive.

When I was a kid and wanted to go to a movie, my father would always ask, "Is there a good shoot-'em-up playing?" He meant a western, not a detective movie or a gangster or war picture. I was just barely a legal adult when *The Wild Bunch* came out, but my father was still asking the same question. My closest friend and I told him yes, we thought we had found him a good shoot-'em-up.

My father *hated* *The Wild Bunch*. In the years since he has changed his mind, whether because he honestly came to feel differently or because I went on to devote a sizeable proportion of my life and education to studying Peckinpah and his work I have never been able to determine. But at the time he hated it, because he felt deeply betrayed by it. My father went to shoot-'em-ups

to be entertained, to be taken out of his everyday world, to be freed from all the pressures of responsibility, obligation, and worry that weighed him down in that world. Peckinpah threw all that right back in his face. And adding insult to injury, his film cut so deeply into my father that, like most of us, he couldn't just leave it at the movies. Love it or hate it, you *had* to deal with it, even if dealing with it meant spending more time and energy than you had or wanted to expend denying it or projecting back onto it everything about yourself it brought up so you could hate the film all the more for having brought it up.

None of this was what my father bargained for when he bought that ticket. A shoot-'em-up was not supposed to make you think, it was not supposed to upset you. If it gave you anything at all by way or residue, it was a sense of deep satisfaction at seeing complicated problems solved in a way that was simple, clear, and clean, and, perhaps most important of all, that the world you left outside the theater did not permit. It was literally escapist: it was to take you away from that world, not deliver you back to it in the form of a heightened awareness and sensitivity. Whatever else, it most emphatically was not to make you question either why you wanted to leave that world in the first place or what forces in yourself sent you to this mode of escape.

But *The Wild Bunch* did and continues to do all of this. It even makes us ask whether the words "good" and "shoot-'em-up" should be used in the same sentence. And it does something more, which may be the most unforgivable sin of all: it makes us *enjoy* its violence and it does this at so intimate a level it is almost physical, almost carnal. Even guilt seems too feeble a reaction to our responses.

In this one aspect, its power to work so directly upon the nervous system that our response is for once quite literally visceral, *The Wild Bunch* stands absolutely alone in the history of cinema and has few peers in the history of art (most of them are in music and dance - Beethoven's Seventh Symphony or Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*). And we continue to be exhilarated long

DANIEL MELNICK ON SAM PECKINPAH

In addition to producing *Straw Dogs*, Daniel Melnick was responsible for the turn in Peckinpah's fortunes when he hired the director for the highly acclaimed television adaptation of Katherine Anne Porter's *Noon Wine*.

"I adored the man and he was the most infuriating friend I've ever had. I was a fan. I had seen and was very impressed with a little film he did at Metro called *Ride the High Country*, and a television series called *The Westerner* with Brian Keith (that) I admired enormously. When I acquired the rights to *Noon Wine* and made arrangements to produce it I thought immediately of this man Peckinpah - who I didn't know at all - as being an ideal choice to adapt it and direct it.

"So I tracked him down and told him what I was interested in, and it was around the time he had been fired from *The Cincinnati Kid*. He said, "You know, people will tell you not to hire me because I'm very difficult supposedly."

Assuming that, like many in the industry at the time, Peckinpah's blacklisting was political, "I said, 'The more pressure there is put on me not to use you, the more determined I will become to use you.'"

However, Melnick shortly discovered one of the reasons why Peckinpah was regarded as a bad risk by the studios. "I didn't know that he was an alcoholic until he spent a weekend at my house when we were working on the script.

"He drank a lot, but it didn't seem to me unusual drinking, it was just drinking a lot. We sat in front of the fireplace and we drank a lot of brandy - and it was fine and he got high, but it was not objectionable.

"(However) when we were having breakfast and he poured some brandy in his coffee, I thought, 'Hm, that's not a good sign. It may be macho, but it's not a good sign.' And he then drank coffee and brandy up until the time we were getting ready for lunch, and then he had some wine with lunch. And then, after lunch, he started drinking hard whisky - that's when I knew we had a problem and I didn't know what to do about it.

"By the next morning, I said, 'Sam, you're drinking to excess,' and he said, 'Yes, I always do this before a picture and then when I'm in prep for a picture I dry out and I only drink wine.' And that was part of his mythology about himself and that was the constant struggle. He was drinking all the time.

"His basic personality had a very strong paranoid streak to it and everybody was the enemy. He would create enemies. Sam was one of those guys who would get drunk and punch people out. He was acting out his fear and hatred of authority.

"Sam was a man who had to defy authority by definition. Sam couldn't make the distinction between rational and irrational authority. If you were authority, you were automatically an enemy unless you were able to transcend the designated role by virtue of personality. He would look to pick a fight. In Sam's world it was always an extreme, and the authority figure was always the enemy with rare exceptions.

"If I had not produced *Noon Wine*, we would never have gotten through *Straw Dogs* as well as we did, but I had built up an inventory of credit with him. He had come to trust me and he recognised the things that I as a producer do is everything that is necessary to support the director, that my job was to