



Life at the movies

BASED ON FACT

Adrian Turner

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FOREWORD

This is primarily a story about movies, films, flicks, motion pictures, the cinema. And, most of all, the people who made them. You probably won't have heard of me so please allow me to introduce myself. I am a man of wealth and taste. Why am I writing this? Why are you reading this on the www? You must have found me by accident or maybe you were searching for something else or someone else, like Aidan Turner, an easy slip on the keyboard. I'm glad you're here. Please stay even though you might not be remotely interested in the early stuff and isn't that the case with most biographical works? You know, all that *David Copperfield* kind of crap, as JD Salinger once called it.

You are here because I have a few stories to tell about people and places you most definitely will have heard of. Movie stars, movie directors, many long dead now and possibly forgotten. You will also learn about some of my work colleagues and the inner machinations of the National Film Theatre and the British Film Institute. And what it was like running a little art cinema in Hampstead in the 1970s. You might want to skip all that and land on the juicy stuff which starts, by the way, with a chapter called *Becoming Starstruck*. Well, by all means . . .

1: THE TEACHER AND THE CHARIOTEER

I fell in love with movies in 1960 when I taken in a school party to see *Ben-Hur* at the Empire Leicester Square, London. We had an English master, Mr Crooks, who was a big movie fan. He put on 16mm screenings in the attendance hall at the school and maybe twice a year he would take groups to the West End to see a big movie. And movies were really big in those days, shown on huge screens, lasting three hours, with intermissions, with souvenir brochures, with separate performances and so on. *Ben-Hur* was probably the biggest of the big.

Mr Crooks took quite a shine to me, he cast me in his school production of Lionel Bart's *Oliver!*, and he helped me a lot because I was a rather diffident pupil with few prospects. Schools were a meaningless trial for I had little interest in learning. My first school was in Shirley, near Croydon, the local C of E primary, St John's. It's still there. In my day it seemed to have little connection with the Christian ethic of peace and understanding, rather more with the Roman taste for punishment and the scourge. Once, in a mood of excessive zeal, I decided to demonstrate to a fellow pupil how my diabetic grandmother injected herself with insulin. I stabbed him with my straight pen and drew blood. I was soundly scourged for that.

Mr Crooks was a teacher at Malory Comprehensive in Downham, South London, though on the edge of Kent. Of course I had failed the Eleven-Plus and went to a couple of Secondary Moderns, both more secondary than modern, before fetching up at Malory. Mr Crooks once asked me, "Do you take films and filming?" I didn't know quite what he meant by that. He explained that it was a magazine called *Films & Filming*. The first issue I actually bought had on its cover a photo of Marlon Brando appearing to whip Trevor Howard. I was to discover that *F&F* was heavily into S&M and queer stuff. Years later I wrote an article for another movie magazine about that trip to see *Ben-Hur* and I got a letter from Mr Crooks who had retired many years before. It was a rambling letter and extremely sad - his house had burned down, he had lost all his possessions, he needed comfort and pity. He didn't remember me precisely. I never responded. Well, you wouldn't, would you?

I had been to the pictures before this epiphany with *Ben-Hur*. I had been with my father, on the trolley bus, notably to the Davis Cinema in Croydon which, with more than 3700 seats, was the largest cinema in England. I remember seeing *Davy Crockett and the River Pirates*, *The Great*

Locomotive Chase and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, all Disney pictures, at the cavernous Davis. One of these was probably the first film I ever saw in a cinema. The Davis itself was demolished in 1959.

My first direct connection with the movies was rather odd. Movies were an escape and a solace for a fairly solitary child like me. My mother had died of cancer in 1956, when I was eight, putting a great strain on my father who had to keep down his job in the City and cope with me and my elder brother who, at 17, was fairly independent and had already left home for a rented flat. My father had a close friend and office colleague, Alan Shaw, who lived nearby with his son Stephen, who was a little younger than me, and his German-born wife, Gerda, whom Alan had met in Berlin in the immediate aftermath of the war. Gerda had a friend who had also married an English serviceman and they had a son called Richard Williams who wasn't a normal boy. He was a child actor.

Richard was glamorous and Germanic-looking with thick blonde hair. He could have played Tadzio in *Death in Venice*. I went to his home a few times. On his bedroom wall was a huge poster for his first film, *Heart of a Child*, an Alpine whimsy about a soppy St Bernard dog which I only caught up with in 2022 on Talking Pictures TV. "The boy is characterised with almost Dickensian sentimentality, and inexpertly played by Richard Williams," hectored Peter John Dyer in the BFI magazine, *Monthly Film Bulletin*. I hope Richard never read that. Richard's most important film was the rather adult drama *The Greengage Summer* which came out in 1961. While I soon lost contact with Richard, our brief friendship left an indelible impression on me. Sadly, Richard's career never really took off, though he had small roles in several TV shows and could even be glimpsed in *Omen III: The Final Conflict*.

2: FAMILY MATTERS

Because my mother had died when I was young, I spent a lot of time with my maternal grandparents. My father's parents were in Music Hall. His father died in the 1930s of a heart attack in the Charing Cross Road so he had a rather nomadic childhood, much like my own. He was a parcel often passed. His mother's stage name was Ethel Beech and she lived in a home for elderly theatricals. I think I only met her once, a strange woman with a fright wig and mud cake make-up.

My maternal grandfather was Thomas Edward Sydney Pate. He had worked for Shell Oil and was quite comfortably off, thank you. He and his

wife, Daisy May, lived in a handsome house on Orchard Avenue in Shirley with a large garden, a pond, a hot house for tomatoes, an apple orchard and a Wolseley in the garage. They also had a grass tennis court which is where my parents first met. Their wedding present was a fully paid for house down the road.

After my mother died we moved around quite a bit but generally within easy reach of my grandparents; indeed, my father quickly sold the original house and moved into a new-build bungalow which backed on to grandpa's garden. Only once did we move completely away and that was a big surprise and a big disaster. My father suddenly gave up his job with the Atlas Assurance Company and went into partnership with a friend who owned a farm in a Leicestershire village called Wymeswold. It was a pretty place with a brook running along the street. We'd had lots of family holidays up there and now we moved there and shared the small Georgian farmhouse with my father's friend Norman and his wife Dorothy who had upped sticks from Shirley some years before. They had an adopted teenage daughter named Jennifer who had already returned to work in London.

I adored life on the farm. We had cornfields, a herd of dairy cattle, some pigs, chickens and dogs. We fed the pigs stinging nettles and I'd watch their mouths foam. I pretended to help in the milking, I pretended to be of use mucking out the cowsheds, I used to watch when a man showed up and did something called artificial insemination. This involved him wearing a long rubber glove and inserting his arm deep into a cow's bottom. At the same time a long syringe filled with what looked like milk was inserted into the cow's crack. I witnessed the docking of many a dog's tail, the shooting of whole flocks of birds, the drawing and quartering of pigeons and at harvest time there would be a veritable stampede of rabbits and hares, all destined to be skinned and eaten. Once a neighbouring farmer's terrier chased a rabbit and disappeared into the scything jaws of the combine. I had my own bow and arrow and also an air gun. Mice were my modest targets.

I remember when we were just up there on holiday a man came and sawed the horns off our cows which was to protect them from injuring each other as they were being milked. I had a favourite cow called Meg who had the biggest udders and I took one of her horns back to Shirley as a souvenir. I took the horn to school and this was a source of much interest. It lay on a windowsill in my classroom over the weekend and by the following Monday the windowsill was crawling with maggots, a source of even more interest.

Sadly, my rural idyll on the farm only lasted a few months as my father's friend had a fatal heart attack while he was out riding his motorcycle. Jennifer was recalled from London and when she arrived at the farm she met me sitting idly on the farm gate. "Where's daddy?" she asked. "He's dead," I said with the tact and emotional detachment of a ten-year-old whose mother had abandoned him by dying. We moved back to London and my father returned to his old desk at the Atlas Assurance Company. I settled back into my old school routine.

I have only the vaguest memories of my father telling me that my mother had died and I have absolutely no recollection when or how my father told me that he was not my father after all and that she was not my mother. Adoption was not something I knew about. But somehow I learned that I had been adopted when I was very young, less than a year old. At birth my name was Douglas Hart and the odd thing is that both my birth mother and my adoptive mother were called Joyce. My birth mother wasn't married and I have only a few strong hunches who my real father was. I'm not sure if this has had any affect on me. I'm not ashamed of it or proud of it; I'm rather indifferent to it and, as a consequence, perhaps have less understanding of why so many people regard 'family' as the mainstay of their lives. I did look into my origins, so to speak, as a sort of academic exercise. This was less than ten years ago and I found that my birth mother had died only the year before and that I quite probably have a full sister and brother and perhaps a half-brother out there. I know who they are and where they live. They do not know me. They never will.

I totally reject the idea that certain creative genes are inherited. Or character traits. 'His great-grandfather was a piano tuner so it's no surprise he turned out to be great composer.' Nonsense. The only things you inherit are medical - heart problems, cancer genes, baldness, that sort of thing. Maybe it is best not knowing. Many a doctor has asked me if this or that runs in the family and I have great pleasure saying I haven't the foggiest. So far I've got through without my body feeling the tiniest touch of a scalpel and with the majority of my brain cells still functioning.

I turned out nothing like my 'birth family' or my adoptive family. My adoptive father, Leonard, brought me up, ensured I never went hungry, cooked all my meals, bought me train sets, Dinky Toys, musical instruments, cine cameras and everything I ever asked for, usually on a whim, and did all this under stressful circumstances. He never married again. He never seemed to read a book or visit a gallery or express an interest in anything,

apart from wanting to visit Brasilia. He never gave me any of the standard children's books like *Peter Pan* or Enid Blyton and didn't have the slightest influence on my interests or my character. My obsession with movies led to some terrible arguments, most memorably in 1965 when we were staying the night in Birmingham en route to the Lake District when I selfishly insisted on seeing *My Fair Lady* at the ABC Bristol Road in 70mm on a Cinerama screen. Dad always tried hard to stop me wasting my time and money on seeing movies. Some years later he saw me interviewing Steven Spielberg on a London stage. We are all islands.

Being half an orphan, and an adopted one at that, my grandparents showered me with gifts, notably a world atlas and jigsaws of America, Britain and Australia with all the counties or states as separate pieces. By the time I was ten I probably knew all the countries of the world and their capital cities. I became fascinated by places with strange shapes, such as spidery Celebes, and with cities with strange, multi-syllable names like Paramaribo and Tegucigalpa. A lust for travel came at an early age. Maybe I just wanted to get away. Anywhere but here. I was never much of a patriot.

In 1956 I saw a TV programme featuring an excitable schoolboy dressed in shorts chasing across a wild island called Komodo in search of dragons. This was one of David Attenborough's *Zoo Quest* programmes. I had to see and smell a dragon for myself.

In 1961 a British possession in the South Atlantic had a massive volcanic eruption and all 264 residents were evacuated to England. Two years later almost all of them were returned. We did a project on this at school. The island was called Tristan da Cunha. I wanted to go there.

In 1962 I went to see *Mutiny on the Bounty* every week for a month. I became enthralled by the idea of Tahiti and the mutineers' refuge, Pitcairn Island. I needed to go there as well. And forty-seven years later I did make landfall on Pitcairn and not only that, as our expedition vessel approached the island I gave an impromptu talk about the various *Bounty* movies to my fellow passengers who included the adopted son of George Orwell and Nic Roeg's next-door neighbour.

Ben-Hur and other epics like *Barabbas* and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* encouraged me to pour over photographs of Roman ruins which I thought were incredibly romantic. Judging from the photos, one place stood head and shoulders above the others and that was Leptis Magna in Libya. One day, I thought, I would be there, standing in that theatre overlooking the Mediterranean.

In 1965 I saw *Lord Jim* in 70mm at the Odeon Leicester Square. Reading the souvenir brochure I learned that the film was partly shot on location at a place called Angkor Wat in Cambodia. I monitored Cambodia's wretched fate for decades and vowed that, when it was safe, I would make the pilgrimage to Angkor.

Eventually I went to them all - Komodo, Tahiti, Pitcairn, Leptis, Angkor, Tristan, plus Greenland and Antarctica and scores of others - either sailing on the high seas or by flying in successively smaller airplanes.

I owe a lot to my grandfather and I knew that I would inherit half of his estate when he died, the other half going to my brother who had emigrated to Australia in 1963. But shortly after my grandmother died, he hired a housekeeper and yes, dear reader, he married her. I inherited a near pittance, which I couldn't touch until I was 21. At least it enabled me to furnish our little rented flat in St John's Wood. But I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

3: THE LAST PICTURE SHOWS

I was thirteen when I saw *Ben-Hur*, an experience I found overwhelming - that huge screen, the noise, the pounding hooves, the deafening music. I'd never seen anything like it. It was certainly the first film I ever saw in the West End of London and after that I'm afraid I often played truant by taking the train 'up west' to see the latest releases. In this way I quickly learned the geography of the West End by knowing where all the cinemas were. Some of them became second homes for me.

The Empire was built in the 19th century as a music hall and was converted into a cinema in 1928. It was owned by Loews, the parent company of MGM, and was their main showcase. *Gone With the Wind*, however, their biggest movie since the silent version of *Ben-Hur*, ran next door at a little sister cinema called the Ritz which was in a basement, enabling the 1939 blockbuster to run continuously while Hitler's bombs and rockets rained down on London.

In 1959 the opulent Empire closed briefly to prepare for the premiere run of *Ben-Hur*. Until then the screen at the Empire was enclosed within a fairly narrow proscenium and the projection box was way up above the circle. But *Ben-Hur* had been photographed in a system called MGM Camera-65 which required an unusually wide screen, almost three times as wide as it was high. This new screen was placed ingeniously in front of the proscenium, closer to the audience and masked by red curtains. The projection box was

moved to stalls level, below the circle, necessitating the removal of a 1000 or so stalls seats.

Ben-Hur ran for 76 weeks from 19 December 1959. When the run ended the Empire closed and was completely gutted, creating a modern auditorium on the original circle and a downstairs ballroom at stalls level. Today, the Empire has no less than nine auditoria, reflecting the enormous shifts in movie-going across five decades. I have the fondest memories of the first two Empires - not only *Ben-Hur* but also a Garbo season in the late 1960s, *Doctor Zhivago*, *Ryan's Daughter* and an unforgettable single showing of Abel Gance's *Napoleon* as part of the 1980 London Film Festival.

I grew fond of a great many West End cinemas, like The Casino Cinerama in Old Compton Street, Soho, where I saw everything they had to offer, from *How the West Was Won* to *Grand Prix* to *2001: A Space Odyssey* which I saw several times. The Casino had this giant curved Cinerama screen which was only revealed when the deep red curtains parted with portentous slowness. That was always a spine-tingling moment, better sometimes than the film itself (yes *Ice Station Zebra* and *Song of Norway*, I mean you).

The Casino was joined by two other Cinerama theatres - the Coliseum on St Martin's Lane, where I went to the premiere of *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, and the Royalty, tucked away off Kingsway and far from any other cinema so its isolation meant its life as a cinema was fairly short. Other cinemas in my regular orbit were the Warner Leicester Square, the underground but oh so luxurious Odeon Haymarket which opened with the Roman epic *Barabbas*, and the London Pavilion, right on Piccadilly Circus, where I saw *A Hard Day's Night* and *Blow-Up*. And who could not fail to love the slightly tatty Metropole in faraway Victoria, where *Spartacus*, *El Cid* and *Lawrence of Arabia* bestrode its vast 70mm screen. The Metropole fell to the developers' axe and part of it became a restaurant where I once took Jean Simmons for lunch and told her I'd seen her in *Spartacus* on this very spot.

I never really liked the Dominion, home to *South Pacific*, *Cleopatra* and *The Sound of Music* and I never warmed to London's main showcase cinema, the Odeon Leicester Square which was a huge barn of a place with Art Deco flourishes and lousy ergonomics. Years later I saw it from the stage, a rather unnerving experience, when I introduced directors such as John Landis during various London Film Festivals.

Art houses were thick on the ground in the 1960s - the Academy on Oxford Street, the posh Curzon in Mayfair, the Cameo-Poly near the BBC in Upper Regent Street, the Berkeley and Continentale in Tottenham Court

Road, the ICA on The Mall, the National Film Theatre on the South Bank, the Paris-Pullman way out in Kensington and the Everyman, way out in Hampstead. Most of these are now long gone.

Two other cinemas of this period deserve mention. In 1966 the old Odeon Marble Arch was transformed into a simply stunning new auditorium. There was an escalator - unique in London cinemas - a pool with goldfish and the biggest curved screen you ever saw. Unfortunately that screen, designed for a process called Dimension-150, was never properly utilised. The great war picture *Patton* was filmed in D-150 but was shown at the Casino Cinerama instead. *The Bible . . . in the beginning* was also shot in D-150 and that was shown at the Coliseum Cinerama.

I'm afraid the Odeon Marble Arch was the right cinema in the wrong place. My lasting memory of it is the press screening of the restored version of *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1989. I was one of those people whom David Lean called up the next day. He wanted to know if we liked seeing his meticulously composed desert horizons on a curved screen. He was shocked by what he saw and had the power to get Odeon to take away that fabulous screen and replace it with a traditional flat one, an act of cultural vandalism.

There was another Odeon worthy of note, this time in the right place, St Martin's Lane, just up from the Coliseum and two minutes from the cinematic mecca of Leicester Square. This Odeon, below ground, was a stunning minimalist design featuring sharply raked stadium seating and a screen that appeared to float in thin air. They never found the right movies to play there and it was briefly taken over by Disney and then the art house chain Artificial Eye which renamed it the Lumière. Now it's a cinema no more, the space having been transformed into a fitness centre. But back in its Lumière days, I once had the onerous task of taking Claudia Cardinale on stage during another London Film Festival.

Lastly a word for another basement cinema, the Columbia on Shaftesbury Avenue which ran *The Guns of Navarone* for months on end. In 1964 I went there to see Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* which had a similar impact on me as *Ben-Hur* did four years earlier because *Dr Strangelove* was the film that first made me aware of the film director as someone of importance; it seemed like someone's personal creation.

When I look back on my early childhood and those days of sometimes illicit filmgoing, I think of those dream palaces which no longer exist. I think of my grandparents' house on Orchard Avenue in Shirley which was demolished in the 1990s. And I think of the three senior schools I attended,

all of them bulldozed to the ground. And I think of my two best friends at those schools, both of whom died before they were 18, one of them in a motorcycle accident, the other falling off a cliff on the Kent coast which I suspect was suicide. It was as if someone, or *something*, was covering my tracks for me. I have left no trace and I have not a single photograph of myself between the age of five and twenty-four when I got married. Which is perhaps why a line in one of my favourite films, *The Talented Mr Ripley*, has such resonance: "I'd always thought it would be better to be a fake somebody than a real nobody."

4: EVERYMAN YEARS

I left school at 16 and did a variety of boring jobs, starting off by working in an amazing building, the Royal Exchange in the City of London which resembled nothing less than a Roman temple. My dad worked there so he secured a job for me which I endured for a year or so until they lost patience and asked me to leave. I'm afraid they often caught me writing putative film reviews in the office.

Shortly after I left school I met a young man, Fred, who was the son of my dad's mistress. He wrote for *New Scientist* magazine, he was a Cambridge graduate, extremely clever, luxuriantly and gingerly bearded and lived on Argyll Road just off Kensington High Street. At the time I was living in Leigh-on-Sea, or Leigh-on-Mud, in Essex and sometimes spent weekends with Fred and his flatmates, all just as clever with a wide circle of friends, many of whom would end up on TV or in films. They played weird music by Miles Davis and John Coltrane. And they talked about films a lot, movies I had never heard of, such as *Citizen Kane*, *The Seventh Seal*, *Last Year in Marienbad*, *Eight and a Half*. I committed the names of their directors to memory. Orson Welles, Ingmar Bergman, Alain Resnais, Federico Fellini. I'd meet them all in due course.

In this way I was steered towards arthouse cinemas. I started buying magazines - *Films & Filming* and *Sight and Sound*. *S&S* was far above my pay grade and seemed to disdain everything except films in French, Italian or Swedish. Nevertheless, I resolved to track down every movie they gave three or four stars. Once this meant schlepping out to, of all places, the Odeon Rayners Lane to see, of all things, Antonioni's *The Red Desert*.

By 1966 I had discovered the Everyman which was a cinema in Hampstead, an expensive and famously arty area in North London. It became like a University to me. By then my father and I were living on

Gledstones Road, West Kensington, in a duplex flat which had a large balcony that overlooked the tennis courts at Queen's Club. From there I'd occasionally make the trek to Hampstead and once took my girl-friend, Helen Weisz, a pupil at St Paul's Girls School and a dead ringer for Rachel Weisz, to see *Last Year in Marienbad*. Big mistake that, though I found the movie mesmerising even if I couldn't explain why. Still can't.

In 1968 I moved into a small flat in St John's Wood, in a square behind the Abbey Road recording studios. Every day for years I walked across the most famous zebra crossing in the world. I now had a job at London Weekend Television in Wembley - a boring, non-creative chore but LWT was an exciting place to be and I met some interesting people, notably David Frost, Peter Cook, John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and cultural supremo Humphrey Burton. In the lift one day I came face to face with John le Mesurier. 'You are in my favourite film!' I told him. He looked at me flabbergasted. I said, '*Ben-Hur!*' I think he'd forgotten all about it. I became friendly with a trainee cameraman, Marek Kaniewska, who subsequently directed Paul Newman; with floor manager David Yallop who became a noted author, and production accountant Jon Roseman who became a major talent agent. Yes, LWT was an experience. It was also where I met my future wife.

The Everyman had become my local cinema. It was a pleasant half-hour walk from home - up to Swiss Cottage and then the climb up Fitzjohn's Avenue lined then as now with splendid Victorian mansions. I must have gone to the Everyman two or three times a month. They were always showing something interesting.

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In 1969 I saw an advertisement in *What's On in London* - 'London repertory cinema requires Assistant Manager.' I applied and in my letter I stressed that while I had no experience I did have a lot of enthusiasm. I supplied a list of the last films I had seen and took care to include three or four which could only have been seen at the Everyman. I was interviewed by the Everyman's proprietor, James Fairfax-Jones, and the manager, Dennis Lloyd. I got the job and took quite a pay cut. I seem to remember they were paying £12 per week. At long last I had a job that I could enjoy.

Fairfax-Jones, or F-J as everyone called him, was a local solicitor, a commissioner for oaths no less, who just happened to like movies, though he

would never have called them by that Americanism. He had bought the Everyman in 1933, converting it from a theatre and keeping its distinctive name. F-J was very Old School, posh, with a military bearing, invariably in a three-piece suit, and with a twinkle in his beady eye. He lived locally with his wife Tessa in a sprawling house called Manor Lodge. Next door there was a house with a blue plaque announcing that the Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore had once lived there. This was in the Vale of Health, a part of Hampstead that was tucked away, hidden from the world, a hamlet within a village within a city. Beyond it lay the wilds of Hampstead Heath which ran all the way up to Highgate. Manor Lodge was idyllic, what I might later have described as Provençal, with a large, slightly overgrown front garden and a separate wing for F-J's legal offices, or chambers. The main house was filled with books and paintings. For some reason F-J took a shine to me and I was invited to Manor Lodge quite often, just for tea and a chat. He slowly eased me into his world. I couldn't believe my luck.

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The Everyman was a bare bones cinema, no frills or fluff, none of the opulence or flights of fantasy that many sought in cinemas. It wasn't a Picture Palace and it wasn't a flea-pit like the one seen in *The Smallest Show on Earth* though aspects of that classic little comedy were real enough at the Everyman. There were never advertisements, trailers, let alone a kiosk selling Butterkist and Kia-Ora. The seats were hard and the screen did not benefit from the luxury of curtains, just a green footlight. The roof was wooden and vaulted, what you might call budget hammerbeam. The interval music was chosen by manager Dennis, always classical and meticulously transferred to tape from his LP collection. The toilets, especially the gents in the basement, were fairly basic. In the foyer was a small, commercially run art gallery, curated by Mrs F-J. It was all . . . so very bijou, so very Hampstead.

Being an assistant cinema manager wasn't an especially onerous task, although there was I suppose an overall responsibility for the safety of a potential 302 paying customers and staff if, say, a fire broke out or if someone had a heart attack which, fortunately, no one ever did. However, there was the occasional momentary loss of bodily self-control which meant a rapid cleansing of the ablutionary facilities. That was what real cinema management was all about, not choosing this Godard over that Visconti but mopping up after someone's stinking mess.

Dennis Lloyd had been the manager for many years and he showed me the ropes. On my first day he took me through the opening and closing procedures, a routine of chains and padlocks and, in winter, attending to the incredible vintage gas heaters which hung from the walls of the auditorium. When those heaters were on you could hear the gas hissing and see the pilot lights flickering. They broke down frequently.

Dennis was in his mid-50s, a solitary figure, difficult to chat with casually. His private life was a closed book. He was always with a tweedy suit and tie, the corporal to F-J's brigadier. Dennis lived in Wembley with his ailing mother and rode to the Everyman on an old motor-cycle. Dressed for the highway he resembled Richard Attenborough in *Seance on a Wet Afternoon*. Nevertheless, we got on extremely well. He realised I didn't want his job, merely creative control of the cinema.

Upstairs was the projection box which was equipped with two Westrex 35mm projectors. These ran on carbon arcs which had their own distinctive sound and smell. On the wall between the projection box and the auditorium were several heavy fire shutters, needed because the Everyman was one of the very few cinemas in Britain licensed to show nitrate prints. One spark would set the whole place alight. A nice man came regularly to service the machines and I remember being madly impressed when he told me that another of his regulars was Stanley Kubrick's home cinema.

Attached to the projection box was a fairly large sitting room for the projectionists' sole use. It was filthy and stank of cigarette smoke, as did my office and Dennis's domain which had the big wall safe and fireplace. Dennis smoked a pipe and I smoked unfiltered Camels, Chesterfields or Pall Malls. The whole place reeked of tobacco.

The chief projectionist was Tom Robinson, about 60, kind-hearted, slightly coarse. He had opened the Everyman with F-J on Boxing Day 1933 and had stayed loyal ever since. A family man, he lived in Edgware. He wasn't really a film buff but he cared a lot about presentation. His assistant was Harry Walsh, of unknown age and a transvestite. One day he might be a man, another day a woman, whatever mood took him, though he wore high heels every day. He had a strong northern accent, silvery waist-length hair and lived alone in a faraway world called South London. He looked desperately unhealthy, he chain-smoked and liked to shut himself away in the projection box and never see a soul. When he left the building I would watch people stand and stare at him as he walked over to the Tube station. Like Tom, I trusted him completely.

As the assistant manager I did a three-day shift, then a four-day shift. Dennis and I crossed paths on Wednesdays. Consequently I had to deal with cash, usually not a great deal of it, and every night I had to pay the part-time staff and account for the box-office takings, put it in a bag, and drop it into the night safe at the bank across the road. Down the road in Camden Town I would most certainly have been mugged but this was Hampstead. The next morning I had to telephone Manor Lodge to advise them of the previous night's business. They were inured to disappointing news.

As a cinema manager you dealt with the public and in the Everyman's case they were entirely pleasant and often up for a chat. In the eight years I was there I can only remember one awkward customer - a man named Michael Winner who demanded a free seat. David Lean (who came to see *Top Hat*) didn't want a free seat, neither did John Gielgud, Kingsley Amis, Joan Bakewell, Peter O'Toole, cabinet ministers or any other of the luminaries who came through the Everyman's doors on a regular basis.

There was also, just the once, a Royal visit. On 1 March 1977 Frank Sinatra was playing the Royal Albert Hall. His friend HRH Princess Margaret had tickets. Quite by chance we were having a season of MGM Musicals. On 28 February the phone rang and a voice said it was Kensington Palace. HRH wanted to see *High Society* that afternoon and would be bringing her two young children with her. And at 2pm a Rolls-Royce arrived to disgorge the Royal party into our spartan picture house. To coin a lyric from Sir Tim Rice, I was at sixes and sevens and they were dressed up to the nines. Suit and tie for the young boy, tea dress for the girl, an incredible mink coat for Margaret.

The local police station sent a constable to stand at the front entrance, a security man saw *High Society* with the Royal party and I had another security man with me in the upstairs office. He paid for their tickets. Before the film ended he was on the phone organising all the traffic between Hampstead and Kensington, meaning there would be police at major junctions and traffic lights would be neutralised. If this sounds excessive, this was at the height of the IRA bombing campaign.

When the film ended, I was at the door, ready to discuss the subtleties of Charles Walters's direction, the great performance of Mr Sinatra and the respective merits of *High Society* and *The Philadelphia Story*. But HRH just swished past me, a blur of fur, without even a look, though her two children shook my hand and thanked me for my hospitality. They had enjoyed the film, they said.

During my time there, two other things stand out. The change to decimalisation and the three-day week, when we all reverted back to the 18th century by living in candlelight for much of the day. Like all cinemas, the Everyman was half on, half out.

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F-J and Tessa had four children. Tessa herself was quite a large woman and was what one used to call 'tweedy.' She seemed country rather than city, like a landowner's wife. Although she ran the Everyman's art gallery, she never struck me as being arty or highly cultured.

The eldest of their children was Caroline, followed by twins Martin and Ruth, and Alice, the youngest. I rarely encountered Caroline, Martin or Ruth but Alice was around the Everyman a great deal since the spacious basement was her own studio where she made soft furnishings with splendid silk screen patterns. Alice wasn't a hippie but she most definitely was Bohemian in her appearance and her lifestyle. I thought she was utterly captivating, fabulous, initially an alien, quickly a friend. She lived in this amazing place in West Hampstead, an artist's studio that was, more or less, a massive greenhouse which looked like it had been designed by Gustav Eiffel. It was once used as a movie location and Alice invited me down there to watch the filming. The director was Don Siegel, the stars were Michael Caine and Delphine Seyrig and the movie was then called *Drabble*. It was drivel. But, boy, was that an exciting day for me! For the first time, I actually touched Hollywood and met two movie stars.

The Everyman staff usually met all the Fairfax-Jones clan at the annual summer clambake held in the garden at Manor Lodge. It was an interesting occasion, a bit like the Lord and Lady of the Manor spreading gratitude and cheer among their servants. For some of the usherettes it seemed like the highlight of their year. And why not?

The usherettes! And don't forget the box-office girls and boys. What an extraordinary bunch they were. There were essentially two shifts. The afternoons were the domain of three elderly women. There was Birdie, full-blooded Irish, sassy and witty; there was Maud, a bit grim, skeletal, edging into dementia and heavily made-up; and Sally, the incredible Sally, almost totally deaf, with other medical issues, but so so kind. She lived down the road in a typical Hampstead terraced house, her Scottish mother fussing in the kitchen, her father a professor with more books than the British Library.

In fact, this was Paul Bloomfield, a noted socialist and intellectual, who had been Lindsay Anderson's tutor at Cheltenham College.

Often in the cash desk was Mrs Heal, dressed in a shawl with dripping jewels. She was part-owner of Heals, the ultra trendy furniture store on Tottenham Court Road. Her daughter, with mane-like red hair, sometimes did a shift in the evenings, as did the gloriously Nordic-looking Anna who ended up marrying Martin Fairfax-Jones. In the evenings, the usherettes were mainly French and Italian students or *au pairs*. No one did this work for the money. They all liked the Everyman, they liked the company, the friendship, and they liked the movies it showed.

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Working at the Everyman meant being a respected part of a community if not a pillar of it. I found the village scene convivial, even if it was more subdued than other parts of London such as the King's Road area or Notting Hill. Maybe because of the Heath, Hampstead seemed more country than city, despite the Tube station which was London's dankest and deepest. Escalators didn't have the reach so it was clanky old lifts and you emerged into the light to the sound of Bob selling the *Newzanstannard!* As a manager of the Everyman I was, after all, a local tradesman like news vendor Bob, like the greengrocer or the butcher or the owner of the High Hill Bookshop, Ian Norrie, who always seemed to be in a bad mood.

Next door to the Everyman was a Chinese restaurant. One a week I would treat myself to a takeaway of fried rice and spare ribs which made your pee turn orange. Opposite the Everyman was a great bakers and a wonderful patisserie called Louis. Up the hill was Hampstead Hi-Fi which sold expensive audio equipment and only classical records. One of the assistants was the nephew of the conductor Jascha Horenstein. Perhaps the first classical album I ever bought was his performance of Mahler's Third. On Flask Walk future novelist and humorist Joseph Connolly ran a secondhand bookshop specialising in modern first editions, an expensive hobby I soon acquired. Also in Flask Walk was the eponymous pub in which the pot man would go round collecting used glasses and making sure he gulped down everyone's dregs, most of which ended up on his shirt. I thought he was disgusting.

On Perrin's Court, a pedestrian thoroughfare, there was a great local restaurant, Villa Bianca, a fancy contemporary knick-knack place called That

New Shop and the modern offices of the local newspaper, *The Ham and High*, whose legendary editor Gerry Isaaman, hired me as the paper's film reviewer when Tom Hutchinson moved to the *Sunday Telegraph*. And every Wednesday afternoon, after my shift, I would walk down Pond Street to South End Green to a rather manky coffee shop, called the Prompt Corner, to play chess for money with various *Mitteleuropeans* who all seemed to have numbers tattooed on their arms. Yes, Hampstead sometimes felt like being in the country, Stow-on-the-Wold perhaps, but in that smokey cafe you could have been in Warsaw or Budapest.

Apart from Louis, all of these places are long gone. It is a vanished world.

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The Everyman's reputation lay in its programming of mostly foreign language films in linked seasons. I saw this as something of a limitation but certainly for the first year or two I was happy to go along with F-J's tried and tested choices. As far as I remember he went very rarely to the cinema - in fact, I can't recall having a serious conversation about movies with him at all. The furthest we got was at a summer party when my wife told him she had just seen François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* and adored it, especially the music. "Come with me," he said, and they walked into another room where he played the soundtrack for her which he had on a little EP.

I don't recall him ever saying that he and his wife had gone to see a film at the local Odeon or to the West End to see the latest film at the Academy or the Curzon. All I remember is seeing *The Go-Between* with him at MGM's preview theatre in St James's Street.

He subscribed to the two BFI magazines, *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Sight and Sound*, and he read Dilys Powell in *The Sunday Times* and CA Lejeune in *The Observer* to keep track of the latest releases which one day might grace the Everyman's screen. And then there was F-J and Tessa's annual trip to the Venice film festival, a treat bankrolled by the Everyman. They would arrive a few days before the festival started and stay across the lagoon on the island of Torcello before moving across to Venice itself to stay at the Cipriani, one of three deluxe hotels in the city at the time. From there they would take the launch over to the Lido where the festival was based. He socialised, he may have seen a film or two, and came back with a list of titles destined for Hampstead in due course.

The bedrock of the Everyman year were solid seasons of old favourites. The Everyman's opening film of 1933, René Clair's comedy *Le Million*, always paid us an annual visit as did The *Maxim Gorky Trilogy* and The Marx Brothers' comedies. There was always a season called 'Summer Revivals' consisting of lighter fare and in the autumn 'Off The Beaten Track' which was a ragbag selection of arthouse faves by Fellini, Godard and Buñuel. All very Hampstead.

Movies were always shown from Mondays for seven days. Programmes were at 2pm, 4pm, 6pm and 8pm with an accompanying short if necessary. Problems occurred if a film ran for, say, 138 minutes because that meant programmes at 2pm, 5pm and 8pm with a longer short. It was inflexible because F-J believed our regular patrons always knew the showing times. We published little monthly or bi-monthly programme cards and sent them out on a mailing list. We took advertisements in *What's On in London*, the *Evening Standard* (not the *Evening News*), the *Listener*, *The Lady* and the *New Statesman*. There were also the trademark yellow quad posters at strategic Tube stations.

We survived on the goodwill of various film distributors. The arthouse films were largely owned by three companies - Connoisseur Films which was run by George Hoellering who also ran the Academy Cinemas in Oxford Street. Hoellering, a Hungarian emigré, was a sort of legend, high and mighty, and F-J was terrified of him. Then there was Contemporary Films run by Charles and Kitty Cooper who owned the Paris-Pullman Cinema in South Kensington. And Gala, run by the glamorous Kenneth Rive who operated a small chain of Gala Cinemas. Hoellering, the Coopers and Rive were all pioneers, taking on unknown directors and films and bringing them an audience. Roger Wingate, who owned the Curzon in Mayfair, was far too aloof for the likes of us.

Somehow F-J persuaded all these companies to rent out their films for a flat rate of £25 per week rather than the normal percentage deal. This meant that if a film was packed out the Everyman would make a lot of money and if a film flopped losses would be minimal. Amazingly, F-J did an identical deal with the major distributors such as EMI, Columbia, Fox and Warners.

Every Monday afternoon I would sit in the back row and watch the first performance. Mainly this was to check the quality of the print and very often they were quite poor, sometimes almost un-runnable. The worst tended to come from Gala which owned most of the Bergman catalogue and several key movies like *Eight and a Half* and *Pierrot le Fou*. Ken Rive worked with as

few prints as possible and once a 35mm print like *Pierrot le Fou* had done its first run in London and then traversed the country's arthouses and BFI Film Theatres it had become worn and scratched and shorn of a minute or two. Amazingly, our loyal patrons put up with it. I can't recall a single incident when anyone demanded their money back.

By 1971 F-J's health was starting to fail. There were a few stays at the King Edward VII Hospital for Officers in Marylebone. I remember he said, "Isn't it time we did Bergman again?" So I went ahead and planned the season, making it the biggest the Everyman had ever done. I called it 'Bergman Revisited.' In his hospital bed he told me how much he liked that.

I remember arguing a case for a Humphrey Bogart season which F-J resisted simply because he didn't think it fitted the Everyman ethos. But he relented and the Bogart season was a massive success. One major Bogart movie *The Big Sleep* was never shown outside the National Film Theatre because United Artists in London didn't have a print. I contacted Clyde Jeavons at the National Film Archive and arranged to have limited access to their collection, the result of which was that we ran *The Big Sleep* for four days and it was a full house for every single performance. It was by far the biggest money-spinner the Everyman had ever shown. And because they didn't have a print, UA waived the £25 fee!

F-J died in April 1973. His death was marked by several affectionate obituaries. The local paper, *The Ham and High*, said, 'He was the modest, occasionally irascible but always deeply caring father of Hampstead's Everyman Cinema, a man with obstinate foresight and courage, who proved time and time again his faith in the film as a work of art. [He] earned himself a special niche in cinema history and in Hampstead's history too.'

With the death of F-J my own role changed. F-J's son, Martin, became Managing Director and he quickly came to see me and asked if I would take over all the programming responsibilities, alongside Dennis who remained as manager. Martin was a graphic designer with, I thought, little interest in movies. Certainly I had hardly met him in the past few years. Nevertheless, he wanted to become involved and understand the business. He also undertook to revamp the Everyman's little programme cards and make them visually striking. The yellow posters would not be changed.

I was keen to widen the Everyman's programming and also make changes to its format. I thought the week-long run had had its day, so to speak, and one only had to look at the National Film Theatre and also the Electric Cinema Club in Notting Hill to see that shorter, even daily, runs was

the way forward. We determined never to become a club cinema but within a month or two of my taking over the Everyman had two programmes a week and Saturday late-shows were also introduced. I resisted double-bills of the sort that were the Electric's stock-in-trade. For one thing, the logistics of all those 35mm prints would have been a great burden on our two projectionists.

I was always on the look out for fresh ideas and seasons which might give the Everyman a national profile. Somehow it happened. The BFI had a man called Ted Heath who was head of their distribution department. He offered me an amazing opportunity - a season of German Expressionist movies of the 1920s and 1930s, including *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, *Metropolis*, *Dr Mabuse* and *The Blue Angel*, all in new 35mm prints. Ted didn't want the season to go to the NFT, he wanted a proper commercial run and a life for these pictures. We paid I think a flat rate of £250 for all the titles and it was a colossal success, the perfect Hampstead package.

We held the British premiere of François Truffaut's 1968 movie *Mississippi Mermaid*, even though it was dubbed. We recalled Bogart with an even bigger season. We ran as many Billy Wilder pictures as we could get in a season called, naturally enough, 'Running Wilder.' Around this time the NFT was having a feud with MGM so I embarrassed them a little by staging seasons of Greta Garbo and MGM musicals, sometimes using prints sent specially from the studio in Culver City.

In 1976 we did a three-month season called Film Noir, accompanied by a long essay for the programme written by *Time Out* Film Editor Chris Petit. *The Big Sleep* came back for that, of course. We held a press show to publicise it and I was surprised by some national critics who mocked the term 'film noir.' Now it's part of the vocabulary.

As part of that season I wanted to screen *The Manchurian Candidate*, John Frankenheimer's dark 1962 thriller about brainwashing and political assassination. It was one of those films that had gone from flop to cult without ever being a success. United Artists told me they had a print but their rights had lapsed so I wrote to Mr Frankenheimer asking his permission to show the film, little realising that the rights were in fact owned by Mr Frank Sinatra. Mr Frankenheimer replied, yes of course you can show my movie. That was good enough for UA and the film was shown publicly in the UK for the first time in many years. Doing this sort of thing, going the extra mile, probably wasn't necessary for a cinema like the Everyman. I began to think I had outgrown it.

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Three years had passed since I took over the Everyman and I loved every minute, basically asking myself what do I fancy seeing and putting it on. Eventually, though, I found the Everyman just a bit too claustrophobic, a bit limiting, a dead end if you like. I also found it a luxury I couldn't really afford anymore. So what next?

For maybe ten years I had been going to the National Film Theatre. On one of my earliest visits I dragged my father to see Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story*. We were late so I hurried him across Charing Cross Bridge and down past the Royal Festival Hall. I nearly killed him twice over - of a heart attack in the rush and of boredom with the movie. On an other early visit I had the good fortune to witness a landmark event when Jean-Luc Godard went on stage and punched his producer in the face, only to be manhandled off the stage by the NFT's manager Mike Wesson. Later on I saw Sam Peckinpah drink Jack Daniel's and throw a flick knife into the stage. I saw Alfred Hitchcock interviewed by Bryan Forbes and, of course, I saw many, many movies. It became obvious to me that I should work there and in 1977 that is exactly what I did.

I credit F-J for indirectly getting me that job in the NFT's programme planning department. One evening he held a dinner party at Alice's studio in West Hampstead. Looking back I think he wanted to introduce me to some of his friends in the film trade. Dilys Powell was there, and Lindsay Anderson, and so too was Leslie Hardcastle, the Controller of the NFT. Leslie gave me a lift home. I bumped into him every so often and I think that might have helped me get the NFT job.

My last month at the Everyman was quite emotional. It was hard to let go and to say goodbye to that cosy little existence. I will always have the fondest memories of it. I got a letter from that nice man Stanley Kubrick wishing me well at the BFI. And shortly before I left a friend of mine, John Baxter, author of many noted movie books, called and wondered how I could possibly work at the NFT "with Leslie Hardcastle and Ken Wlaschin, two of the most difficult people on the planet." They couldn't be that bad, could they?

5: MY NEW JOB

I really can't remember anything about my interview at the NFT. The job description was 'Lectures & Seminars Officer.' I knew nothing about lectures

and I might have had to look up what a seminar was. I didn't care that much. I just wanted to work there, in the programme planning department. I think the NFT people wanted someone to organise a series of talks to add some intellectual rigour to the programme schedules. I wasn't remotely qualified so I got the job. Must have been my personal charm. My pay was quadrupled overnight.

I was called the next day by Leslie Hardcastle, the NFT's faintly legendary Controller. I gave Martin Fairfax-Jones and Dennis Lloyd the news and helped them find my replacement at the Everyman. This was Tony Dalton who just happened to work at the BFI.

The NFT was just a quick, direct Tube ride from my home in St John's Wood down to Waterloo. By coincidence my wife Andrea took the same daily commute to her job at London Weekend Television where she was the PA to the Managing Director Brian Tesler. She shared an office with another Andrea who worked for LWT's Chairman, the formidable John Freeman whose insightful, revealing and often chilling interview programme in the early 1960s, *Face to Face*, remains an industry legend. At the time LWT's Director of Programmes was Michael Grade. John Birt and Greg Dyke were already climbing ladders there. And when Freeman retired he was replaced by Christopher Bland. Every single one of these gents ended up as Directors General or Chairmen of the BBC. My wife was, shall we say, well connected and, by extension, so was I.

The NFT's programme planning and admin departments occupied the east side of the building, overlooking Denys Lasdun's monumental ode to concrete, the National Theatre, which looked impressive in sunlight and dismal in the rain. On the west side of the NFT was the concrete culture cluster of the Hayward Gallery, the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Royal Festival Hall. The entire South Bank site was a product of the 1951 Festival of Britain which was designed to regenerate and reinvigorate the nation after the Second World War. Dividing the South Bank site was the graceful structure of Waterloo Bridge. The NFT was literally wedged beneath the bridge and at times you could hear traffic rumble in the auditorium. Leslie saw great symbolism in the architectural and cultural hierarchy of the South Bank - while the theatre, music and art were brazenly conspicuous, film was skulking out of sight. He may have been right. So Leslie always set out to make as much noise as possible. I was thrilled to be part of it.

6: LESLIE HARDCASTLE

Leslie Hardcastle, the Controller of the NFT, was an extraordinary figure. He was my boss from 1977-1988. My friend, the film critic Derek Elley, called him 'Mr Pickwick' and he did indeed look like the character described by Charles Dickens and drawn by various caricaturists. He was quite short and rotund with a chubby, slightly ferocious face. His head was totally bald except for a luxuriant scarf of hair which he wore surprisingly long, giving him a rather arty, raffish look. He dressed rather smartly, favouring double-breasted suits. All he lacked were Samuel Pickwick's owlsh spectacles. He lived in a recognisably Dickensian London - an early Georgian terrace on Great Pulteney Street in the heart of Soho.

It is hard to tell whether Leslie's second love was the NFT or Soho, assuming that his first love was his wife, Wendy, whom he married at the Church of St Barnabas in Greek Street in 1968. Leslie was born in 1926 in suburban Croydon, close to where I was born. His parents were singers in music hall and split up when he was young, exactly like my paternal grandparents. An uncle was a minor actor who also had a toy and sweet shop in Soho. Leslie used to help out in the shop on weekends and became familiar with Soho and the wider West End, just as I did as a young teenager.

Leslie served in the Navy during the last phase of the war as a nurse aboard *HMS Anson* in the SW Pacific. Intending to become a doctor on his demob he found a job, in Soho, at the offices of British Lion, a film company. Soho was London's red light district, the haunt of gangland, the aristocracy and quite seedy. It was also the film industry's home turf, with offices centred on Wardour Street. Leslie joined the Soho-based British Film Institute in the early 1950s and found himself getting the prints delivered to the nascent National Film Theatre. He became its first manager and then Controller in 1966, often hosting movie luminaries such as Jean Renoir, Judy Garland, Luis Buñuel, Gina Lollobrigida and so on.

He became a Soho resident in 1960 and eventually co-founded the Soho Society which emerged from a housing association. Leslie immersed himself in Soho, becoming its *de facto* ambassador, working on social issues as well as historical research and architectural preservation. He was never a moral crusader like Mary Whitehouse; indeed, he revelled in Soho's diversity, from *Lords of the Realm* to *Ladies of the Night*.

Leslie brought Soho to the NFT: staff meetings were sometimes held at mysterious venues with historical interest, always served with pastries from Maison Bertaux; staff lunches were held at watering holes like Kettner's and

the Gay Hussar and Leslie always held a special lunch at the London Film Festival where he served *panettone* from Soho's Italian delis.

Leslie was in his 50s when I worked for him. I thought he was woefully inarticulate, which made him both charming and infuriating. His apparent befuddlement might just have been a camouflage to mask his sharp intelligence. He often spoke in riddles and was hopeless at writing reports for the BFI executive. He was intimidated by intellectuals, and the BFI was stuffed with honours degree bullshitters.

Leslie could also be slippery and duplicitous. I had only been working for him for a few weeks when he asked me if he should get rid of Ken Wlaschin, the fiercely independent and unknowable programme director. That was probably a loyalty test. And when Ken did leave of his own volition and was replaced by Sheila Whitaker, Leslie took me to lunch and, head in hands, told me that this was a disaster which he was powerless to avoid. I am also sure that he agreed with BFI Director Tony Smith that Sheila was the right man for the job. But at least Leslie did manage to secure the services of *The Guardian's* film critic Derek Malcolm as a highly successful interim Director of the LFF. Despite the inherent slyness of his character, there was always an underlying optimism, passion and visionary fervour about Leslie which made everyone intensely fond of him.

As the BFI became more bureaucratic, more political and, yes, more professional, Leslie felt less at home and more insecure. He was a showman at heart and showmanship was not really part of the BFI's DNA. Leslie got things got done out of sheer enthusiasm, not business plans or spreadsheets. He couldn't have coped without the ladies in his outer office - Wendy, Heather and Janet. They all knew Leslie's shortcomings and all were unswervingly loyal.

You see, Leslie Hardcastle *was* the NFT. He virtually invented it and oversaw its expansion from one to two to three auditoria; he expanded the clubroom into a large restaurant; he imagined a London Film Festival and made it a date on the international calendar; he had the idea of turning the riverfront into a secondhand book and flea market, transforming a short stretch of the Thames into the Seine; and with David Francis of the National Film Archive he devised the Museum of the Moving Image which opened in 1988 on a site adjacent to the NFT. Leslie often dreamed of declaring UDI, breaking away from the BFI and forging a new, independent entity with the National Film Archive. That never happened and shortly after Leslie retired

his worst fears were realised - the NFT was renamed BFI South Bank and MOMI was closed to become more office space.

To me, Leslie always looked and behaved like a heart attack waiting to happen but he lived to the ripe old age of 96, dying in 2023 in Great Pulteney Street, in his beloved Soho.

7: RED SQUARE IN SOHO

The British Film Institute was a spider's web and a constantly growing, self-serving bureaucracy. As we were publicly funded like a government department, through an Arts Council grant, employees were regarded as civil servants. We were all on civil service grades of pay which came with generous pension schemes. It was a cushy little number.

The NFT was the BFI's shop window and that was resented by some. Its spiritual core, if it had one, was the National Film Archive which kept films for posterity and made significant efforts towards restoration and preservation. The NFA was run from the the BFI's Dean Street HQ by its curator, David Francis, and his deputy, Clyde Jeavons. There was always an unshakeable, inter-dependency between the NFT and the NFA - after all, we showed the pictures, they kept them safe and sound. It was as simple, as symbiotic, as that.

The other main BFI departments were the Library and Information Department; Publications, which published the *Monthly Film Bulletin* and the quarterly *Sight and Sound*, both brazenly elitist yet venerable magazines; the BFI Production Board produced independent movies which few people ever saw; and the Education Department organised all sorts of worthy stuff within the UK's schools and university system. In the late 1970s and the 1980s all this was pretty academic and arcane, far removed from the real cut and thrust of the British film industry. It was also explicitly left-wing and thus totally out of step with the government of Margaret Thatcher. Out of step with me, too, as I often thought I was the only member of BFI staff who voted Conservative. Maybe Penelope Houston, the editor of *Sight and Sound*, was also a Tory. She was tweedy, always with a fag clamped between her fearsome fangs, always dreaming of riding to hounds.

There was another department which was the reason for Leslie's insecurity within the BFI. This department revelled in the title of Film Availability Services, or FAS, an acronym like CIA, FBI or, more pointedly, KGB because it seemed to be peopled entirely by Marxists or, worse, by Marxist-Leninists. There might even have been a Maoist or two. The

Commissar of FAS was a nice guy called Colin McArthur, a professional Scot and a fan of westerns. He always signed his memos, "Yours, aye." You could have a chat and a laugh with Colin even though you knew he wanted to take over the entire BFI.

The role of FAS was simple - track down films and prints from domestic and international sources and make them available to the NFT and to the BFI's growing chain of Regional Film Theatres. But McArthur widened its remit to encompass an entire philosophical and ideological approach to cinema. And within FAS were Colin's loyal *apparatchiks*, some of whom, like Paul Willemen, wrote for an obscure but hugely influential magazine called *Screen*, published by a BFI affiliate called the Society of Film and Television Arts. Its writers were not interested *per se* in movies, stars or directors; influenced by an unreadable book by Peter Wollen called *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* and by earlier French theorists, they were interested in narrative structures, semiotics and signifiers. They thought films and books and plays etc were expressions of prevailing ideologies. Their writings were often impenetrable, they were often ridiculed by mainstream critics, but they carried weight and influence and permeated the entire British higher educational system.

Leslie Hardcastle was paranoid about the threat of the dreaded 'structuralists.' He called them that without knowing what it meant. He thought they were like the pods in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and would gobble up the NFT and send it into a Marxist-Leninist paradise. As for my part, I called Mark Nash, the editor of *Screen*, offered him a season of films and lectures at the NFT and let them get on with it.

I have an amusing memory of Mark Nash, an amiable guy with whom I probably disagreed on just about everything, all at once. We staged a *Guardian Lecture* with a Cuban director, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and went to pick him up from Heathrow in a huge Daimler limo, complete with uniformed chauffeur. Mark and I were sitting in the back like potentates when a taxi drew alongside and there, looking at us totally aghast, was *Time Out's* film editor, Chris Petit. Looking back, I suppose I should have driven out there in a pink 1960s Cadillac or Chevy to make the Cuban feel at home.

8: THE BIG W

Ken Wlaschin, an American, was the NFT's programme director. He also headed up the London Film Festival which was held each November. Ken was my immediate boss for seven years.

He was a tall, full-framed, good-looking man, dressed perpetually in scruffy denim jeans and denim jacket, over a freebie t-shirt, with a catastrophic haircut and a grey stubbly beard. He could pass as a country & western singer - Willie Nelson's kid brother maybe. He sometimes wore bootlace ties and an odd assortment of bangles on his wrists. He invariably had a ciggie going.

He was nearly 15 years older than me and I hoped I might look up to him as the older brother I never had. Actually, I did have an older brother who was a complete waste of space and lived in Australia. But Ken was not that sort of man at all. For weeks after I arrived I hardly had any contact with him. He never showed me the proverbial ropes. He just let me get on with it, basically invent a role for myself. I found him unknowable and I believe quite a few people thought that about him as well.

Ken was born in 1934 in a place called Bradish in Boone County, Nebraska. Henry Fonda came from Nebraska and so did Marlon Brando. Ken's paternal background was Romanian, though there was never a shred of that to be seen or heard. It was just that name, Wlaschin, which Ken pronounced as 'Val-osh-in.' Bradish was a tiny, nothing place on the flatlands. It was abandoned in the Depression and people migrated to the nearby town of Scottsbluff where Ken spent his childhood. I once spent a night in Scottsbluff, en route from Denver to Rapid City, and I told Ken I had been there. I sent him a postcard from there. He just blanked out.

Ken won a scholarship to the esteemed Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, graduating in English, and then attended University College Dublin. Ken somehow joined the US Army and was stationed in France, working in counter-intelligence. He had married Maureen Kennedy-Martin, whom he met in Dublin, and in 1961 they had a son, Scott, presumably named after the Nebraskan town of his childhood. The family subsequently moved to Rome where things began to both coalesce and also get a little murky. Suddenly he was an art critic working for *The Daily American*, a Rome newspaper which, everyone knew, was partly owned by the CIA. Maybe he pictured himself as Gregory Peck in *Roman Holiday*.

Then, in the mid-60s, the Wlaschins moved to London. Ken seems to have found work as an arts columnist on the struggling tabloid newspaper *The Daily Sketch* and he may have briefly worked for London Weekend Television as a script editor. Some of the dates in his CV never quite tied up. There was always a deep mystery about Ken and his face was almost always a mask. He never seemed to express a complete opinion about anything. He

was always placid, composed, quite charming, happy to go with the flow. He was to cope with the BFI machinations and political infighting by simply having nothing to do with them. Also, I always felt he was happier in the company of women than he was with men. In fact, looking back, the NFT was virtually run by women and Ken could be extremely supportive of them.

Rumours always abounded about Ken being a CIA agent. And why not? That Rome newspaper, *The Daily American*, was a CIA house magazine designed to root out communists in Italy. And when Ken became Programme Director of the NFT and the LFF he constantly travelled the world, often behind the Iron Curtain, and would meet large numbers of people associated with unfriendly or just plain offensive governments. Ken was not a spy in the traditional sense, but a word here and there from, say, a Czech or Russian film director or a state film school lecturer might be remembered and passed on to the CIA in London. They might think, hey, that man in Prague might be useful one day. The same might be said of any of us who worked and travelled for the BFI. I had several close encounters with British intelligence officers when we ran, for instance, films by a Turkish political prisoner, Yilmaz Guney, and also a film from North Korea.

Ken arrived at the NFT in 1969 and had big shoes to fill. His predecessor was another American, Richard Roud, who was sophisticated and elegant, a cultural heavyweight who was "in with the French" as David Thomson put it. Roud's tenure at the NFT and the LFF coincided with the rise of new waves in Europe, especially France, and he rode the waves like a champion surfer. Roud wrote many fine books about the cinema and put on a broad range of programmes that rapidly earned the NFT an international reputation. At one point he was the director of both the London and New York Film Festivals. Roud left London for good and lived mostly in Paris until his early death, from heart problems, in 1989. He was 60.

Ken didn't have a track record in cinema. He was completely unknown. How Leslie Hardcastle discovered him remains a bit of a mystery. He presided over an expansion of the NFT from one to two auditoriums and introduced a rather more radical style of programming which included seasons of American underground films, movies made under the Third Reich, Black African cinema, Cuban propaganda documentaries and so on. Ken often ran into trouble with the British press, the government and foreign embassies. He floated above it all serenely. Under his stewardship the NFT's international reputation was significantly enhanced.

Sadly, I never found him engaged in the work I did for the NFT. In fact, I'm not sure Ken's heart was as much in the NFT as it was in the London Film Festival which was his showcase and the source of his international reputation. At foreign festivals he rarely had the patience to sit through an entire movie, often dipping in and out at various screening rooms, and getting a consensus later on from friendly critics. That's how the LFF was programmed. He hardly ever took an active interest in my events, except on a few occasions: he stayed on for Steven Spielberg's stage appearance, he was around for Scorsese and Ingmar Bergman and took a keen interest when I ran Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* for ten or so performances. In fact, the only time I can remember Ken being visibly moved or shaken by a movie was in 1978 when he arrived for work after lunch looking even more wrecked than usual. He said he had just seen a picture called *The Deer Hunter* at EMI's screening room. He had found the movie devastating. His wife worked for Barry Spikings who ran EMI and they had produced Cimino's film which was still some months from release. Getting Cimino to the NFT for our run of *Heaven's Gate* solicited one of the few words of praise from Ken about my work. However, he must have valued my writing skills because he asked me to edit his 1979 book, *The World's Great Movie Stars*.

Ken left the NFT in 1984 and took a job in Los Angeles, initially running the local film festival, FILMEX, and then as programmer for the American Film Institute. I saw him only once after that, in Los Angeles, and had lunch with him and his wife, Mo, at their house on Dearborn Drive which was close to the Hollywood sign. It was a strange place, like a log cabin, with a sort of ski-lift contraption to get you up from road level. Ken hadn't changed, except he had given up smoking, possibly his only concession to life in Southern California. He drove me back to my hotel in Westwood in a battered old Toyota or something like that. He seemed happy, he had done an amazing amount of work for the American Film Institute, and he had written a few more books, one of them about opera in movies. I can't ever remember him talking about liking opera or saying he had been to one. He was charming, yet intensely secretive. He died in Palm Springs in 2009, aged 75.

9: BRIAN BAXTER

Ken's deputy was Brian Baxter. He was also Ken's exact opposite, being elegant, outgoing, waspishly witty, indiscreet, opinionated, flamboyant, refined, theatrical. Serious minded, too. He drove a Saab and lived in a smart

flat in Fitzrovia surrounded by Bang & Olufsen electronics and antique furniture. Or so I imagined.

I had boundless admiration for Brian and I hope he remembers me fondly, though I have a nagging doubt that he does. It was probably all very cosy before I arrived at the NFT and he might have felt I was a bit disruptive, perhaps a bit competitive. But I liked Brian because he was a true movie fan who turned his enthusiasm into practical use.

Brian was senior to me and thus merited his own private office and an assistant, Rita Foreman. She was a remarkable woman, rather older and was what used to be described as 'full of brass.' She smoked all day, she drank a lot, she could be barmaid coarse at times and she had a heart of gold. She also had a son, Chris, who was a member of a burgeoning pop group called Madness. She and Brian made an odd couple yet they were devoted to each other.

Brian's partner was a Dane called Søren Fischer. They met at a Judy Garland concert. Søren was really a PR agent and had steered the John Player Lecture series at the NFT which began in November 1968 and ran for five years. This was a series of on-stage events at which major actors and directors were interviewed and answered questions from the NFT audience. Several of these were televised by the BBC. I would end up organising a similar series from 1980 with funding from *The Guardian* newspaper.

I had been working at the NFT for barely a week when I strolled into Brian's office and found myself face to face with John Schlesinger. Brian introduced us and John said to me, "Now, which of my films do you love the most?" I said, "I love them all, of course, but my favourite is *Far From the Madding Crowd*." The smile froze on his face.

Brian's love for the cinema extended in some quite interesting directions. He had a passion for British movies, though this did not include the films of David Lean and he was even a bit lukewarm on Michael Powell, whom one was ordered to admire by special BFI decree. Brian's favourite director was Robert Bresson, whom I decided to call Bob, just to rib Brian a little bit. I never fully understood Brian's passion for Bresson's austere, spiritual movies. It may have been religion, it may have been something about being gay, it might just have been an aesthetic connection. Bresson was one of a handful of deeply intellectual European directors whom you thought would be intimidating if you ever met them. In due course I would meet Bob as well as Ingmar, Alain and Michelangelo and they all came across

as regular blokes. I was always reminded of little Alan Barnes's great line in *Whistle Down the Wind*, "'T'isn't Jesus, he's just a fellah."

Brian left the NFT around 1980 and went to work for the BBC, programming films for BBC2, a wonderful job because the BBC regularly showed whole seasons devoted to the films of Fellini or Buñuel and Bresson, naturally. It was like an electronic NFT. Brian's boss was a man called Alan Howden, who was head of Programme Acquisitions and was one of the dullest men I ever encountered. Life seemed to have drained away from him and he didn't seem interested in movies or anything, really. He reminded me of Churchill's famous quip, "An empty taxi arrived at 10 Downing Street and Clement Attlee got out of it." How the flamboyant Brian coped with Howden I'll never know. And *vice versa*.

Alan Howden's opposite number at ITV was Leslie Halliwell, a legend among film buffs because he was the author of a book called *The Filmgoer's Companion*, a weighty tome full of lists and facts and also opinions, most of which were totally wrong-headed. Almost without exception Halliwell disliked any movie made after 1959. His blindness to foreign language films or new movements in world cinema was quite sad, especially so because of his influence on British film culture. Britain's finest film critic, Philip French, wrote that Halliwell "isn't a scholar, critic or cineaste, but rather a movie buff, a man who knows the credits of everything but the value of very little."

Halliwell should have been an interesting man but he was also deadly dull. He first made a name for himself when he ran a banned movie, Marlon Brando's *The Wild One*, at the repertory cinema in Cambridge which he managed. Halliwell subsequently went to work for the Rank Organisation and then Granada TV. Because of his film buff credentials, he became the chief film buyer for the entire ITV network and, later, added Channel 4 to his bailiwick. With Alan Howden at the BBC, Halliwell went off to Hollywood on twice-yearly shopping trips. What he happened to like was what we saw on ITV.

I thought Halliwell might be interesting as a guest in the *Guardian Lecture* series and he jumped at the chance. I asked Brian to chair it and we all met up at a restaurant in Richmond where Halliwell lived. The restaurant, located on a boring shopping street, was called Lichfield's and had a Michelin star. Halliwell breezed in - bearded, plump, condescending. I asked him what he'd like to drink and he asked for a crème-de-menthe. Brian and I exchanged an immediate startled eye contact. *Crème-de-menthe?* It was like the moment in *From Russia With Love* when the SMERSH assassin, posing as a

British agent, orders red wine with fish. You just knew Halliwell was going to be a disappointment. So utterly, unrepentantly, suburban. He died of cancer aged just 60.

Sadly, I didn't see much of Brian after that encounter, just one or two social occasions, including a party held on his retirement from the BBC in 1993. His partner, Søren Fischer, had always suffered from ill-health and he sadly died, brutally young, ten years later. Brian subsequently went to live in northern Thailand. He left a legacy at the NFT as well as a void which was never completely filled.

10: CHECKPOINT CHARLIE

My first overseas trip for the NFT was to East Berlin in December 1977. My boss Ken Wlaschin had not exactly given me the icing on the cake. He could have sent me to the Venice Film Festival. Nevertheless, all foreign travel excited me and so one day I flew on a BA flight to West Berlin, collected my bag and found a taxi. "Checkpoint Charlie *bitte*," I said. Can you imagine that? I was a fan of spy fiction - Fleming, Deighton, Le Carre - and here I was, starring in my very own spy movie.

The taxi drove through West Berlin, along the Kurfürstendamm, which was bedecked with Christmas decorations, just like the opening scene of *The Odessa File*. Then the taxi pulled into a border zone and there it was, Checkpoint Charlie, just a series of wooden sheds, all rather drab, especially on this dark, freezing, drizzly night. It looked exactly as it did in the Richard Burton movie *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*. In black and white. I was completely alone. No one else was making the crossing that night. I walked into one shed, showed my passport and I think I had some sort of document to prove I was expected. Then it was another shed, a bit of a walk through no man's land, a glimpse of the wall, and then a waiting car. There was a brief flash of headlights. But no rattle from a Kalashnikov or the chilling thud from a silencer. I had gone over to the other side. Rest assured, I had no plans to defect.

The East German film people put me up at the Hotel Unter den Linden on the eponymous *strasse*. It was a fairly modern building, brightly lit and devoid of character. It has subsequently been demolished. Down the road was Berlin's most famous hotel, the Adlon, where, according to legend, Billy Wilder was a taxi dancer. And right across the road from the Adlon was Berlin's most famous landmark, the Brandenburg Gate. This was the border

between East and West. Before that, Hitler and his cronies swanned up and down here and before them all manner of Ruritanian monsters.

I made the most of East Berlin and the least of the crappy movies they showed me. Only two - a nicely made historical drama *Lotte in Weimar* and a thriller, *Die Flucht*, were remotely interesting. My hosts were deathly serious. One of them kept mentioning something about 'zee social informations' contained in every boring movie. They weren't big on socialising either.

The GDR was then deep in the grip of Erich Honecker's harsh government and its dreaded secret police, the Stasi. Despite the freezing cold and the slushy streets, I went out on daily walks. Sometimes a minder went with me. I went on the underground trains, I went to the famous Alexanderplatz, I stood before some incredible buildings which had escaped our bombs, such as the Humboldt University, and I noted how many churches were in ruins, left to rot by the atheist commies. I wandered around the dusty Pergamon Museum, savouring the looting by German archaeologists, especially the monumental Pergamon altar which I did not see on my visit to Pergamon itself in 1973. I marvelled at the ranks of apartment blocks which marched down the city streets, all identical, except for numbers. I subsequently learned that these blocks - the *Khrushchyovka* - were to be found right across the Soviet Union, from Berlin in the West to Almaty in the South and Vladivostok in the Far East. Some of them looked so badly made they would fall down if you sneezed. The only cars seemed to be Ladas and Moskvitchs. And in the shops the produce looked poor and if you wanted to buy a set of glasses or a dinner service there was only one to choose from.

This was the first of many trips behind the Iron Curtain and my first impression of a grey, grim prison never really wavered. I hated Romania, I didn't like Poland much but I warmed to Czechoslovakia because my hosts were lovely and welcoming, the movies were pretty good, Prague was beautiful, and I adored the national dish of dumplings with duck and red cabbage washed down with Pilsner.

11: BECOMING STARSTRUCK

I have been struggling a little to find a way of starting this mini-essay about my first encounter with a major movie star. Saying something like, 'Lauren Bacall swanned down the stairs at the Connaught with a big broad smile on her face. She was utterly familiar and a total stranger.' That sort of thing.

Then yesterday, as I wrote this, it was announced that Michael Parkinson had died, aged 88. I admired Parkinson a great deal because like many million of Brits I tuned in every Saturday night to see his talk show on BBC1. More often than not, he had some major star from Hollywood's golden age and got them to talk about themselves in often revealing ways. Many years later I would find myself in a vaguely similar situation, putting on shows with Hollywood stars, in my case not on TV but on the stage at the National Film Theatre. You had to get them to trust you and you had to remember that it's never about you, always about them.

This was all in the 1970s and 1980s and that was a different world. Arguably a better world. They were exceptional times because so many of the great stars were still alive and wanted to be remembered. They were accessible. Many of them could be reached in one, two, three phone calls at most. Most of them welcomed the chance to share their memories about their lives and the people they encountered. And back then they didn't have the army of fawning press agents prepping every comment they made. There was no social media. There was TV, radio and there were magazines and newspapers. That's it.

Among the vast amount of press coverage Parky received I was particularly struck by something Richard Littlejohn wrote in the *Daily Mail* today, 18 August 2023: "Parky was no Norma Desmond. But although he was still big, the 'celebrity' guests had got small. How do you go from Lauren Bacall to some dopey bird from *Love Island*, surrounded by stylists, agents and sticking to a script written by PR spivs?"

So as I was saying, Lauren Bacall swanned down the old oak staircase of the Connaught and fell into my arms. There was quite a stir in the air of that small, country house-style lobby I can tell you. Bacall was a great star - yes, most certainly - who had a rather less than stellar career. It's hard to think of her outside the pictures she made with Bogart. I had been contacted by Jonathan Cape who were publishing her autobiography, *By Myself*. This would have been sometime in 1978. Would we be interested in a Q&A session and a book-signing, like those good old John Player Lectures? I don't think I thought about it for very long. We agreed on a date, we cancelled whatever it was we had scheduled, we put up a blackboard and sold out within nano seconds.

Now I had to select someone to do the on-stage interview. I chose Sheridan Morley, not someone I knew, but admired for his silken interviews with various luminaries on the BBC2 arts programme, *Late Night Line-Up*. He

had done a few John Player things so knew the NFT ropes. Sherry - everyone called him that - jumped at the chance and we had a lunch to discuss what was to happen.

Betty - everyone called her that - was wearing an enormous white billowy feathery coat thing designed to send anyone rushing for an anti-histamine pill. The first thing she said in the limo was, "Why is Sheridan Morley doing the interview?" He's a big fan and he's very skilful, I said. "Bogey and I hated his father," she said in a flat tone. Oh dear, I thought, this isn't going to go well. Apparently Sheridan's father, the corpulent British actor Robert Morley, got under everyone's skin in Uganda and the Congo during the making of John Huston's *The African Queen* in 1952. Despite this, Morley was cast opposite Bogart in another Huston picture, *Beat the Devil*, a few years later. Maybe Huston thought that Morley's innate pomposity was needed. I certainly disliked him for that reason.

But we were all professionals. Bacall was fabulous on stage, Sherry was a superb interviewer, the audience had a great time. I wanted more of this if I could find it. I was suddenly just a teeny-bit starstruck.

One of the reasons I became good at this job was that I already knew my way around the capital's top hotels and restaurants. I had been buying the *Good Food Guide* and the *Egon Ronay* guides since the mid-60s. I knew the difference between a *béarnaise* and a *bordelaise*. And I knew that most Hollywood stars only really cared about where they stayed, what suite they would have and where they would eat. They were welcomed as royalty in these places though I always remember escorting Sir John Gielgud from the Connaught when he said, "Going to the john in the Connaught makes one's dick look so shabby."

And I remember going to see Dirk Bogarde at the same hotel. He had a nice suite and was wearing jeans, not his best look. We had some drinks and a chat and then he explained, "I need to change into something smart before we go downstairs. I have an arrangement here that if I sort of loiter around the lobby a bit every day they give me a free room."

Next up was Natalie Wood. She and her husband RJ Wagner were staying at the Dorchester. I'd chosen David Castell to do the interview and there wasn't a back story about tensions in the Dark Continent. David was tall and slender and looked about fourteen. He was the film critic of *The Sunday Telegraph* and was the publisher of my first book. We waltzed into the lobby of the Dorchester and met Natalie and RJ in the lobby. Our lunch venue was the Connaught and we walked there through the pretty, sunlit

Mayfair streets. If Betty Bacall caused a stir in the lobby, that was nothing compared to when Natalie entered the wonderful dining room where the wood panelling had the gloss of toffee apples. Luscious lobster claws, globes of *rognons de veau* and pink slices of beef froze in the air, suspended on silver forks as diners looked around and gasped. On a table by the window, eating alone with a bottle of Ch. Gruaud Larose, was Yul Brynner. He immediately came over, delivered warm greetings, kissed Natalie's hand and returned to his table.

Rest assured, there was quite a clamour down at the NFT as well. And I daresay many hearts were broken when we played the clip from near the end of *The Searchers* when John Wayne sweeps Natalie into his arms and says, "Let's go home Debbie." It was at that point Natalie walked onto the NFT stage. I thought then, this is better than Parkinson, watching it on TV at any rate, because it's a live performance. David Castell conducted the interview very smoothly and there was one unexpected treat for Natalie, a filmed clip from Laurence Olivier who was in Venice making *Brideshead Revisited*. He had appeared on stage with Natalie in a Tennessee Williams thing and sent her this lovely tribute. People just adored her.

Natalie wrote me a lovely letter from her home on North Cañon Drive. Three years later she died in a tragic and controversial drowning accident off Catalina Island. A few years later we had Robert Wagner on stage, interviewed by Joan Bakewell. He couldn't have been more modest or charming. An NFT stalwart and self-appointed Quality Controller, Tony Sloman, came up to me at the reception and said, "Well, that's a first for an NFT interview. Not one mention of a film director." I don't think anyone else noticed.

12: STEVEN SPIELBERG

In February 1978 I went to the Odeon Leicester Square for the official press show of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. It was to be that year's Royal Film Performance and Spielberg was coming to London for the occasion. I thought, well, here's an opportunity.

My first step at procurement was to call Donald Murrey who was the Publicity Director at Columbia's offices in Wardour Street, Soho. Donald was nearing retirement and gangly, instinctively vague, very old school, by the book, still thought Kenneth More was the most popular star in Britain. Donald avoided risks, the unusual. So when I proposed to him that we stage

an interview with Steven Spielberg at the NFT his natural reaction was to go on holiday for the next fortnight.

Back in my office at the NFT I picked up the phone, called Sony pictures and asked to be put through to Mr Spielberg. Now, Spielberg was the absolute hottest thing in movies at that time and, 45 years later, he probably still is. I got him on the phone in minutes. Today that would be totally impossible. Way back then he came on the line right away and after a brief chat I had his agreement to be interviewed by me on stage at the NFT on 15 March, two days after the Royal show.

Columbia put him up at the Connaught and I called him there and to suggest we meet up and go through the evening. He suggested dinner and I thought, great, a splendid dinner at the Connaught. But Spielberg said he wasn't keen on that sort of French stuff, preferring Tony Roma's in St Martin's Lane, a self-styled 'place for ribs.' He held court at a big table and looked like a goofy teenager. Donald Murrey was there, he congratulated me on quite a publicity coup, and just by looking at Donald and then at Spielberg you knew things were changing for good.

On the evening of our little soiree at the NFT, I collected Steven in a limo from the hotel. We talked about David Lean's films and he told me he had spent the day at Stanley Kubrick's house. He went on stage to thunderous applause and said, "This is really frightening." He had never spoken to such a big crowd before and was visibly nervous, as indeed was I. He'd only made three features and we thought we might have to avoid any real discussion of *Close Encounters* since it had only been showing publicly for two days. I asked for a show of hands from people who had seen it. Almost everyone raised an arm.

He spoke publicly, perhaps for the first time, about his childhood in Phoenix, about his parents, his early experiments with 8mm cine cameras and his school days, all of which he later fashioned into his marvellous autobiographical movie *The Fabelmans*. He took us through his early career directing TV shows and his shock at being told he would be directing Joan Crawford. "I had a tan at the time," he said, "and it left my face. It was a very bad experience. The critics said I was too young to direct. I had just turned 21 and all the other directors at the studio were over 35." The TV film which got him noticed was of course *Duel*, released theatrically in Europe. A member of the NFT audience asked why in one shot you see someone sitting in the back of the car reflected in the driver's mirror. "I've been waiting to hear from you for six years," said Spielberg, explaining that it is he in mirror,

directing Dennis Weaver and that the goof was only spotted when the film was shown in a wider ratio in cinemas.

Spielberg was really relaxed by now, just a slightly nerdy movie buff chatting in a room with other even nerdier movie buffs. We glided over the box-office failure and the cutting in Europe of his first feature *The Sugarland Express*, the technical and also the emotional problems he faced when shooting *Jaws* - "Some movies come from within you, others you have to pretend, and I had to pretend *Jaws*" - and the uplifting spectacle of *Close Encounters*.

I sometimes wonder if Steven remembers that evening with us. It was a first for him. I had been at the NFT for only a few months. That night, I thought, I had made my mark.

13: THE MAN WITH THE UMBRELLA

In early 1980 we decided to stage a tribute to MGM studios. It would be in four parts across four months and would be the biggest season the NFT had ever mounted. It came about when I went to Hollywood and met with the CEO of MGM, Frank E Rosenfelt, at the MGM studio in Culver City. That was quite a moment as Frank, a charming man, occupied the same office in the Irving Thalberg Building from which Louis B Mayer conducted his business.

At this time, the NFT was embargoed from showing MGM titles because of some sort of rift between the studio and the National Film Archive. It all seemed rather petty and Frank thought so as well. I outlined our plans and the embargo was lifted; not only that, some key movies would be supplied with newly struck 35mm prints. The season would be curated by myself and my colleague John Gillett and to mark each part we hoped we could lure one of MGM's major stars or directors for an on-stage Q&A session.

With the help of the PR firm Rogers & Cowan I somehow managed to find myself knocking on the front door of 725 North Rodeo Drive. The door opened and there was 67 year-old Gene Kelly with a smile on his face. I walked up the step the sun was shining, it wasn't raining.

The house was exceptionally pretty but modest for Beverly Hills as it was on the 'flats,' south of Sunset Boulevard, rather than north of Sunset which is hilly, Bel-Air and more expensive. From Gene Kelly's house you could actually walk to a bookshop or a grocery store. Of course, he'd love to

come to London, of course he'd do an interview on stage, even do a press conference. Somehow we'd find the money.

We did find the money. Or at least, the BFI's newish Director Anthony Smith found the money. He was extremely good at doing that. He was a careerist who had made his name in current affairs at the BBC. He was profoundly embarrassed by his prosaic name, insisting he was just Tony. He loudly credited himself with coming up with the idea for a new television channel offering culturally diverse, innovative programmes and funded by advertising. This became Channel 4 and Tony assumed he would be its Chairman but that job went to Richard Attenborough who eventually assembled more chairs than Thomas Chippendale. Tony also believed he could be Director-General of the BBC but in that ambition, too, he was thwarted. The BFI beckoned which might have looked a bit like a consolation prize. Tony's natural environment was always in academe so the BFI seemed the ideal home for him. Except he knew nothing about movies. He did, however, have large reserves of enthusiasm.

A meeting was called when Tony announced that he had secured funding from *The Guardian* newspaper for a major series of lectures at the NFT. This had come about largely from the urging of the paper's film critic Derek Malcolm who had seen our recent successes with Lauren Bacall, Natalie Wood and Steven Spielberg and thought the format of the old John Player Lecture series should be resuscitated. For some reason the top brass at the paper agreed. I say 'for some reason' because in all my dealings with them - mainly the socially awkward Editor Peter Preston and their lugubrious PR guy Jon Gordon - I never felt much enthusiasm or encouragement from them. They always looked hopelessly at sea in the many receptions and lunches we held.

As I was the NFT's Lectures & Seminars Officer it fell to me to organise this new enterprise. I knew what was involved and this time I had a proper budget - about twenty-five grand a year I seem to recall. Tony Smith took me to one side and said how wonderful this could be, all these great filmmakers giving lectures about their work and their philosophy. It was clear he had in mind a South Bank version of the BBC's prestigious Reith Lectures. I told Tony in a probably far too condescending (and career ruining) manner that I doubted if the likes of Ingrid Bergman, say, or James Stewart would have the time or the ability to prepare an hour's formal lecture. "Isn't it going to be rather like *Parkinson*. Showbizzy?" asked Tony between gritted teeth. You bet, I said.

This is how Gene Kelly came to be our first *Guardian* 'lecturer.' I took a limo out to Heathrow to meet him. A few paparazzi must have been tipped off about his arrival. A couple of them asked him to pose with an umbrella. He declined. Dignity, always dignity, I thought. In the car he rather unnerved me, just like Betty Bacall had done, by asking why I had selected John Russell Taylor to do the interview. Well, I said, he is a big fan and he's an expert on musicals. Gene opened his travel bag and took out a copy of John's book *The Hollywood Musical*. Gene had annotated it and quoted me a few lines which seemed to be critical of Gene's work. "Doesn't strike me as a fan," he said.

I sensed a disaster looming. In fact, my selection of John Russell Taylor was probably a political error as well. John was the film critic for *The Times* which was a major rival of *The Guardian*. If I had wanted to play this game seriously, I would have asked Derek Malcolm to do the job but as much as I liked Derek I knew he wasn't the right man for this job. JRT was steeped in these movies. He was a superb interviewer.

I checked Gene into the Dorchester on Park Lane. He had a full suite with an enormous sitting room. He wanted me to stay for a while and have a drink. He called room service and got some wine sent up and also organised a full bar for the guests he would be inviting. He then went into the bathroom and came out without his toupée which was quite a shock I can tell you. I thought it was a little gesture of mutual trust.

We held a press conference in NFT3, quite the wrong venue as it turned out - too many people packed into the little room, the wrong ergonomics, lousy for the photographers. We even had TV crews from the BBC and ITV. We moved Gene outside on to the Thames Embankment where he was repeatedly asked to pose with an umbrella. No, he never did that, he said. Dignity, always dignity.

The big day, the first *Guardian Lecture*, was held on 25 May 1980. I remember it vividly as my father rang up with about 30 minutes to go and said he was unable to pee and couldn't take the pain anymore. I urged him to call 999 for an ambulance and hung up. In the green room John Russell Taylor and Gene were getting along just fine. Gene was being attended to by his personal make-up artist, a young woman named Barbara Daly. Vanity, always vanity . . . Barbara had worked on many *Vogue* shoots as well as Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* which of course features an unusual version of *Singin' in the Rain*. I wonder if Gene knew that.

Gene was one of the most lucid guests we ever had. He gave generously with his answers to some cleverly pitched questions. Here he is on how a dance number comes into being: "A dance starts the same way a writers starts writing a script, a poem, or a novel. It starts in the choreographer's head and he sits down, usually in a chair. He doesn't get up and shake his hips and the dance flows out, any more than a writer sits down and starts to move his pencil and, lo and behold, it's *A Dolls House!*"

He explained in detail how his partnerships worked, notably with co-director Stanley Donen, how they shot the rain in that movie, why he never worked with Hitchcock, why his favourite of his own dance numbers is the one with the squeaky board in *Summer Stock*. He revealed that *On the Town* was always his favourite of his own pictures though he saw it recently and thought it looked terribly dated. He said the best musical ever made was Vincente Minnelli's *Meet Me in St Louis* and that his favourite dance number of all time was 'Dancing in the Dark,' performed by Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse in Minnelli's *The Band Wagon*.

I should mention how we got Gene Kelly on stage. We edged to the stage door. The place was packed. All I had to do was open the door and John would go on stage to introduce our guest. Gene turned to Mike Wesson, the NFT's manager, and said "Can you fetch me an umbrella?" Mike got one from his office, I swung open the door, John went on stage, Gene unfurled the broly and walked on stage to thunderous applause. That's what being a movie star is all about.

14: GEORGE & VINCENTE

Ask anyone who had the most beautiful house in Hollywood and many would say George Cukor. George, who was known in some quarters as the Queen of Hollywood, had exquisite taste. The address was 9166 Cordell Drive, just north of Sunset in West Hollywood, a narrow twisty little lane up in the hills. The front door gave nothing away but it opened into a jewel box of a house and garden, sort of Regency style, that put you in mind of Brighton, England. Cukor had scores of framed photographs lining the walls and staircase. I paused at a set of Garbo. "She came to dinner last week," he told me. I sniffed the air for a trace of her perfume. A maid served tea and chocolate dainties.

Cukor bought the house in 1935 and had extended it since then. The swimming pool acquired a celebrity of its own, having been recreated on a Fox sound stage for Cukor's *Something's Got to Give* which was aborted after

Marilyn Monroe was fired and subsequently died of an accidental overdose. I commented on the view from the garden which was of an empty hillside. Why are there no houses, I asked? "Oh, I own the hill," he said with a vague wave of an arm.

George had a companion that day, Paul Morrissey, whom I knew only by reputation. He had made some serious trash. In fact, *Trash* was his most famous film, oozing as it did from the swampy world of Andy Warhol. That wasn't my world but I did once say hello to Mr Warhol who was dining next to me at the Ritz Carlton in New York. Morrissey said he was helping Cukor write an autobiography or possibly edit a volume of Cukor's letters but nothing ever came of it. I don't think Cukor was interested in such things and some have suggested Cukor didn't really like analysing himself too deeply. He had forged an entire career trying to evade his homosexuality and his Jewishness. Apparently he gave regular 'boys' parties where furtive behaviours or soliciting was banned. He was an elegant man whose films were never less than civilised and sophisticated. Getting him to agree to come over to London was a doddle - he loved being remembered, and who wouldn't be?

A few months later I picked up Cukor from Heathrow and checked him into the Connaught. The manager came out to greet him personally and said he would be in the Katharine Hepburn suite. This wasn't actually named after the actress, it was simply her favourite suite at the hotel and she had called them to ask if it were possible. Now, that's what friends are for. It was a lovely room with a small terrace from where, if you stood on tip-toe, you could see Big Ben.

It was now my habit to make sure my guest was comfortable and then go to the restaurant and have breakfast before heading down to the NFT. I only had breakfasts or lunches. I drew the line at dinners. The Connaught did the most wonderful, silky scrambled eggs laced with smoked salmon, all served on toasted brioche. Sometimes they gave you a slice of truffle. I'm not sure the BFI would have approved of paying for my breakfasts at the Connaught . . . but what the hell. It had been an early start for me that morning.

Cukor's appearance at the NFT taught me a big lesson: don't necessarily get an expert to conduct the interview. His interviewer that day was the BFI's very own John Gillett who was perhaps too much of an aficionado, too much of a specialist to get the best out of Cukor. When John started off by asking arcane questions about personal style and obscure

technicians such as George Hoyningen-Huene (a collaborator on Cukor's *A Star is Born*) and studio cameraman Joseph Ruttenberg you could sense the audience getting a little impatient. Cukor was a natural story-teller and all he needed was someone to drop a name like Garbo or Hepburn and he'd go gossiping at a canter. The BBC cameras were recording the entire event so they just cut all that buff-stuff out and emerged with a thoroughly entertaining 40-minute programme.

Cukor's first words to me were, "Most people think I'm ga-ga." Cukor wasn't, but Vincente Minnelli was edging that way, though I managed to get a reasonably cogent interview out of him for *The Guardian* arts pages. I met him at his house which was on the junction of Sunset Boulevard and North Crescent Drive, right across from the Beverly Hills Hotel, an incredible, if rather noisy, location, with a grand entrance on Sunset used when the Minnellis entertained and a smaller entrance for everyday comings and goings on Crescent.

He was dressed in a bright yellow jacket, he was suavely welcoming, he chain-smoked, his voice was weak and husky, he wheezed a bit. His Oscar and other hunting trophies of great directors were displayed on a large table. The house was positively stuffed with memorabilia - fabulous photos, awards, books, posters. He played the piano for me and above the piano was a portrait of him, wearing the same yellow jacket, which he had commissioned from Sascha Lautman. He was immensely proud of it. After my interview we moved out to the terrace where he served martinis with slices of lemon which he picked right off a tree. His British-born fourth wife, Lee, six years younger than he, was most attentive. She seemed eager to promote him lest we all forget. Mr Minnelli was beginning to forget a lot. You could say, he didn't remember it well.

We got him over as part of the ever-lasting MGM season and I chose, once again, John Russell Taylor to do the interview. I never thought Derek Malcolm had the depth of knowledge about Old Hollywood that was required. Minnelli was one of Hollywood's great stylists - *Meet Me in St Louis*, *The Band Wagon*, *The Bad and the Beautiful*, *An American in Paris* were on his CV. Need I go on?

On Sunday 20 July 1980, before the *Guardian Lecture*, I hosted a lunch at the Ritz on Piccadilly. I chose the restaurant because I thought its decor would appeal to Vincente. It looked like a set from *Gigi*. Most of us went for the roast from the trolley and a glass of good claret. I remember one of our waiters had had some accident with his hand and blood could be seen

seeping through the bandage. Not what you expect at the Ritz, though it was perhaps coasting on a bygone reputation.

At the NFT we got Mrs Minnelli into her seat and took Mr Minnelli up to the projection box so he could see our selection of clips. We knew we were in trouble when he said, "What movie is this?" "*Lust for Life*, Mr Minnelli," I said. "Did I do that?" he said. Back at his house, he had singled out this picture as his personal favourite.

John Russell Taylor earned every one of his one hundred pound fee that afternoon. You could say that the problem JRT faced, as I did a few months earlier, was that Minnelli wasn't particularly articulate. He was first and foremost a visual stylist who spoke in a language not of words and sentences but of camera movements, choreography and lighting effects. There was a famous occasion when an awestruck interviewer from *Movie* magazine asked him about a camera movement in his torrid *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. "Why does the camera go up now?" And Minnelli replied, "Because he's watching the sky." The regular newspaper critics had a field day with that one.

The NFT audience saw the struggle JRT was having but were happy, I think, to share a room with Judy Garland's husband and Liza Minnelli's dad. That sort of thing always got the NFT crowd rhapsodic. At one point John's friend, the famous photo archivist John Kobal, rose to his feet and started to interview John about Mr Minnelli's work. Somehow we all got through it. There was a reception afterwards when something odd happened. There was a prominent Labour MP and former government minister named Gerald Kaufman who was a connoisseur of movie musicals. He was an NFT regular and I often gave him tickets. He was desperate to meet Mr Minnelli so I introduced them. I said, "Mr Minnelli I'd like you meet Gerald Kaufman who is a Member of Parliament." Now, Gerald, who was very Jewish, had injured himself and was wearing one of those surgical collars. Minnelli stared at him for quite a while and then said, "Father O'Connor?" We dined out on that for a long time afterwards.

On checking out of the Dorchester Mrs Minnelli went to the kiosk in the lobby and hoovered up a copy of every single glossy magazine they had and charged it to the BFI. I always remember that. That was the last I saw of them. They were headed for a messy future - Vincente became seriously ill with both emphysema and Alzheimer's and Lee nursed him at the house until he died in 1986. Vincente left her some money and the house was willed to Liza with the proviso that Lee could live there until she died. At some

point it seems the house was without electricity and fell into near dereliction, a rarity in that area. Lee sued Liza for neglect and then the house was sold with Lee remaining as a sitting tenant. The situation went unresolved until Lee died in 2009, aged 100. In 2018 Liza held an auction of all her father's personal archive. The portrait by Lautman was offered for \$300.

George Cukor died in 1983. The house on Cordell Drive was sold for \$1.5m to the owners of The Ivy Restaurant in Beverly Hills. The empty hillside is empty no more.

15: LIFE & DEATH IN SPLAJ

In the early 1980s, Libya was a country with a wall around it. If you wanted someone to let you in you had to be either in the oil business or you were a terrorist wanting money to finance your killing sprees. I was not an oilman and I was not a terrorist. I was desperate to go there. I did not have the key to Libya's door. But I knew a man who did. His name was Elley. Derek Elley. Still is.

This is quite a story, by far the most dramatic of my not inconsiderable travelling life, but where to begin? Why did I want to go to Libya? That's easy. In two words: Leptis Magna, the greatest, most spectacular Roman ruin in the world. Who is Derek Elley? That's also easy. He's a friend, a fellow film journalist, who I first met at the NFT, though we soon learned that we were both present at an otherwise empty screening of *The Fall of the Roman Empire* at the Muswell Hill Odeon in 1975-ish. We knew that because the film had broken down and we stuck it out. Unlike me, Derek was well-educated. It says so in his dossier. Cambridge, classics degree, speaks Greek and Latin, big *Ben-Hur* fan, loves clambering over fallen agoras and shattered temples. He is Romulus to my Remus. Or maybe the other way around. He too was besotted by Leptis.

So what about Libya? Wasn't it throwing all moral scruples to the wind to go there? Probably. And the thing is, back in 1981, I rather admired Libya's extraordinary leader, Muammar al-Gaddafi, or however whichever way you spell his name. In 1969 Muammar and a group of fellow army officers came out of nowhere and in a bloodless coup displaced Libya's leader, a dissolute colonial stooge called King Idris. The European oil companies were expelled. It all carried echoes of Nasser's rise to power a decade earlier next door in Egypt.

Muammar introduced many things to Libya. Free housing, free education for all, free health care, subsidised food. It was like some socialist

paradise. Except that Muammar was using his vast oil wealth to buy compliance and docility from his tiny population of around two million. Muammar himself seemed a modest man who lived in a bedouin tent in the grounds of a military barracks. He was a colonel and forsake promoting himself major general or king or sheikh. He seemed to be edging Libya into becoming a secular state and only used Islam when it pleased him. He wrote a book, a little green one instead of Mao's little red one. And then he changed the name of the country. Libya became the Socialist Peoples Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, or SPLAJ.

It took young Derek about a year to arrange our passage. Although he later became a senior film critic for *Variety*, he was then working for a magazine which dealt exclusively with Middle East affairs. Together we concocted a plan to assemble a group of travel writers who would produce glowing accounts of their visit to Libya in the British newspapers. To our astonishment, they took the bait and before long Derek had an entree to the Libyan Peoples Bureau in St James's Square, a splendid building which, in 1984, became infamous when Libyan diplomats opened fire on demonstrators and killed a British police officer, Yvonne Fletcher. This was three years after our visit and rather sealed the fate of Libya in many people's eyes. This was clearly a terrorist state.

Derek paid several visits to the Bureau, drinking lots of sweet tea and exercising such tender yet cajoling diplomatic skills to match those of *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.* The result was six round-trip tickets on Libyan Arab Airlines, all accommodation and meals, the services of a guide and driver, and a tour of all the major archaeological sites including Leptis Magna and Sabratha in Tripolitania and also Cyrene, Ptolemais and Apollonia in Cyrenaica, near Benghazi in the east of the country. All at Muammar's expense.

Six tickets? There was Derek of course, a work colleague of his, John Roberts, and a friend of John's named Nigel Maslin. There was also yours truly, my wife Andrea and lastly, but by no means leastly, there was the legendary film critic of *The Sunday Times*, Dilys Powell, then aged 80. I had got to know Dilys across the years and knew she had a significant life outside the insular film world. She was not only a rather forgiving and generous critic, she was also a Classicist who, in 1926, married Humfrey Payne who was director of the British School of Archaeology in Athens. Payne died tragically young of a bacterial infection in 1931 and Dilys buried him at Mycenae before returning to England and journalism, never abandoning her

love of the Classical World. She knew her way around ancient ruins as she might her own little garden near Hyde Park. She had written an extraordinary account of a stay in Petra and wouldn't mind roughing it in Libya. My wife Andrea would be a sort of companion in the harshness and maleness of the Arab World. My role was to write an article for *The Ham & High* and also to take photographs to illustrate any piece Dilys might write for her paper.

Our motley group flew out to Tripoli on 19 June 1981. Libya had broken out on our passports like a rash - a translation into Arabic of all our personal details and then the gigantic visa stamps. We were met at the airport by a man called Tahar who was to be our government minder for the entire trip. He was about 40, dressed in a sort of tan safari suit that Roger Moore might have coveted, and had a large shock of fuzzy hair. With him was our driver, Muhammed, much darker and swarthier. He had a black Peugeot 504 Estate with seats for all eight of us. At a squeeze.

This would be a trip of many surprises, the first of which was the incredible light show which greeted us as we left Tripoli's brand-new airport terminal. The road into the city was like a floodlit sports stadium - energy was not a consideration here. The second surprise was our hotel which was a car ferry permanently moored in the container port. I remember it as fairly basic, like student accommodation, with vast acreage of shiny stainless steel, chrome and aluminium. Our cabin was tiny and spotless. The restaurant was a buffet, just like school dinners. And then there was a huge lounge area, packed with foreign journalists from all over the world. Everyone wanted to get an interview with Muammar. So like the refugees in *Casablanca* they waited and waited . . . A few might be lucky one day. We were the oddballs, six Brits, one of us in her 80s, doing a sort of Swan Hellenic tour. People have done stranger things here.

The next morning we were all a bit nervy. No one came for us. We scanned the city from the decks of our ferry and wondered if we were free to come and go as we pleased. We could see minarets, a huge castle and we knew there was an arch dedicated to Marcus Aurelius a few blocks in. It looked very enticing. John Roberts thought we should register our arrival with the British Embassy . . . just in case. We tiptoed ashore and found a building with the Union Jack on it. A notice said, 'Closed until Monday. Cricket match.'

Tahar suddenly showed up and took us on a city tour. The Roman arch, Green Square - so called because the road surface was painted green - and the

dusty, unloved museum which displayed antiquities, bedouin relics and stuffed wild animals, including something that might have been a hyena with two heads. All the little shops, so typical of Arab cities, seemed to be boarded up. Tripoli was almost a ghost town. We went back to the ferry for a dinner of pasta and orange juice which was to prove, mostly, our diet for ten days.

Our first major site, Sabratha, lay about 50 miles west of Tripoli. Before WWII Libya was under Italian control and Mussolini's people restored Sabratha's Ancient Roman Theatre. From the front the stage building looked like it was built last week but once inside the theatre the vista was sublime, rows of seats and in golden-hued marble, elegant columns on the stage and beyond the glittering blue of the Mediterranean. It was clear that Tahar had no interest in what we were seeing or knew what there was to see so I guided him out to the only partly excavated amphitheatre. Somehow I managed to miss the museum, a mistake which my wife Andrea often reminds me of, for it contained some of the most beautiful mosaics to have survived from the Roman World.

The next day was the big day. The day of days. We drove east to Leptis Magna which sprawled along a stretch of coast near a town called Homs. It was always a fairly important port in Roman times but when one of its sons, Septimius Severus, became Emperor in 193AD the city was embellished and expanded far beyond its needs. Leptis isn't what you might call a domestic archaeological site like Pompeii, where you can see in great detail how and where the people lived (and died). Leptis is the grand Imperial boast with acres of marble and sculpture, just up from the beach. It has all been preserved by the desert sands which swept in once the city was finally abandoned around 400AD.

There is perhaps the most beautiful Roman theatre to be seen anywhere, the biggest forum, an enormous basilica, a living market, baths, amphitheatre, circus . . . everything a second century Roman needed. Our guide Tahar didn't allow us to go down to the old harbour and lighthouse area, though that didn't stop Nigel Maslin sneaking off to take a peak. We had lunch on the site - yes, they had a museum and a cafe - and then we drove out to see the amphitheatre and the circus, though we weren't allowed to photograph them because of some sensitivity about defence installations further down the coast. We approached the amphitheatre from what appeared to be a ground level only to find ourselves on the top tier looking down into the arena. It was a simply extraordinary sight, like a quarry with ornately carved marbled seating for perhaps 20,000 spectators and one

startled fox. Dilys wasn't impressed. "Pit of death," she muttered. I clambered down to the arena floor where I committed a minor crime by pocketing a small fragment of marble the shape of shark's dorsal fin. It has been with me ever since and now, as I write this, it is immediately in front of me. If I need a book for research and need to weigh a page down, I always use that piece of marble.

After Leptis, we were taken to a dusty little town to witness a military parade for Libyan troops coming back from the war in Chad. Gaddafi and some breakaway Chadian factions planned to annex a large strip of territory in the north of the country, a casual invasion opposed by the government in N'Djamena and their French backers. The war rumbled on for years before Libya was forced into an ignominious retreat.

We were shown to seats on a rickety little wooden grandstand. There was also a bunch of foreign journalists including a glamorous woman from *Newsweek* named Elaine Sciolino. Sitting up there on the grandstand we watched the troops march past, there was loud wailing Arab music, there were horses and camels and a lot of men in flowing robes rushing about firing guns into the air. It was like a scene from John Milius's *The Wind and the Lion*. It was rumoured that Muammar himself would arrive and give one of his trademark five-hour speeches. Sadly, we had to make do with a three-hour précis from his number two, Major Abdessalam Jalloud.

I fancied getting some photos and when Elaine Sciolino said she was going for a walk I tagged along. She had no trouble at all getting these young, barely educated Libyan soldiers to mob around her and tell her their stories. One of these young guys, probably a teenager, gave her a present. It was a medal he had been awarded. I think she got a military cap as well.

It was time to move on. We were taken to a modern hotel with a vast downstairs lobby lounge decorated with an enormous mural of Gaddafi in flowing robes riding a white charger. We had a meal, killed an hour or two and then took a flight through a thunderstorm on a clapped out old Libyan airliner. Welcome to Benghazi!

Tahar came with us to Benghazi where we picked up another Peugeot, white this time, and another driver. It was a long drive up into the Jebel Akhdar, or Green Mountains, for our next spectacle, the ancient site of Cyrene which sprawls around the village of Shahat. At Cyrene, nestled among the cool hills, the Greeks built a magnificent city, rather like Delphi in Greece itself, so Derek and Dilys, classicists both, who perhaps resented the Romans for their dominance, their bling and cruelty, fell into a sort of ecstasy with the

Doric columns, the scent of wild herbs, the oleander, the bleating of sheep, the sound of trickling water. A place to get out your old black-spined Penguin Classic editions and sit awhile under a shady bough. Cyrene was a magical place, never more so when, in the Sanctuary of Apollo, we all drank water straight from a lion's head fountain, fed by a natural spring. Restoration work was taking place on the monumental Temple of Zeus with much left to do after that, including the entire Roman section of the city with its vast forum, a theatre and a circus.

Our accommodation that night was not exactly the Ritz, being a makeshift camp hastily built for Pakistani road builders. Tahar thought it unwise for Dilys to spend the night alone so Andrea moved in with her and I shared a room with Derek. While the two women went to bed early - it had been an exhausting day - we men stayed up chatting, drinking tea, smoking, listening to the baying of wild dogs and crushing the odd scorpion which came scuttling towards us.

In the morning we drove down to the coast to a place called Ras Al-Halel where there was a fairly basic seaside hotel comprised of several individual . . . well, to call them villas would be an exaggeration. Four concrete walls, a door, a window and a roof. But bougainvillea blazed against the white walls, date palm fronds rustled, it was all surprisingly pleasant. We got to our rooms and met up for a lunch of salad and the ubiquitous orange juice. I sat opposite Tahar and distinctly remember how utterly foul was the stench rising from his sandalled feet. Maybe he smelled it too because he suggested that before visiting the next Roman site - Apollonia - we all went to a local beach for a swim. I don't think any of us had come prepared for the beach - least of all Andrea and Dilys - but Tahar was adamant. While Derek stayed behind at the hotel - he would have preferred five hours of root canal work to one hour on a beach - we got into the car and drove for about ten minutes to this grotty beach area. There was sand sure enough, heavily polluted by thick globules of oil.

While we rather reluctantly fussed around with a sun shade, Tahar stripped off his clothes down to whatever it is that Arab men wear instead of briefs or Y-fronts, a sort of loose-fitting loin cloth affair. He dived headlong into the pounding, frothy, oily surf and was immediately swept out to sea with frightening speed. He was dead within five minutes. His body washed up near a little pier about a hundred yards away to our left where a couple of men fished him out of the water. By the time we got there he was lying on the broken concrete wall. He looked pathetically small and foam bubbled out

of his mouth. This would have been bad enough in Italy or Spain. But Libya?

Within minutes the police arrived and we were ordered into our car and escorted to the local station. No one spoke English. People just looked at us. For a while it seemed as if we were suspects. Perhaps half an hour passed before a uniformed army captain showed up to take charge. He was young, handsome, spoke perfect English and seemed quite bemused by the situation. He sat at a desk, we men stood before him, Andrea and Dilys were given chairs. He pointed at Dilys and said, "How old are you?" Dilys said with all the pride of the well-born Englishwoman, "I am eighty years old. How old are you?"

Andrea went with our driver back to the hotel where she woke Derek from his slumbers and told him the news. She was in shock and in tears. We all were. When we were six again the army officer sought to get as much information as possible and it was a huge relief to us all that our driver had also witnessed what had happened. The army officer was reassuring and became quite chatty. He told us, "Don't be so upset. It was the will of Allah that he would die today." At one point he told us that he had lived in London for some months at the Royal Garden Hotel in Kensington. We could only imagine what he might have been doing. And then a curious thing happened. He looked at Andrea and said, "Do you work for *Newsweek* magazine?" "No, London Weekend Television," she said. "OK," he said, "We are looking for a woman from *Newsweek* who has a medal given to her by one of our soldiers." Now that was a few days before and 500 miles away. That is what you call a country with an airtight security apparatus. That night, Andrea shared with Dilys and I shared once more with Derek. No one slept.

It was a tragedy that befell Tahar and a shame that we had to forfeit our visit to Apollonia. I longed to see the Roman theatre which had partially collapsed so that the stage area was literally on the beach and had become tidal. But we were taken to Benghazi, via the scruffy site of Ptolmais, and put up at a decent hotel, the Kasr Al-Jaziera which overlooked the harbour.

The Libyans were being exceptionally kind to us, aware of what a shock we had experienced. One problem they had was that Tahar's briefcase was missing and along with it all our documentation and air tickets. At least they never took our passports. It would take them a couple of days to organise our journey back to London so they needed to keep us occupied and amused. We wanted to go back to Tripoli to thank Muammar in person for his gracious

hospitality. We were told he was meeting Martin McGuinness, or perhaps it was Kate Adie, or Ken Livingstone, or maybe he was playing a round of golf. So they took us to a school for young children where we were given totally authentic, government issue hats in Libyan green.

They also took us to a very large building, like a warehouse. What we saw inside was astonishing, world changing. There were rows - aisles really - of shelving laden with various foodstuffs and household items. People were walking down the aisles wheeling metal trolley things, putting their foodstuffs into the trolley and when they had chosen what they wanted they went to the front of the building and paid someone for the whole lot in one go. This had revolutionised shopping in Libya, we were told, because in the Jamahiriya this was the way forward. The old individual market traders were a thing of the past, swept away in the great march forward. In due course, we were told, this new way of shopping would slowly become the norm across the globe. "What do you call this place?" I asked. "The People's Market," said our minder. "We call them supermarkets," I said.

Back at the hotel we were getting impatient. We had separate rooms, and private bathrooms, and every day the woman who serviced Dilys's room insisted she also brushed her hair. Until this point everyone had remained quite calm and was careful about their language. Then Dilys's fuse snapped. We were all gathered in her large room and she said, "I'm fed up with this fucking country. No one has a clue what's going on. I've got a press show in two days!" She was also worried about her little dog.

We flew back to London on 28 June and shortly after we sent a letter of condolence to Tahar's widow via the People's Bureau in St James's. Many months later we received a message conveying her thanks and her view that it was Allah's will that her husband died that day. Dilys Powell lived on until 1995, attending press shows in a dressing gown and slippers, doggedly writing film reviews right until the end. She never wrote about her visit to Libya. Muammar Gaddafi's rule over Libya continued with increasing harshness and repression. His early idealism dissolved into debauchery and despotism until, in 2011, as part of the disastrous 'Arab Spring,' fermented by the old colonial powers, his people rose up and tortured and murdered him in a bombed-out street. He had been hiding in a drain. With the death of Gaddafi and Libya's abrupt descent into chaos, Leptis Magna entered into another deep, silent sleep on the alluring yet pitiless shores of Africa. In 2024, it slumbers on.

16: CURTAIN CALLS

My boss at the NFT, Ken Wlaschin, sent me behind the Iron Curtain on many occasions. In 1981 I went to Bucharest, the capital of Romania, to select a programme of new films to show at the NFT. In 1979 Romania's president, Nicolae Ceausescu, had been accorded a State Visit to the UK, instigated by Britain's Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Ceausescu was regarded as a friendly commie who kept his distance from the Kremlin and would order British-made fighter aircraft. Thus he was given an honorary knighthood for services to grand larceny and murder. As a result of this diplomatic chumminess the British Council embarked on a series of cultural exchanges - one almost expected Lord Pinkrose to show up in Bucharest and deliver a lecture on Byron. The NFT dutifully played its part in the cultural exchange.

The Romanians put me up in this ghastly hotel, the Dorobanti, which was full of military personnel. I was convinced my room was bugged or had been searched because my minder asked me about Frederick Forsyth and I just happened to have a book by him in my room. The films they showed me were dreadful and the people I dealt with were totally cheerless. Normally on these trips you could expect a nice dinner or two at a local restaurant and maybe a little drinks gathering at the movie studio. But the Romanians made no effort to be nice. Bucharest itself was falling apart and no one had bothered to clear up the mess caused by a small earthquake a few years before. At the end of the main street was this incredible building, bigger than Versailles, where Comrade Ceausescu and his ugly wife lived in absolute luxury.

The only civilised place in town was the InterContinental Hotel, a hideous high-rise a short walk from my hotel. InterContis were to be found in most Soviet satellite states and the restaurants were always reliable. And there was always a routine. You order your food, you enjoy your meal and then the waiter presents you with a bill. Let's say it comes to 10,000 Leu which, using the official conversion rate, was £20. "You wish to pay in dollars?" asks the waiter. I slip him a ten dollar bill. He returns with another bill, this time for 25,000 Leu and that is the bill I present to the BFI on my return. I am inventing exchange rates here but you get the picture.

The only good thing I remember about Bucharest was the coffee. A huge, sweetened caffeine hit to rival the best that Istanbul could offer. One morning I paid a social call on the British Council which had an office in the

rather grand, Regency-style British Embassy. The Council's representative put a kettle on and took a jar of Nescafe Gold Blend off a shelf. "I bet you want a decent cup of coffee," he said.

That season of Romanian films was one of the NFT's few low points. On Christmas Day 1989, Ceausescu and his wife were arrested one morning, put on trial by lunchtime and shot that afternoon. As Omar Sharif says in *Doctor Zhivago*, "Good man to shoot, that." I went back to Bucharest in 2015. And what a transformation had taken place. There were smiles on people's faces.

The Hungarian state film organisation, Hungarofilm, held their film week in February so Budapest was cold, wet and muddy. They put the foreign delegations into a terrible, greasy hotel called the Royal on a street which was being dug up to make a new tramline. It looked like *All Quiet on the Western Front*. My friend Derek Elley was also on this not-so-jolly and we managed to abscond for a morning to inspect the sopping wet, rubbish-strewn ruins of two Roman amphitheatres in the slummy suburbs. I absconded rather more than that and took in all the city's major sites which, in 1980, were faded relics of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. The city looked grey and exhausted with a sewer, otherwise known as the Danube, running through it.

I absconded, too, from several screenings because the movies were beyond grim and, anyway, I had a book to complete so I hammered away on my portable Brother typewriter in my grotty room. Ken Wlaschin berated me from missing what was apparently the best film of the week - something called *Angi Vera* - though I did attend the screening of a nasty rural drama called *The Stud Farm (A ménesgazda)* which included a scene in which several dogs were shot for real. British critic Dilys Powell was so appalled by this she got all the British contingent to noisily walk out and lodge an official complaint. I went back to Budapest in 2015 and found the place transformed. The old Empire buildings had been smartened up and the old Royal hotel had become a five-star place called the Corinthia. People were smiling.

The only Soviet state I had any time for was Czechoslovakia - I loved Prague, I loved the people, I loved the Moser crystal glassware and I loved the local *pilsner* and the food. They had a way with fatty, yeasty dumplings, roast duck or goose and red cabbage that, if cooked correctly as in a restaurant called U-Kalička, was one of the world's great gastronomic experiences. They even made some decent movies, partly inspired by the 'Prague Spring' of Alexander Dubček's liberal government which enabled

directors like Miloš Forman and Jiri Menzel to break through until the thugs in the Kremlin had enough and sent the tanks rolling in. Just as they did in Hungary in 1956, just like Ukraine today. It's what the Russians always do. From Kaliningrad to Vladivostok, they are all culpable.

Every two years I went to a Czech spa town called Karlovy Vary for the film festival. I was never a fan of film festivals and I only liked them when the weather was nice and when they were held somewhere I fancied visiting. Bombay, for instance, or Los Angeles, Taormina or Antalya. Karlovy Vary was definitely one of the nicer ones, a Soviet showplace yes, alternating with Moscow, but held in this utterly gorgeous town nestled in a wooded valley. I used to be driven up there from Prague in a Russian-built limo called a Zil. Comrade Brezhnev had one. Or two.

One of the films I saw at the 1984 Karlovy Vary festival was called *The Emissary Who Did Not Return*. It was made in Korea. In my innocence I went along assuming this was a Korean movie, emanating from Seoul, but this was North Korea and it was directed by a man called Shin Sang-ok. The movie was an espionage drama, set in the 1900s and shot in Czechoslovakia and other Soviet states. It had caused huge excitement in North Korea because audiences there had hardly seen anything beyond their own borders. It took some time to ferret out the delegation from Pyongyang who represented it but in the end we secured it for the London Film Festival. To our amazement we were told Mr Shin would attend the screenings.

Shin Sang-ok's life and career is an epic of ambiguity. He and his actress partner/wife, Choi Eun-hee, were big-time filmmakers in the South, though Mr Shin was born in the North, then under Japanese occupation. In 1978 Choi Eun-hee was apparently kidnapped in Hong Kong by agents of Kim Jong-il's Utopian People's Democratic Republic of Korea. Mr Shin was kidnapped a little later, also in Hong Kong. Except that insiders believe they were not kidnapped at all but had defected because their careers had started to founder and they had fallen out, also big-time, with South Korea's despotic General Park. In those days both Koreas were hells on Earth. I won't attempt to explain this story any further since you won't understand it and that is because I don't understand it myself. The whole Shin saga gives new meaning to the word murky. There are stories of imprisonment, divorce, forced re-marriage, coercion and collusion, and other weird stuff.

North Korea's London embassy operated out of a semi-detached house on the North Circular Road, just down the road from *Carry On* star Sid James's house and opposite the house occupied by a pop group called The

Seekers. It was about half a mile from my own house in Ealing. I went there a few times to thrash out some of the finer details. The PDRK would cover their own costs which included putting up their delegation in the big tourist-class hotel that directly overlooks Tower Bridge. It was all beginning to look like an episode of *The Avengers*.

By this time the Home Office was on the case. So were MI5 and MI6. And the local coppers. Everyone expected trouble. We were assigned two 'liaison officers' who came to inspect the NFT and, one supposed, search for likely firing positions from some sort of Jackal character. There were genuine concerns about South Korean hit squads or an elaborately staged defection from Mr Shin. His wife did not accompany him so it was assumed that the PDRK wanted to ensure Mr Shin, unlike his fictional emissary, would return to Pyongyang like a well-behaved puppy.

Of course everything passed off without incident. There were a few mild-mannered demonstrators from the South who stood outside the NFT waving placards but that was it. My main memory of that rather melodramatic episode is sitting down with Mr Shin and his army of minders drinking expensive whisky at the bar in the Tower Hotel. It was impossible not to notice that they all wore immaculately tailored suits and on their wrists were heavy, solid gold Rolex watches. And Mr Shin himself? Perfectly pleasant, polite, somehow distant and vacant. He reminded me of Laurence Harvey in *The Manchurian Candidate*.

A few years later, at a film festival in Vienna, MI5's worries were realised. Mr and Mrs Shin defected to the West. They were smiling.

17: MARTY & BOBBY

I first encountered Martin Scorsese in November 1980. He was on the phone from New York and it was like talking to a Sten gun. Words poured from him in an incoherent firestorm. I had no idea what he was talking about, though he did insist right away that I call him Marty.

Marty had a particular bee in his bonnet which was the tendency of colour films to fade over the years. Some were more vulnerable than others. As if to prove a point, Marty's current film, *Raging Bull*, had been shot in black and white. A flop on release, this movie has become one of the highest rated American films ever made. I don't mind admitting that I have tried and failed twice to get past more than an hour of it. Do we really care about any of the appalling people in it, or all that photographic gloating over blood and sweat, and all that monotonous bad language? I find it utterly repellent. I

thought Scorsese's relish for these savage, inarticulate people marked him as psychotic.

At the London Film Festival we put on a sort of Scorsese double-bill, a screening of *Raging Bull* and a stage event which Ken Wlaschin insisted we called *The Colour Film Problem* while I wanted to call it *Not Fade Away*. Win some, lose some.

I picked up Marty at Heathrow late at night and we drove to Claridge's. With him was his wife Isabella Rossellini. As we got to Harrods Marty ordered the car to stop and he jumped out, waving his arms about, pointing at the famous department store all beautifully lit up like a beached cruise ship with pinprick neon. "This is what I want for my movie!" he said, thinking ahead to how Boris Leven might design the sets for *New York, New York*.

The next day at Claridge's Marty was ensconced with the rest of his team - Thelma Schoonmaker who had edited most of Marty's pictures and was a sort of mother figure who kept the erratic *auteur* in check, and also Mark del Costello who was Marty's archivist and general factotum. Mark was needed on stage at the NFT because Marty himself was barely in control of himself, high on God knows what, low on coherence. Nevertheless, he had an important message and he was one of the first advocates for film preservation, or is it conservation?

Before Marty arrived in London he rang me several times at three in the morning so I had to stand listening to him in the hallway of our freezing Victorian house in Ealing. After one of these calls I was physically sick. It reminded me of a story about Sam Goldwyn told to me by Willy Wyler. Sam would from call from New York at ungodly hours and once Willy said, "Sam, do you know what time it is?" and heard Sam turn to his wife and say, "Hey, Wyler wants to know what time it is." What we are talking about here is a species of selfishness.

Marty even got me taking him down to the NFT's film storage rooms - which we called the Vaults - at five in the morning to run some footage on the 35mm Steenbecks. Marty was looking for prints which had faded badly which we could show as illustrative clips. He was especially thrilled to see a print of Anthony Mann's *Strategic Air Command*. I put it on for him. Sadly, the print was pristine.

I can't deny having major problems with Scorsese at the beginning - as Thelma might have said, he was a handful. But Marty mellowed, cleaned himself up and became one of Hollywood's elder statesmen, a tireless and passionate campaigner for world cinema. Sadly, with few exceptions - *The*

Age of Innocence, *The Aviator* and *Hugo* - I continued to dislike his movies and now just I don't even bother seeing them. Things like *Casino*, *Goodfellas*, *The Departed et al* are just nasty, one-note, foul-mouthed bores. And then there are the turgid worthy ones.

The film that, for me, exemplifies Scorsese's weakness as a director is his 1991 remake of *Cape Fear*. It's a story about a psychopathic rapist who cleverly arranges his release from prison after serving 14 years and then menaces the small town prosecutor and his family who sent him to jail. The original film, made in 1962, starred Gregory Peck as the prosecutor and Robert Mitchum as the rapist and both were ideally cast, perhaps typecast. Scorsese's version stars Robert De Niro and Nick Nolte and that's the first weakness as they are interchangeable. Either actor could have played either part.

The 1962 film was directed by J Lee Thompson, a prolific British director who was chosen by Gregory Peck after having made *The Guns of Navarone* with the star. Thompson also had a history of making pictures about serious crime and legal process. *Cape Fear* was his first film in America and is a minor classic, full of nuance, menace and dread, beautifully shot in black and white and enhanced by a fabulous Bernard Herrmann score. It's all rather reminiscent of Charles Laughton's masterpiece, *The Night of the Hunter*.

The Scorsese picture is obviously well-made but extremely crude, lacking any nuance, just a headlong rush to a schlocky, totally implausible, blood-spattered conclusion. The portrayals of Nolte and De Niro are one-dimensional with De Niro developing into an indestructible monster like Godzilla. It might have been funny except for a disgusting rape scene when De Niro bites off the cheek of his victim and spits it across the room. Scorsese has always sucked up to the thugs in his audience.

At the time of the film's release I happened to interview J Lee Thompson in Los Angeles. "Scorsese is my favourite director," he said. "I've seen *The King of Comedy* six times. My other favourite of his is *New York, New York*. Also, Robert de Niro is my favourite actor. Then I heard that Peck and Mitchum were were in the film and they were using Bernard Herrmann's old music score. It was in safe hands. They treated it as a remake of a little black-and-white thriller and spent around \$35 million on it." J Lee had a good chortle at that. "It's over the top and has three endings too many. The audience I saw it with were laughing their heads off." J Lee was visibly upset that Scorsese had never once contacted him about it, let alone offered him a walk-on part like Hitchcock.

I will always be grateful to Marty, however, for persuading his frequent collaborator Robert de Niro to do one of these *Guardian Lectures*. He even cared enough to come over to London for it and I got a nice picture of myself with the two of them. Getting de Niro was quite a coup for us. Maybe it was a coup for him, too. Bobby, as he insisted I call him, may have come alive on screen but in real life he wasn't that how shall I put it kindly . . . communicative? I got Chris Auty from *Time Out* magazine to do the interview-cum-soliloquy. Marty himself got up and answered a question, maybe to help out or maybe just grandstanding. Nevertheless, I think the audience were grateful just being in the same room, breathing the same air as the 'greatest actor of his generation.' Yeah, life's tough, Al. After the event we all went off to a Chinese restaurant where Bobby had invited some mates of his, all members of a rock group called The Clash. They - and Bobby - all seemed to be suffering from prostate problems as they visited the loo quite often.

An amusing if pathetic little admin issue came in Bobby's wake. I had agreed to pay his airfare and put him up at his preferred hotel which was Blakes in Kensington. I factored this in to my annual budget of sponsorship money from *The Guardian*. Then I heard that the cost of Bobby's visit to London would be covered by David Puttnam who was about to start *The Mission* with Bobby in the lead. His trip was now also for make-up and wardrobe tests so we saved a shed-load of money. I thanked David most warmly. He knew the money was important to us. A month or two later I got a memo from the BFI's finance director threatening me with a disciplinary meeting for underspending on that budget. What an arsehole.

18: MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

On 29 March 1982 *Chariots of Fire* carried off four Oscars - for Best Picture, Best Screenplay, Best Music and Best Costume Design. It was when the latter award was announced, early in the proceedings, that David Puttnam, the film's producer, knew he would win the Big One. Movies with nice coats and frocks often win Best Picture. Or in this case, muddy cotton shorts and starchy frock coats.

The film's screenwriter, Colin Welland, an actor we all knew from *Z-Cars*, went on stage and said, "The British Are Coming." He didn't shout this in the manner of "Let slip the dogs of war!" He said it almost apologetically, sheepishly, very Britishly. One man was truly robbed that night and his name was Hugh Hudson who just happened to be the film's director. The

Academy had decided that this low-budget British movie couldn't possibly win too much so they decided that year's best director would be Hollywood actor and smoothie Warren Beatty who had made the year's longest and most expensive vanity project, *Reds*. The crime against Hugh wasn't matched until 2000 when Ridley Scott was overlooked as the man who directed that year's Best Picture, *Gladiator*. I'm sure he will have his vengeance.

Hugh followed *Chariots of Fire* with the revisionist Tarzan picture, *Greystoke, the Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*, which is some sort of over-reaching masterpiece, arguably more Joseph Conrad than Edgar Rice-Burroughs. But then Hugh went from golden boy to industry outcast in the blink of a camera shutter. His movie about the American War of Independence, *Revolution*, went way over budget, virtually bankrupting Goldcrest Pictures. Al Pacino's performance was ridiculed and it was a colossal flop. It's was Britain's answer to Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*.

And like Cimino, Hugh was a bit of a victim of circumstance, but arrogant with it. Born into privilege, an Old Etonian, Hugh looked like a dashing young blade but he was a committed Socialist whose best known movie, after *Chariots*, was a Party Political Broadcast for the Labour Party which became known as *Kinnock: The Movie*. Before turning to features he had made some of the most familiar and eye-catching commercials. He once took me to breakfast at the Hyde Park Hotel in Knightsbridge and tried hard to conceal from me the Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow that had been valet parked for him. Intriguingly, Cimino had once done exactly the same thing with another Roller, this time a metallic gold Corniche convertible valet parked at the Bel Age Hotel in LA.

Because I had publicly admired *Revolution*, Hugh took a shine to me and got me reading a few novels he fancied making into movies - Sinclair Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal* for example - and I thought he might be on the verge of offering me some sort of script development job. I went out to LA when he was shooting a movie called *Lost Angels* starring a rock star called Adam Horovitz. *Greystoke* and *Revolution* had both been about painful relationships between fathers and sons and so was *Lost Angels*, which pitched itself as a *Rebel Without A Cause* for the modern era. It was a bitter artistic failure and hardly released anywhere, so my location report intended for *The Guardian* never appeared. I remember that trip chiefly for spending some time with the celebrated photographer Robert Frank whom Hugh had hired on special assignment.

The collapse of Hugh's career was swift and shocking - perhaps he needed the support of a strong producer like Puttnam who had soon bailed out of *Greystoke*, leaving Hugh to handle both the incredibly complex logistics - shooting in Cameroon for heaven's sake - and the soaring budget. After *Lost Angels*, Hugh's films were few and far between and on the obscure side of unknown. He spent his last years tramping around the the world's film festivals. He died in 2023.

Hugh was one of an elite group of directors whose careers were kick-started by Puttnam. Ridley Scott made his first feature, *The Duellists*, for David. I only got to meet Ridley once, when he was interviewed at the NFT by Iain Johnstone. He is not the most articulate of men but and you just have to marvel at his stamina - one vast period epic after another, most recently *Napoleon* and *Gladiator II* made at the age of 86. He is the Methuselah of the cinema.

Roland Joffé's first film was *The Killing Fields*, a breathtakingly ambitious feature about the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia. Joffé and Puttnam followed this with *The Mission*, about the Jesuit *reducciones* in Paraguay, from an old script by Robert Bolt. I met Joffé twice when the NFT had premiere screenings of these films. I thought he was just about the brainiest director I had ever met - intellect just oozed out of him. Sadly, his career rather fizzled out into a string of dull and worthy failures.

Which leaves us with Alan Parker, the working class lad from Islington, as he never failed to remind us. He mocked his mentor David Puttnam for getting a knighthood, well before Alan himself was so ennobled. Alan was always slightly suspicious of me because I worked for the BFI, an institution he regarded as so irrelevant and elitist that he eventually became its Chairman. I remember an extraordinary dinner with him in San Rafael in northern California where he was filming arguably his best movie, *Shoot the Moon*, a marital drama that had the bleakness of a Bergman picture such as *A Passion*. I wanted to talk about the picture he was making but all Alan wanted to talk about was the BFI and why people there, such as John Gillett, hated his work so much. It's true that Alan's prolific career was uneven but its range was quite phenomenal, from the kiddie musical *Bugsy Malone* to the horrors of *Midnight Express* to the racial drama *Mississippi Burning* to the internment of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor in *Come See the Paradise* to the awesome technical command displayed in *Evita*. Alan was a remarkable talent and a brilliant cartoonist yet he always harboured a grudge against the British film establishment and the widely held prejudice among

British film critics who scoffed at these directors who came from advertising (to be strictly accurate, Joffé came from TV drama). Parker moaned about this for his entire career. You could say he was the most balanced man I ever met because he had a chip on both shoulders.

19: CLEVER CLOGS

Of course, organising these *Guardian Lecture* events brought me into contact with some famous people. A lot of famous people. Most of these people were smart. Some were merely clever. And a very select few were just jaw-droppingly brilliant. These were people who lived entirely inside their brains, their heads. "Everything else is just transport," as Sherlock Holmes (Benedict Cumberbatch edition) said about the rest of one's boney, bloody, fleshy, slimey, suppurating carcass.

Peter Greenaway was one such brain on sticks. He even looked like everyone's idea of the Baker Street sleuth. I encountered him a few times, taking him on stage for Q&A sessions at the London Film Festival following multiple showings of *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *A Zed and Two Noughts*. The first of these films was a major breakthrough, not only for Greenaway himself but also for Channel 4 and the BFI Production Board which financed it. The film became a major art house success - Sir John Gielgud was spotted queueing to see it in Belsize Park and Alan Parker ridiculed it as "a pile of posturing poo-poo." Many thought that was the highest recommendation.

The Draughtsman's Contract lifted Greenaway from total obscurity to artistic genius in the blink of a camera shutter. He obviously relished it but off-stage he was just a nice bloke, not in the least condescending. By the time we got to *A Zed and Two Noughts* a few years later he had become rather grand. On stage he was incredible. Never content to give a simple answer to a simple question, he delivered impromptu discourses which might encapsulate the history of European art to the history of the Roman Empire to grand opera and the French *nouvelle-vague*. And that was in response to a question like, "Erm, Mr Greenaway, what the fuck was that all about?" Maybe Greenaway's liking for self-analysis and elucidation for the less sophisticated was ultimately self-defeating, opening him up to mockery. Maybe he should have just kept *shtum*, like Stanley Kubrick, and let the mystique cast its spell.

Dennis Potter was another brainstorm. The NFT had mounted an extensive season of Potter's dramas, one of the first occasions when the NFT treated television as seriously as film, mainly down to a guy at the National

Film Archive called Paul Madden who found an easy ally in the BFI's Director Tony Smith who knew quite a lot about TV and nothing about the cinema. Potter's reputation was sky high and the BBC had agreed to film the interview and show it in their series of *Guardian Lectures*, alongside the interviews with movie stars and directors. But suddenly the BBC pulled out and to this day no one knows the real reason. It was said at the time that the BBC did not regard Potter as a proper subject in that series and they may well have been right; the BBC had several arts programmes which could have done the job just as well. Potter himself was quite indignant about the situation so his regular producer Kenith Trodd quickly organised his own private film crew. He was interviewed on stage by Philip Purser, the TV critic of *The Sunday Telegraph*, who may have looked a little shambolic and uncomfortable but he drew out of Potter an unforgettable two hours of non-stop bile. Potter smoked throughout the interview and spent a lot of time discussing the relationship between TV drama and movie drama, slagging off the BBC with some relish. This was in 1980, nearly 15 years before a terminally ill Potter, sipping opium, gave a landmark television interview to Melvyn Bragg. The recording of the NFT event remained unseen until 2019.

Jonathan Miller was another brain on stilts and another Holmesian silhouette, angular, birdlike, a pretty poly-polymath with a wonderfully sonorous voice. Clive Hodgson had suggested the NFT did some sort of season around him which was quite difficult as Miller didn't really have a coherent career - he just had bits and pieces, led by a radical TV adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*. Clive and I went to see him at his home on Gloucester Crescent, a few doors away from both Alan Bennett and Michael Palin. It was positively crepuscular in there, stuffed with books and stuffed with . . . stuff. It was like the study at 221b Baker Street: "Dust, Mrs Hudson, is an essential part of my filing system."

My main memory of Miller is in 1987 when he interviewed Jack Lemmon for us at the NFT. This was a major event and the demand for tickets was akin to a Wimbledon final. Miller was directing Lemmon in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* at the National Theatre, the Hollywood star's first and only stage appearance in London. I knew Lemmon slightly as I had spent a week on the set of *Buddy, Buddy*, the last film he made with Walter Matthau and Billy Wilder. He always seemed a bit distant, reserved, slightly suspicious of strangers.

Miller and Lemmon agreed to have lunch with me at the Savoy Hotel, just to chat over the details. Lemmon's wife, Felicia Farr, made up the

foursome. First off, my immediate boss, Sheila Whitaker, said she wanted to tag along. Then the NFT's controller, Leslie Hardcastle, got wind of it and he joined the party. Finally, the BFI director Anthony Smith said he couldn't possibly not go. As usual, no one from *The Guardian* was present as they seemed rather shy of these occasions. So it all looked like a BFI staff lunch with Mr & Mrs Lemmon and Dr Miller. At least I had a genuine reason for being there as I was paying the bill and organising the transport. The next day I got a strong memo from Tony Smith expressing his disgust at the whole thing and the vast expense. I was reminded of *Casablanca*: "I am shocked, shocked, to find that gambling is going on in here."

That interview with Lemmon, conducted by Miller, was perhaps the finest I have ever seen with an actor. A masterclass. What a shame it wasn't filmed.

Frederic Raphael was also terribly, terribly clever. The word erudite might have been invented specifically for him. On my school leaving certificate one teacher had written, "For Turner, who is nobody's fool . . ." and I guess that plagued me for most of my life and possibly for most of Raphael's too. He was a prime target for my NFT gigs - I loved screenwriters and Freddie had racked up quite a filmography, starting with two piercing satires on British life - *Nothing but the Best* and *Darling*, for which he won an Oscar, then a dreamy adaptation of Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* and then one of my all-time faves, the bittersweet romantic comedy *Two for the Road*, starring Albert Finney and Audrey Hepburn. Into this mix you have to add the BBC drama series *The Glittering Prizes* which charts the lives of several Cambridge graduates from the 1950s to the 1970s. Tom Conti plays Adam Morris, a dead ringer for his creator, and he is an insufferable, superior bore with Jewish hang-ups already. I loved the arrogance, the entitlement and the honesty of that characterisation.

Raphael's film career teetered a bit later on and he retreated to France and into classicism, fiction, translation and journalism but he came back to write the script for Stanley Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*. I think Raphael's book about his experience, *Eyes Wide Open*, is one of the very best and wittiest books ever written about movie-making. The Kubrick family hated it.

Raphael himself was splendid company, a gifted raconteur, and I regret I have absolutely no recollection of who conducted the interview with him. I do remember that over dinner our conversation topics drifted towards Los Angeles and my enthusiasm for the Beverly Wilshire Hotel's poolside

cabanas. The next day Freddie sent me a signed copy of his bitter-sweet novel *California Time*. I might add that his review of one of my own books is also one of the best things he ever wrote.

You might have thought that some great European auteurs would belong in this select little grouping of mine. Ingmar Bergman perhaps, purveyor-in-chief of Nordic gloom and an intimate of God. A god himself perhaps since he virtually invented the art house cinema by serving up its first main dish, *The Seventh Seal*. We got Bergman on the NFT stage on slightly false pretences because we conned him into being interviewed about Alf Sjöberg, a mentor of his. Bergman didn't come across as an intellectual heavyweight. He was just a fellah.

Alain Resnais directed *Last Year in Marienbad*, a playful, impossibly dreamy little movie of 1961 set in a European spa where people wander around in B&W Dyaliscope whispering in riddles and wondering which time zone they are in. The droning organ music never stops, the camera never stops creeping about, you emerge 90 minutes later saying, What the fuck was all that about? So you see it a second time and ask the same question. And you see it a third time and ask the same . . . Oh what a lark that was. Resnais must have been a creature from another planet. Dressed incredibly well, immaculately coiffured, prowling around Claridge's rococo salons like his own characters, he was just a fellah.

Michelangelo Antonioni made a trilogy about urban alienation that got the critics very excited. *L'avventura*, *La Notte* and *L'eclisse* drew as many boos as cheers, especially *L'avventura* which scandalised Cannes in 1960 and coasts along for two-and-a-half hours before reaching an enigma wrapped up in a mystery. And then there was *Blowup*, the ultimate statement on the Swinging Sixties. It ended with a tennis game played out in mime. One of the film's stars, Sarah Miles, was present when that scene was filmed in Maryon Park, South London, and she asked the maestro what it all meant. "Zis is for ze critics," he told her. Antonioni's physical being looked like he carried all the worries of the world on his shoulders. He turned out to be quite funny, chatty, just a fellah.

20: BAD BEHAVIOUR

I always kidded myself that the stars and directors who flattered the NFT with their presence were on their best behaviour. That they somehow equated the NFT and the BFI with the BBC which was revered across the world. It was also a little like dealing with the Royal Family. Protocols

needed to be observed, etiquette respected, deference applied. Coke addicts hid their habit. Sex pests kept their trousers zipped. Spendthrifts suppressed their urges.

By and large this happened and in almost ten years I encountered hardly any unpleasantness. But, as people always asked about the HM The Queen, “what is she *really* like?” then people often asked me what so-and-so was really like and was that person just a real so-and-so. There were many people I really liked. This chapter is dedicated to some people I didn’t like at all, people who behaved rather badly, people who disappointed me, heroes turned into villains.

For instance, **Joseph Losey**, **Ken Russell** and **Robert Altman** were ludicrously grand and pompous and I admit to having a slight distaste for their ability to fund a string of box-office and critical flops. They might all have been arrested for extortion. So too could **Terry Gilliam** with his chaotic, indulgent flops, though he wasn’t grand or pompous, merely grungy.

Losey swept into the NFT with a cape, a fedora and a cane. I wanted to like him as I thought *The Servant*, *Accident* and *The Go-Between* were three of the greatest British movies ever made. Any one of these were always on my Ten Best list and, of course, they all just happened to be written by Harold Pinter. But too many other Losey pictures - think of *Secret Ceremony*, *Modesty Blaise* and *Boom!* - count among the worst movies ever made, proving he was only as good as his scripts. A later film, *The Romantic Englishwoman*, reignited the old flame and that was scripted by another playwright of heft, Tom Stoppard. Sadly, Losey himself was just an unpleasant, raddled bore.

Robert Altman had made one of my favourite films - *The Long Goodbye* - but after his *Guardian Lecture*, chaired by Derek Malcolm, he held court at Langan’s Brasserie much like Michael Gambon in Altman’s later masterwork *Gosford Park* before someone stuck the knife in him. Ken Russell was just like his movies, a total gross-out. He reminded me of Mr Creosote in *The Meaning of Life*.

Sam Fuller was one of the most boring men I ever met, droning on and on about his mostly crappy B-movies which had become cults. Maybe I might prefer one of Sam’s 80-minute quickies to one of Marty Scorsese’s three-hour endurance tests. The BFI Director Tony Smith held a soirée at his apartment in Albany and asked me to bring Fuller along. It was two hours of embarrassment as Fuller hogged the conversation without realising what a crashing bore he was. But at least he didn’t repeat the same trick he did on

his first visit to the NFT, back in 1969, when he took himself off to Camden Passage, bought a shed-load of antiques and charged it all to the BFI.

Blake Edwards was always on my target list as he had made some great comedies and was also a gifted raconteur. If I couldn't get Peter Sellers I could surely get Blake. He was at Pinewood so I called him up and got through without a problem. He seemed keen, he knew of the NFT, he knew what was expected. We would put on a season of his films. We agreed on a date. He would be in the UK anyway and would not need plane tickets or a hotel. Everything went ahead as planned until about a month before I started to smell a rat. I called him up to finalise the details. "Sorry, I completely forgot about it, I can't do it." The line went dead.

Joan Fontaine was just a bit rude. She was in London to promote her autobiography, *No Bed of Roses*, and came with her own young, hand-picked interviewer named Martyn Shallcross who was an aficionado of Daphne du Maurier. La Fontaine had starred in Hitchcock's celebrated adaptation of Du Maurier's *Rebecca*. She won an Oscar for Hitchcock's laughably twee *Suspicion* and was perhaps at her best in Max Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. This woman had major allure.

I hosted a lunch at the Connaught with Joan, Martyn and the PR lady from Joan's publisher. I could see that Martyn, terribly smart, was about to throw up in a fit of nerves and I could also see that Joan was in a foul mood. Before we had ordered our food Joan started grilling me about the National Film Theatre, what sort of place it was, who would be there, what sort of questions she would be asked and so on. I assured her that the NFT had a peerless cultural reputation, that it was cleaned on a regular basis and it was packed with Joan Fontaine fans who would ask her lots and lots of easy-peasy questions. Joan was unconvinced. She got up and left the Connaught telling us that she would check it out for herself. She took the waiting limo. We stayed for the lunch - no way would I forfeit chef Michel Bourdin's masterpiece *croustade d'oeuf de caille maintenon* - and we eventually took a taxi down to the South Bank.

Joan was waiting for us surrounded by fans and, guess what, she was a real trooper on stage, playing the audience like a maestro conductor. She had anecdotes, she had charm and she had jokes. Someone asked her the inevitable question about her screen test for *Gone With the Wind*. "I was told I wasn't right for the part of Melanie," she said. "They wanted someone less attractive, a bit plain. I told them you should test my sister!" That brought the house down. Even Martyn Shallcross relaxed after that.

Cyd Charisse and **Glenn Ford** thought they were still living in the 1950s and didn't appreciate that the BFI was not the open cash machine of MGM or Columbia Pictures. Movie stars of the golden age had an amazingly cushy life. The studio handled everything. If they went to New York or to Europe the studio paid First Class all the way, ocean liners, huge suites at the best hotels, personal publicists, every last morsel they ate or drank, flowers, make-up artists, hairdressers, gifts, limos. The BFI was not like that. We could offer airfares and nice hotels, a meal or two, a limo, but not a trip to Harrods or a Savile Row tailor. It grieves me to report that Cyd and Glenn were just too demanding and I had to finally admit to them that they were way above our pay grade.

In the case of Cyd Charisse this might have been a blessing as it struck me at our meeting at the Hotel Bel Air that she wasn't the brightest star in the firmament. She was just a pair of legs. I should perhaps have gone for Debbie Reynolds instead. Glenn Ford, though, was an interesting man. We met at his house and sat at a bar which was done up like a saloon from one of his many westerns. I think there might even have been a spittoon. He had a butler and a dog called Bismark. On the walls he displayed his collection of autographs - I saw F Scott Fitzgerald, Samuel Pepys, Martin Bormann, Adolph Hitler, Churchill and Voltaire, an amazing mix of saints and sinners. Ford was affable and would have made a great guest, having quite a store of memories of people like Howard Hughes and Harry Cohn. And of course Rita Hayworth, his lover and co-star in the *film noir* classic *Gilda*. Ford seemed quite haunted by her and was helping fund research into dementia in honour of her memory.

In a similar vein, I must also tell you this story. It's not bad behaviour in the strictest sense, just a little on the sad side. I received a telephone call from **Ann Todd** who, in the late 40s and early 50s was one of Britain's best known movie stars. I'm not sure she was also 'best loved' as there was something of an icy chill about her screen persona. She had once been married to David Lean and she was calling because we had just staged a retrospective of David's films. Ann was keen to see again one of the three films she made with him, *Madeleine*. She wondered if we would be showing it again. I said we wouldn't but I would be more than happy to arrange a private screening for her. The National Film Archive's print was spectacular, I said. She accepted my offer and a week or two later I called her to suggest a date.

She was a little confused when I gave her the address of the cinema where she would see the film. It was the NFA's screening room at the BFI headquarters on Dean Street, Soho. She seemed to think the screening would be at the NFT. I could tell she wasn't entirely happy and on the day I could see why. I stood outside the BFI waiting for her and saw this wonderful 1950s black-and-grey Rolls-Royce purr down Dean Street. A uniformed chauffeur hopped out and opened the rear door. Two women got out, both dressed in fur coats, high heels, hats and a tsunami of perfume. It was Ann and her companion that morning, Dame Anna Neagle. The only thing that was missing was Michael Wilding.

We went inside the BFI to the little basement screening room. It all looked so incredibly dark, dank and dingy. I was embarrassed and Ann was embarrassed. I realised I had made a big mistake. I should have worn a suit, I should have laid on refreshments, I should have hired the Odeon Leicester Square. Ann did ring me the next day to thank me but there was a distinct frostiness in her voice and the line went dead a little more sharply than necessary.

Peter Bogdanovich earns his place here for some bad behaviour at our luncheon at the beautiful River Restaurant at the Savoy Hotel. You could see the Thames and the NFT through the huge windows. Without warning, Peter brought along a publisher, John Calder no less, an ardent Leftie and friend of Samuel Beckett. Peter also brought another guest, a young woman, whose identity I never figured out. That was just about OK, I guess. What was not OK was what he did at the end of the meal. He asked a waiter for the cigars and helped himself to half a dozen Churchill-sized monsters which added a further £100 or so to the bill. Someone like Peter, a former film critic, would surely have known about the BFI and this was just unacceptable. On stage, though, he was one of the very finest raconteurs I have ever encountered. I was chairing that event and all I had to do was introduce him, light the touchpaper and retire. Clive James called people like this "self-starters." If I ever regretted not being able to host the likes of John Ford, Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock, it didn't matter if you had Peter Bogdanovich in the room because he brought them with him in his hand luggage. His powers of mimicry were remarkable. He used one of the cigars as a prop. Such a shame what happened to him in his later years, especially after that Dorothy Stratten tragedy. When he died, in January 2022, I felt that Hollywood had lost its last real link with the classic era.

Peter's behaviour at lunch reminds me of a story he liked to tell about Orson Welles, of whom more later. Orson was a great friend of Peter's, though I'm not sure if Peter was a great friend of Orson's. The story goes that a producer had a lunch arranged at a famous Beverly Hills watering hole called Ma Maison. It was an early venture of the chef Wolfgang Puck who subsequently invented duck pizza. This producer shows up to find Orson already seated. Waiters bring menus, they order their food, they eat their lunch and discuss whatever it was they needed to discuss. A waiter brings the check, Orson seems distracted, the producer picks up the check and sees that it was lunch for three. Orson had arrived early and had already eaten one lunch. Whole.

Oliver Reed had a rather sad reputation for being a drunk, a boor and physically threatening. He looked the part - thuggish, thickly-set with a deep scar on his face obtained during a brawl at a London nightclub in 1964. But Oliver was a seriously good actor with several fine films on his score card, notably his work for Ken Russell and Michael Winner and also his performance as Bill Sikes in *Oliver!* which was directed by his uncle, Sir Carol Reed. His voice was a gorgeous, velvety, loud whisper and when the mood took him he could be as compelling as any actor of his generation.

I spent a day with him at the NFT when we premiered a movie of his called *Castaway* which was directed by Nicolas Roeg. Oliver starred as a real-life character called Gerald Kingsley who had advertised in *Time Out* for a girl Friday to share a desert island with him for a year. Roeg had cast Amanda Donohoe in the role. She was on the cusp of minor stardom and was quite flirty. Apparently the shoot in the Seychelles had been problematic and the movie didn't quite work. However, Oliver seemed keen to promote it and he showed up at the NFT at 10am for the first performance at 10.30am. He was smartly turned out, dressed rather like a country squire which in fact he was, living in a huge Surrey mansion at the time. He was accompanied by a couple of minders who asked that we open the bar because they wanted to pour alcohol down Oliver's throat in order for him to become 'Ollie.' He seemed to be a willing recipient though I got the impression early on that they wanted Oliver to live up to his reputation by getting him pissed asap. To everyone's relief, Oliver behaved quite well that day. His companions didn't. I felt deeply sorry for him.

Brian de Palma was a bit of a monster. He showed up with a large retinue of foot soldiers from United International Pictures and didn't really know where he was. You looked past the trademark beard and into his eyes

and you saw a blur. I loved his movies, especially *Obsession* which was a riff on *Vertigo*. But Brian was in no mood for a chat. Or anything. He was at the end of a world publicity tour for his great picture *The Untouchables* and had come to the NFT straight off a flight from Tokyo. He clearly wanted to be somewhere else and was downright rude to everyone. He was so pissed off by the whole publicity circus that he sleepwalked through the interview, unaware that he was, at heart, just a movie nerd sharing a room with 400 other movie nerds. A few weeks later I got a written apology from him. I forgave him. I forgive them all.

We all behave badly, once or twice in a while.

21: ORSON

One day in 1983 Tony Smith, director of the British Film Institute, called to ask if I might take care of Orson Welles for a week. It was a case of pass the parcel. A very large parcel, indeed, in terms of cultural cred and bodily bulk.

Orson Welles was a daunting prospect, intimidating even. He was not being invited for a *Guardian Lecture*. If he had he would almost certainly have declined which is why I never seriously entertained the idea of going after him. But Tony Smith, in tandem with BFI Chairman Sir Richard Attenborough, had decided to mark the BFI's 50th Anniversary with a big industry bash in the medieval magnificence of London's Guildhall. They had also hit on the idea of bestowing a first tranche of annual Fellowships which would be handed over at the banquet by the BFI's Patron, The Prince of Wales. Having Dickie Attenborough and Prince Charles as its first line of charm offensive made the BFI a formidable fighting force. Orson's defences were down.

The first Fellows were Orson, David Lean, Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, French director Marcel Carné and Indian director Satyajit Ray. Fellini and Bergman might have been there had they bothered to respond. As David Lean was away filming in India, his award would be collected by Sir Alec Guinness. Satyajit Ray was sadly too ill to attend . . . I met him a few times and he was so imperious I called him Satyajit Vice-Ray.

My job was to deliver these people to the Guildhall for as little outlay as possible. I'd always had problems with the BFI about this. The accountants would say, "Why put Ingrid Bergman into the Connaught when there's a perfectly good Holiday Inn down the road? Did you *have* to take Sylvester Stallone to Le Gavroche? What's wrong with the Spaghetti House?" And so on.

Powell, an awkward bugger at the best of times, and Pressburger, as sweet as *dobos torte*, were simple - they always stayed at the Savile Club, a Mayfair retreat for gentlemen. So they didn't cost much. The delicate and fragile Marcel Carné came with a minder, the director Costa-Gavras, and we put them into the Athenaeum on Piccadilly. This pleasant hotel just about met Tony Smith's tight budget and it was only two airfares from Paris. Cheap as *frites*.

Orson broke the bank. I found him living in Paris at the Hotel de la Trémoille. I called him there. Any worries I might have had evaporated immediately - he was chatty, funny, honoured to be invited, anxious to please. Alone among the incipient Fellows, Orson was being asked to sing for his supper by making a keynote speech. He wondered how he should address Prince Charles. Over the next week or two we spoke almost every day. Sometimes I could hear his dogs yapping in his hotel suite. I said we could offer him two round-trip airfares from Paris, a limo and a suite at the Athenaeum.

He said he needed three air tickets. First Class, naturally. From Las Vegas to London with open-ended returns. I said OK. He said he had to stay at the Savoy. In a specific room. Orson explained: "When The Duke was filming in London he told me about this bed which he had specially made for him at the Savoy. I must have Duke Wayne's bed," Orson chuckled. I said OK. The manager of the Savoy confirmed all this. "It's not the best suite," he said, "but it is the biggest bed."

Orson asked about the car. Our regular company used XJ Jags and Daimler DS420s, classic limos, with a wall of walnut and cut glass between the driver and the passengers. There was enough room in the back for a game of ping-pong. But that wasn't big enough for Orson. He gave me the name of a stuntman who was based out at Pinewood Studios. "He has an old Chevy and that is the only car I can climb into and out of comfortably," he said. It was all to do with the width of the door and the placement of the A-pillars. We would need to hire this stuntman and the car for a week on 24-hour call. The stuntman said he would charge us £2000, all-inclusive. I said OK.

Shortly afterwards I had an interesting conversation with Tony Smith which ended with my saying. "Do you want Orson Welles or not?" He said OK. Coming from BBC current affairs and academia, I think he found this world rather distasteful which is why Richard Attenborough, who knew all

about celebrity foible and excess, was such an asset. He'd even heard of that bed in the Savoy because he co-starred in *Brannigan* with The Duke.

And then the time came to finally meet the great man. I went along to the Savoy to say hello. And there he was, literally larger than life, swathed in black robes, silver-haired, beaming, chubby hand extended. His deep, rich voice was a permanent chuckle. There were a few other people in the room, including a diminutive man who was sitting at his feet. "Have you met my pimp?" said Orson with a whiskery grin.

It was Alan Yentob.

The truth was Orson had become so obese that he used a wheelchair. He didn't like to be seen in public in that state and he was very anxious about the Guildhall. While he could stand to make his speech there was no way he could attend the reception. He just couldn't stand up for any length of time.

On the night I watched that wonderful chrome beast of a Chevrolet swing into the forecourt of the Guildhall. The A-pillar was perfect for Orson to use as an anchor and as a pivot. We got him into his chair and wheeled him into a little anteroom we had found. From there he walked into the great dining hall, looking regal in his glistening cape and walking cane.

The dinner was a black tie thing for maybe three hundred guests. Everyone ate, Orson spoke, Fellowships were bestowed, Tony and Dickie beamed. Orson said to me, "I think there might be some people here I know or who might like to meet me." He was intensely self-aware. So we got him back to the anteroom. Yentob and I went out on a raiding party, looking for people to take to the presence. I purloined Kevin Brownlow. Alan grabbed the BBC Director-General. A shrewd move, I thought.

Then it was Sam Spiegel, Fred Zinnemann and dozens of others. The actor Gordon Jackson burst into tears and then fled - back in 1955 he had played Ishmael to Orson's Father Mapple in the London stage production of *Moby-Dick*. Dickie showed up with HRH. And there was Orson, in his element, enthroned like a King, energised by the affection and the esteem, with people literally at his feet, sitting on the floor, while he just talked and gossiped and yarned. It was quite an occasion, or at least I thought so and so did everyone I spoke to, during, after and even since. Was there no one out there who begged to disagree? Over to you the perpetually peeved Lindsay Anderson who wrote to absentee Satyajit Ray . . .

"I didn't go to that BFI celebration but I watched it on television. I found it horrific. Awfully dowdy, with many pasted-on smiles and the kind of snobbish conformism that always brings out the anarchic element in me.

The Prince of Wales made one of those charmingly amateurish English speeches protesting that he really didn't know what it was all about . . . then Dickie Attenborough, at his most effusive, introduced Orson Welles at his most would-be discursive, witty and false . . . from what I hear the dinner was a generally uncomfortable one with longstanding enemies carefully placed together, and everybody questioning the validity of the whole media-oriented occasion. Forgive me if I sound crabby." No, I won't, Lindsay. People always called Lindsay 'prickly.' Sometimes he was just a prick.

The next day Orson gave me a script he had written of *King Lear*. I was to keep it until a potential financier, an Italian prince, called me. About a week later the prince called and I took the script to him at Claridge's. Orson never made *King Lear*. I suppose he didn't need to. *Lear*, surely, was an imposter. Orson Welles died two years later. It was an enormous privilege to have met him.

22: BIG GAME, BIG CATS

Gregory Peck and Charlton Heston were men to look up to. They were not only tall, they were imposing, towers of strength, hewn in granite like the faces on Mount Rushmore. In the Hollywood game park, they were the lions. Both had presidential demeanours and both were liberals, at least until the early 1970s when Mr Heston started to veer to the right. I admired them both equally and I met them on several occasions. They took their work seriously, perhaps too seriously, and were unfailingly generous with their time with journalists and fans. They were also sparring partners in one of my favourite movies, William Wyler's *The Big Country*, despite the fact that the film is rather sanitised - it's about cattle ranches without a cowpat in sight and actually not many cattle either, a bit of budget cutting that infuriated Mr Peck. The movie is famous for its music and an epic fist fight between Chuck and Greg, after which they revealed only superficial damage to their faces the next day.

I first encountered Mr Heston on 10 April 1979 when I rather nervously interviewed him on stage at the NFT. He had just published an outstanding volume of personal diaries, *The Actor's Life*. His wife of many years, Lydia, accompanied him and we had a great dinner, hosted by Leslie Hardcastle, in a famous Soho Hungarian restaurant, the Gay Hussar. For me, it was a childhood dream come true because I was meeting Judah Ben-Hur, the Jewish aristocrat turned galley slave turned charioteer who got me interested in movies in the first place. Here I was supping with Moses, Rodrigo Diaz de

Vivar, Michelangelo and General Gordon. You might scoff at these Hollywood epics, you might have contempt for this right-wing reactionary who opposed any form of gun control, so go ahead and scoff. I don't care. Mr Heston was big enough to take anything you care to throw at him. I always liked the story about James Cameron's movie *True Lies* which starred Arnold Schwarzenegger. Mr Heston was cast in the small part as Arnold's boss at the spy agency specifically because, Cameron said, "he was the only actor who could intimidate Arnold."

In a 1960 article in *Cahiers du Cinéma* called "In Defence of Violence", French critic Michel Mourlet made this celebrated and contentious claim: "Charlton Heston is an axiom. He constitutes a tragedy in himself, his presence in any film being enough to instil beauty. The pent-up violence expressed by the sombre phosphorescence of his eyes, his eagle's profile, the imperious arch of his eyebrows, the hard, bitter curve of his lips, the stupendous strength of his torso - this is what he has been given and what not even the worst of directors can debase."

It wasn't just *Ben-Hur*. It was also Welles's *Touch of Evil*, Anthony Mann's *El Cid*, perhaps the purest movie epic of them all, Sam Peckinpah's hugely flawed *Major Dundee* for which Mr Heston sacrificed his fee so that Sam could shoot the picture as he intended (the studio still cut it), and Basil Dearden's Imperial epic *Khartoum* in which Mr Heston totally out-acted Laurence Olivier. His transition from historical figure to science fiction hero - in *Planet of the Apes*, *The Omega Man* and *Soylent Green* - won him a new audience. His own personal favourite was the western, *Will Penny*.

I once went to his house perched on the edge of Coldwater Canyon. Designed largely (and largely designed) by Mr Heston himself, it was a low-lying modernist building of stone and glass with a great curving hallway that would not have been out of place in a University. In his study I held his Oscar for *Ben-Hur* as well as his stave from *The Ten Commandments* and his mighty sword from *El Cid*. In his later years he was outspoken on many issues, notably the Iraq War which he supported, and his opposition to gun control: he was President of the influential National Rifle Association. I disagreed with him on all these issues yet my respect was undying. He was nothing less than warm and obliging towards me and I was deeply saddened when, in 2002, he announced publicly that he had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. His decline was fairly rapid and it was one of the American cinema's least edifying and most upsetting episodes when Mr Heston's obvious mental struggles were cruelly exploited by the repulsive

documentarist Michael Moore in his film about gun control, *Bowling for Columbine*.

Mr Heston died in 2008.

My favourite memory of Mr Peck is meeting him in the mid-1980s. I was in LA on one of those fishing expeditions for the NFT. Staying at the same hotel as me was my friend Donald Spoto who had written two books on Alfred Hitchcock and many others besides. A trained theologian and a full-time professor in New York, he was an unusually gifted speaker who put most of our academics to shame. NFT audiences responded well to him and he became an annual fixture. We quickly formed a friendship and in LA we rather childishly traded celebrities. I offered to introduce him to Billy Wilder and he offered to introduce me to Gregory Peck.

The next day we drove to have a morning chat with Mr Peck at his house at 375 North Carolwood Drive in the Holmby Hills, an enclave of palatial residences tucked between Beverly Hills and Bel-Air. Barbra Streisand lived next door. Donald was quite specific - "Mr Peck is very formal," he said, "we should dress accordingly." So after breakfast both of us dressed in jackets and ties - not suits, mind - and drove off to see Mr Peck. The house, arguably the swankiest I ever saw, lay behind a black steel gate and looked like a *svelte* French chateau, as did his lovely wife, Veronique. A golden labrador with three legs hobbled up to greet us, tail wagging. A maid opened the front door and ushered us inside to a gorgeous hallway and then into a living room so big you could stage the Wimbledon singles finals in it. In one corner, far away, there was a grand piano and facing us a wall of windows and beyond that the garden and a glimpse of a pool.

We were asked to sit and make ourselves comfortable. Coffee and iced water were brought. Something to nibble as well. We were told that Mr Peck wouldn't be long. He was just coming back from his morning jog which he did without leaving the grounds. So we sat, sipped and nibbled in our smart clothes.

Then Mr Peck strode into the room, offering us an outstretched paw the size of a lion's. Sweating profusely, apologising profusely, wearing an old track suit and muddy trainers. And people wonder why I don't give a shit about dress codes on fancy cruise ships.

Donald had another trade in his pocket, Tippi Hedren, the star of Hitchcock's *The Birds* and *Marnie* whom Donald had got to know while researching his biography of Hitchcock, *The Dark Side of Genius*. That book caused quite a stir as it revealed a distinctly unpleasant aspect of Hitchcock's

complex personality which culminated in his alleged sexual abuse of Miss Hedren. This led *The Guardian* to describe Donald as a “quasi-academic gossip-monger.”

In 1964 Tippi married her agent, Noel Marshall, and in 1981 they made a movie together called *Roar!* which vastly exceeded its budget and never recouped a fraction of it. However, its story about Africa and its wildlife had become a significant issue for Tippi who started a private ranch north of Los Angeles where she kept a large menagerie, most notably big cats, many of which were rescued from poorly maintained private zoos and ill-suited domestic environments. Two of Michael Jackson’s tigers ended up here. Some time after my visit Tippi opened up the Shambala Preserve to monthly ‘safari tours’ for the general public. People could ‘adopt’ a specific animal for a donation.

Donald drove me out to a perimeter fence where Tippi picked us up in her blue Mercedes with the licence plate ROAR1. I liked her immediately. She just seemed totally natural, not at all like a movie star, though the twangy voice was unmistakable. Her sprawling house was made mostly of wood, looked a bit like a safari lodge and had a well-tended garden and pool within a steel cage. There was also a dedicated area for her domestic cats. She took Donald and I outside, beyond the cage, with mugs of coffee and as we sat down an adult cheetah appeared from nowhere and jumped up on the table. To say this was unexpected is an understatement. Startling might be the word. I had two cats at home - Leo and Tiger - so I knew a pussycat when I saw one. This cheetah was very affectionate and sort of followed us around as Tippi took us on a tour.

The area was enormous and the day was seriously hot and dusty. It wasn’t open land, like the African plains, but a heavily wooded valley. She took us through some serious metal fencing into a field and asked us to sit on the ground. She walked off a bit and called out. Something stirred over there and bounded towards us - a male lion with a splendid black mane. Donald said something like, “Can I go now?” but, hey, I had been brought up on a farm, and I figured that this woman knows what she’s doing and she would never run the risk of us ending up like Nero’s weepy, pious Christians. Just think of the press coverage.

To sit on the ground and have a fully mature lion stand next to you is quite an experience. When you get that close, so close you feel and smell its breath, it is the size of everything that humbles you - a head the size of a mountain, paws as big as Gregory Peck’s, the whole beast towering over you.

Your head might disappear inside its jaws as you might consume a gobstopper. I patted and stroked the mighty beast until it got bored and padded away.

Way back in my childhood I had a schoolfriend whose mother was a veterinarian at London Zoo in Regent's Park. One day I was treated to a behind-the-scenes tour and held a lion kitten in my arms. Above my head there was a walkway enabling the big cats to move from one enclosure to another and at one point this enormous tiger seem to float above me. I remembered that day as I walked around Tippi's place. The only animals she would not let us mingle with were the tigers which she thought were unpredictable. Despite a few problems, financial issues and the unfortunate mauling by a tiger of one of her keepers, Tippi still lives on the ranch at the ripe old age of 93.

I had some great experiences in my many visits to Los Angeles. This was certainly one of them.

23: GORILLA! GORILLA!

Travel has played as big a part in my life as the movies. Probably more. I call it travel but 'holidays' might be a more accurate term. Writers like Jan Morris, Bruce Chatwin and Paul Theroux did serious travel. And TV presenters like the inspirational Simon Reeve. We merely did holidays and travelled to get there, even if it was Micronesia, Patagonia or The Empty Quarter.

As I said earlier, it was the movies that made me see the world and impelled me to go there. By the mid-70s my wife Andrea and I had toured all the major classical sites in Turkey, then just at the start of its tourist industry. We went to Greece, followed by Tunisia and Morocco.

In 1980 we went to the Seychelles, our first long-haul trip. We got there at dawn, after a long BA flight via Bahrain. In those days the Gulf States were little more than sand and a duty free shop at the airport. Reaching the island of Mahe, we stepped out of our taxi at the Fisherman's Cove Hotel and encountered a soaring open-air lobby filled with birdsong which led to a terrace overlooking our first tropical beach. It changed our lives forever - the sound and smell of it was intoxicating. Our cottage room, called Marlin, had just been readied for us. We were told its previous occupants were quite famous - Mr Paul Simon and Miss Carrie Fisher. We loved the place so much we went back the following year and island-hopped for three weeks.

A few years later we did our first safari trip to Africa. We flew into Harare, formerly Salisbury, the capital of the recently created independent state of Zimbabwe, formerly Southern Rhodesia. We then flew up to the Hwange National Park and stayed in a tented camp run by two white Rhodesians whose blatant racism was quite shocking. They refused to allow us any contact with their black employees, so food was brought out from the kitchen by black staff and then handed over to white staff who served the guests. And the owners never missed an opportunity to rant about Zimbabwe's president Robert Mugabe, calling him a monster who would destroy the most beautiful country on Earth. At that time Mugabe was in a sort of honeymoon period but as the years wore on you could see that the owners of our safari lodge had a point. God knows what happened to them.

On checking into the colonial-era splendour of the Victoria Falls Hotel the manager came up and said, "Mr Turner, you have a telegram from *The Times* in London!" I had written a piece for them which needed a bit of editing. I'm not sure if that impressed the two guests who were checking in at the same time. They were Mr and Mrs Ian Botham. Later that day, it was pre-dinner cocktails in the garden and there was Botham, England's greatest cricketer, with a lady guest on each knee having their photo taken. No selfies then of course, just a proper camera snap. I had met many big movie stars in my time but this seemed to be on an altogether different level. What a sport that man Botham was and remains.

A few years later we visited the fabulous Oxfordshire garden of Lord Carrington who had been Britain's Foreign Secretary during the long negotiations between Mugabe and Rhodesia's awkward Prime Minister Ian Smith. In the garden was a life-size sandstone sculpture of a gorilla. Seeing us admiring it, Lord Carrington came up to us and said, "I had this put in the diplomatic pouch from Salisbury. I call him Robert."

24: CRITICAL CONDITION

The only film critic the British people ever heard of was Barry Norman. Tall, avuncular, enthusiastic and acerbic, Barry presented a BBC-TV programme which reviewed new movies and occasionally ran features and interviews. Barry started presenting it in 1972 and it was called *Film '72*. Barry's last series was in 1998 when it was called *Film '98*. Although he had become frustrated by the BBC's increasing marginalisation of the programme, I suspect the main reason he quit was that he felt disenchanted with much of modern cinema and began to question whether teenagers or 20-somethings

would ever consider asking their 65 year-old grandpa which film they should see.

Barry was the son of film director Leslie Norman, who made the minor classic of 1958, *Dunkirk*, so he had movies in his bloodstream. Yet he never came across as a nerdy film buff. Barry's appeal lay in his ability to speak to a general TV audience without embarrassing the cinephiles. In other words, he was serious without being elitist and because he came from print journalism he wrote his own scripts which he laced with a good deal of dry humour. Barry was cosy, he rarely strayed beyond the borders of critical orthodoxy, he rarely went out on a limb (unlike his successor Jonathan Ross), and he told his viewers that because he had seen this or that film on your behalf, and here was a clip, you don't need to bother but you could happily dissect it over dinner in Chipping Norton. Because of this, Barry's loyal viewers liked him and respected his judgment and many filmmakers trusted him. He wasn't a cultural heavyweight like Clive James or a smarty-pants like Clive James. He was just a fellah.

I hardly knew him. I once stood directly behind him at a British Airways check-in desk at Heathrow. He presented his economy class ticket and was immediately upgraded to First Class. I wasn't. No other film critic would receive that sort of treatment because no other film critic had a face anyone would recognise. While freelance movie journalists envied the power and security of the salaried newspaper film critics, those selfsame critics probably envied Barry his fame and fortune. I know I did.

I'm not sure if Barry was ever part of the group of what we might call the 'posh critics.' Or rather, the critics who wrote for the posh papers, the broadsheets. There were half a dozen of them - Derek Malcolm (*The Guardian*), David Robinson (*The Times*), Nigel Andrews (*The Financial Times*), Patrick Gibbs (*The Daily Telegraph*) and Philip French (*The Observer*). I might have added Dilys Powell, often called the *doyenne*, but she retired from *The Sunday Times* and was replaced by someone called Alan Brien who I never took seriously because he wasn't a movie person, just a high-flying political journalist and professional wit with nothing better to do. He did, though, take part in a bombing raid on Hitler's Berchtesgaden.

Patrick Gibbs also knew all about bomb runs. He was a bit of an outsider and I hardly got to know him. He was rather older than his *confrères* and had the appearance of a city gent. He was in fact a military man and had a remarkable war, flying dozens of sorties against German targets and, in 1942, winning the Distinguished Flying Cross as a Wing Commander based

on Malta. To go from that to writing reviews of dismal movies for the *Daily Telegraph* seems a rather odd career path. In fact, his own wartime exploits would have made a great movie. Gibbs always seemed a bit hostile to the notion of cinema as an art form and he once claimed he saw little point in writing about film directors. He was really a theatre man and probably thought the actors made it all up as they went along.

David Robinson took over at *The Times* in 1973 from John Russell Taylor who became the paper's full-time art critic. At this time the paper never revealed the identity of their writers - reviews were signed, 'From Our Film Critic.' David was first and foremost a film historian with a special interest in pre-cinema and the silent era. His London flat was filled with cinematic toys and ephemera and had a CinemaScope view of St Paul's Cathedral. He always seemed to be a gentle man, quiet and unassuming, and his reviews were always elegant and usually kind. David wasn't prepared to stick a knife in anybody. His great work was the definitive biography of Charles Chaplin.

Philip French was perhaps the most erudite man I ever met. He gave the impression that he had seen every movie ever made, read every book or poem ever written, listened to every symphony and concerto ever composed, admired every painting ever painted, attended every play ever performed. He was an aficionado of westerns. He had an encyclopaedic memory so if he was reviewing a new movie about, say, Depression era America he would always be ready with an apposite quote from Thomas Carlyle or compare the film's imagery to a French Impressionist painting of a railway station in Paris. The greatness of Philip was he never talked down - or wrote down - to anyone even though, privately, he might have thought you were a complete Philistine.

For many years Philip produced a highbrow BBC radio programme called *Critics' Forum*. The odd thing was, he had a startling stammer so his appearances on his own programme were rare and subjected to judicious editing. Sadly, it was for this reason that I never asked him to chair any of my *Guardian Lectures* at the NFT. He was also completely bald, due to alopecia, brought about by stress over his stammer. The baldness gave him a striking appearance to put alongside his speech impediment. I remember being at a press show for *Annie* and leaving with my friend David Castell who looked across at Philip and said, "Oh look, there's Daddy Warbucks." Everyone, including Philip, howled with laughter. I always found him exceptionally friendly and was flattered when he asked me to deputise for him on *The Observer*. The first film I had to review was *Yellow Earth*, a Chinese film

which was slightly out of my comfort zone. I liked it and gave it a positive review which led to the freelance critic Tony Rayns congratulating me on my efforts to understand something which he regarded as his personal fiefdom - the cinematic landscape of China. Tony had opened up Chinese cinema to a grateful world, via a groundbreaking NFT season, and he made sure he owned it. Turf wars were commonplace.

By the same token Derek Malcolm owned India. I once watched him operate at the Bombay Film Festival. So revered was he that I was convinced he might arrive at the cinema on the back of an elephant; he was the critic's equivalent of a Viceroy. Carpets, carvings and tea chests were presented to him in tribute. What a pity his name wasn't Clive. His girl-friend (and later wife) Sarah Gristwood was often cast adrift at these festivals so she and I would have dinners together while Derek was being feasted by some director or other. I guess I got to know Derek more closely than any of the major critics - he was accessible, sociable, chummy and he also became a colleague when he was hired to direct the London Film Festival for a few years, a job he did brilliantly.

Derek seemed to be a walking contradiction. Everyone said he was 'small but perfectly formed' because he had intended to become a jockey. He had been to Eton and had just about the foulest mouth of anyone I ever met. It was always f-this, f-that with Derek. He smoked obsessively, his car - a hideous shit-brown Triumph TR7 - was a bomb site, full of fag ends, newspapers and unpaid parking tickets. He wrote about sport for *The Guardian* until their film critic Richard Roud threw in the towel. Derek was probably hanging around the editor's office and got Roud's old job without really being a movie person. While he didn't seem particularly interested in old movies, I did admire the way he gradually came to dominate the mainstream critical landscape in Britain and also the way he championed what we used to call Third World Cinema. He and I lost touch once I left London but when I got edged out of the BFI Derek threw a lot of freelance work my way and for that I shall always be grateful.

And then there was Alexander Walker, the film critic of the *London Evening Standard*. Alex - everyone called him that - was most certainly part of the critical coterie. And he was as aloof as aloof could be. Alex was a piece of work.

I must admit to being rather intimidated by Alex. He was outspoken on just about everything and he seemed wholly assured and self-confident. He was a fanatical non-smoker and, in *Who's Who*, listed among his pass-

times 'persecuting smokers.' He was obviously a Tory which is perhaps why he tolerated me. I got him to conduct several *Guardian Lectures* - with Gloria Swanson, Faye Dunaway and Jules Dassin who blew fag smoke at him. He had unfettered access to Stanley Kubrick, he knew Garbo socially, and he successfully lobbied Margaret Thatcher to get Alfred Hitchcock a knighthood.

He was a remarkable man to listen to - he had the softest burr of an Ulster accent - and he was equally remarkable to look at. His suits, and he had many of them, were pure Savile Row. He probably had a set of lasts at John Lobb, the St James's Street cobblers. His shirts, ties and cravats shouted Jermyn Street. And then there was his hair, a spectacular *bouffant* which defied the laws of gravity. Alex was born in 1930 so he was in his 50s when I knew him. He had been the *Standard's* film critic since 1960 and you just knew that the word 'jaded' was not in his vocabulary; he surely woke up every day thinking that today's movie might be a masterpiece or at least the cause of a review that was itself a masterpiece. And surely every Thursday he would take the Tube and see everyone engrossed in his column.

Alex lived near me, in a modern block of flats in Maida Vale. Apparently it was filled with a great art collection and was free of any speck of dust or dirty dish. It was rumoured that he paid for all this, along with his ski-ing holidays, with a million pound Premium Bond jackpot. He lived alone and didn't seem to have any emotional relationship.

Alex was pugnacious, iconoclastic and courted controversy. He was also a deadly serious film historian, publishing many excellent books, including a classic trilogy about the postwar British cinema. Along with smokers he also persecuted the British Board of Film Censors and the British Film Institute. Most of all he persecuted Ken Russell whose films he hated with a passion. You could sense his blood boiling when reading his reviews of *The Music Lovers* and, most of all, *The Devils*. This led to Walker and Russell confronting each other on the BBC's nightly political programme *Newsnight* when Russell famously produced a copy of the *Evening Standard* and hit Walker over the head with it. Russell was later asked if he regretted doing that and he said yes he did. He wished it had been an iron bar. Sadly, the programme went out live and wasn't recorded so both Walker and Russell were denied the chance to relive their fifteen minutes of fame. This violent encounter between critic and criticised was not without precedent - the brilliant columnist and satirist Bernard Levin was assaulted on live TV a few years before during an episode of *That Was The Week That Was*. That was recorded for posterity.

There were two American critics I got to know, albeit briefly. I invited both of them - separately, for they were always at war with each other - to give *Guardian Lectures* at the NFT. The first of these was Andrew Sarris, arguably the most influential film critic of all time, mainly because he Anglicised a French gimmick of ranking American film directors. In France it was called *Les Politique des Auteurs* and that caused quite a kerfuffle, elevating people like Hitchcock, Hawks, Preminger and Minnelli to the highest levels of a theoretical and largely rhetorical Pantheon. That was in the 1950s. All Sarris did was publish his own list in the 1960s in a very clever and deliberately controversial way: directors were put into picturesque categories, the most desirable being The Pantheon and The Far Side of Paradise and the least desirable being Strained Seriousness and Less Than Meets The Eye. Most of my favourite directors - Kubrick, Lean, Wilder, Wyler and so on - were in Sarris's rubbish bins. That didn't stop me inviting him to London.

There was quite a lively debate about film criticism in London at the time - you know, those Marxist structuralists were everywhere, like a virus - so I expected fireworks. I put Sarris into NFT1 and it was barely half full. He was clearly yesterday's man.

Pauline Kael, on the other hand, was today's woman. She was the film critic of *The New Yorker* and routinely wrote 3000-word columns in a remarkably fluid, stream-of-consciousness style. David Thomson once described what it was like seeing a movie with Pauline Kael in the seat in front. He could hear her pencil scratching violently on the pages of her notebook, there was a rhythm to the sound, she was reviewing the movie synchronously as it wound its way through the sprockets on the projectors.

Unlike Sarris, with whom she disagreed on just about everything, Pauline wasn't tied to a fixed idea about directors and hierarchies. It was her good fortune to arrive on the scene just as Hollywood was undergoing a revolution of sorts when the old guard was swept away and replaced by people like Altman, Bogdanovich, Coppola and Scorsese. I had never read a critic with such passion and such style. She was impatient and intolerant, starting one column by saying that she didn't write a column last week as the new movies defeated her; she couldn't think of anything worth saying about them. I totally agreed with that because I doubted if I would have lasted very long had I been a salaried, nailed-to-a-masthead critic who was paid to write a weekly column no matter how dire the movies were. I was a total addict of Pauline's columns and bought all her books. She reigned supreme for over twenty years at the *New Yorker* until Kevin Costner released his

western *Dances With Wolves*, a movie I love but which Pauline detested, calling it 'plays with camera.' The magazine thought she was way out of touch and persuaded her to leave.

I contacted her in San Francisco, her home city, and agreed to put her up at the Connaught. She was strong, businesslike, amenable, glad to be the centre of attention in a city she probably didn't much care for. There were dozens of interview requests. I know she was just a critic but she was clearly a movie star. She went on stage, alone, and immediately plugged in to the audience, riffing about whatever movies came into her head. It was quite a performance and she agreed to do it all over again to another sell-out crowd. She probably could have filled the Albert Hall.

Barry Norman? Eat your heart out.

25: THE LAST CINEPHILE

I have known a lot of film critics in my time and also a lot of film buffs. They are not necessarily the same breed. While film critics - proper ones at any rate - are blessed with the powers of aesthetic judgement, film buffs are often said to know the credits of everything and the value of nothing. And for my sins I was once a question setter for a 1980s BBC-TV game show called *Film Buff of the Year* which was hosted by a wonderful guy called Robin Ray. It was recorded in Manchester and once a fortnight I would go up there by train, stay overnight, invariably eat at a fabulous Chinese restaurant called Yang Sing, and attend the rehearsals and tele-recordings the next day.

Film Buffs were a peculiar breed, almost exclusively men, many of them rather solitary, often gay, smirky or just plain glum, and a few were positively troglodytic in their appearance and disposition. One young man I remember looked a bit like Charlie Chaplin, complete with a white shirt and skinny black suit that had gone beyond the threadbare phase. Needless to say he won, to everyone's annoyance as he was not the programme's finest ambassador because he merely confirmed most people's opinion that film buffs were creeps who lived in the dark.

So film critics are professionals and film buffs are creepy. These are just some of the people who cling to the film industry like leeches. Parasites if you will. Or remora fish. Lecturers, theorists, professors of film studies and so on. And then there are the cinephiles and the cineastes. There is a subtle difference here which defines a cineaste as some who has graduated from the parasitic camp into the host camp. A cineaste, therefore, is a critic or a buff

who has become a filmmaker like Godard, Truffaut and, more recently, Tarantino.

I have met and known several true cinephiles. The locus classicus of the cinephile is perhaps Jean-Pierre Léaud's character in Truffaut's *Day for Night*. I knew Jonathan Rosenbaum, Tom Milne, Michel Ciment, David Stratton, David Thomson, David Thompson and Gilbert Adair and they were all true cinephiles, men who lived and breathed cinema. Gilbert later wrote some novels and a screenplay for Bertolucci so he became a cineaste.

Another cinephile was a colleague at the BFI. His name was John Gillett. One warm spring evening in NFT3, the upstairs space where we held receptions, I told John that Andrea and I were going to Venice that weekend. He looked perplexed and said, "But Venice isn't until September." That is exactly the answer one expected of a *bona fide* cinephile.

I was very fond of John Gillett. Everybody was. If any one person could be said to own the British Film Institute, to be its advocate, its custodian and guardian, it was he. I first met John in September 1970, well before I started to work in cinemas. It was at an event called Cinema City held at the Roundhouse, an old railway turntable shed, in Camden Town. John was wandering around, inspecting the exhibits, and because he was wearing an official name tag I recognised him as one of the few people who wrote reviews and articles I could understand in *Sight and Sound*. I went up to him like a fan and found him to be warm and friendly and encouraging. His knowledge of world cinema was legion and talking down to people just wasn't in his DNA.

We became work colleagues when I joined the NFT in 1977. John was based at the BFI's Information Department, initially at Dean Street, then at the BFI's new premises on the Charing Cross Road where the Information Library had room to breathe. It really was an impressive space and John was usually to be found ferreting along the bookshelves or the index cards looking up some obscure Japanese film of the 1930s. The Japanese cinema was his great passion. He was instrumental in getting the director Yasujiro Ozu internationally recognised in the 1950s.

John and I collaborated on many things at the NFT, mostly notably perhaps the comprehensive MGM season of 1980. Before that he and I, plus *Times* critic David Robinson, had hosted the veteran director Henry King at the NFT. King had flown into Gatwick, piloting his own plane, and we lunched him at nearby Gravetye Manor, then as now the *ne plus ultra* of

English country house hotels. King was beaming throughout and so was John.

John and I were kind of soul-mates because we had no interest in the internal politics of the BFI or the concerns of what I might term the Marxist wing of the Institute and their opposition to the idea of an individual artist being the creator of a film. John worshipped directors - well, some of them anyway. Alan Parker was so distressed by John's hostility to his films that he penned several of his funny but angry cartoons about him, like this one: 'This week at the NFT: Last Pseud in Marienbad. Un programme note de John Gillette.' And when in 1982 I asked Alan to stop sounding off about critics and the BFI he sent me a lovely letter which contained a little cartoon of a schoolmaster wearing a mortar board berating a pupil - 'Now Parker minor, stop spouting on about the NFT.' And the pupil replies, 'But Gillette and company started it, sir.'

John was too placid ever to be described as eccentric. However, at the Berlin Film Festival I was amused to discover that he had brought his own personal supply of Kellogg's Corn Flakes, as if that cereal was unavailable outside the UK. One year the management of the Cannes Film Festival placed an armed policeman at the projection room door to deter John's polite but firm incursions to complain about the presentation. At the Moscow Festival he detected something beneath the carpet in his room and became convinced he was being bugged. He pulled the carpet back and saw an unusual-looking fitment which he carefully removed. The next morning there was consternation among the Bulgarian delegation because in the middle of the chilly Soviet night the chandelier in their office had crashed to the floor. John dined out on that story for years and embellished it with every telling. And so have I but there is a kernel of truth in it.

John was a certain breed of man drawn to the rather insular world of the BFI and film criticism. That is to say, he was a loner, seemingly without friends, without a family, naïve about the wider world, without any emotional relationship except his love for the cinema and music. His was not an isolated case; press shows were the haunts of many solitary men and, yes, women, and not just because they went to these shows alone. John tried to shut out the real world. The Canadian film historian Gerald Pratley remembered being driven with John to a cinema at the Calcutta Film Festival. They sped past the usual panorama of Indian squalor - crippled child beggars, horses and carts, men with absurdly heavy loads on their backs, careering rickshaws, double-decker buses, herds of goats with their eyes full

of terror. Gerald pointed all this out to John whose face was buried in the programme. "What about this Mexican film this afternoon?" he asked. If John had looked out of the window he might have appreciated how the silken evening sunlight and the vibrant colours created a scene that might have been shot by the Bengali master cameraman Subrata Mitra.

John was born in West London in 1925 and kept much of his early life a mystery. He didn't look after himself - he was always rather sweaty, he had bad skin and he walked rather awkwardly, as if he had once broken both his ankles. He always wore a shirt and tie. You always felt there was a lot hidden, a lot of pain and suppression going on inside John. He seemed content to puff away on a cigarette and enthuse about the lighting on that Garbo picture or that Soviet drama. Too disorganised to write a book and too specialised to write for newspapers, it's a shame that John's great wealth of knowledge wasn't more widely known and shared.

His great crisis was the death of his mother whom he lived with. When she died his entire life support system fell away. His immediate boss at the BFI, the lovely Brenda Davies, took pity on him and gave him a room in her house. But John was such a messy lodger that Brenda threw him out after a few months and he went to a flat share with a BFI colleague, David Meeker, and that great writer on film, Tom Milne. That made three chain-smoking, introspective loners in a Kensington flat. Tom remembered John packing a laundry bag and saying he'd be back that afternoon. He felt impelled to use the same laundry near his mother's house on the other side of London even though there was an identical one around the corner. When David and Tom evicted John after a month or two he went to live in a boarding house in Tooting.

John's last years were rather sad. He retired from the BFI in 1990, not because he wanted to, not because the BFI forced him out (they wouldn't dare) but because those were the rules, strictly applied. He would have had a nice pension after serving the BFI for 44 years and his outgoings were meagre. But John refused to be cast adrift into the wide world and he went almost daily into the BFI where they found him a chair and a desk. They even took him back as a consultant. Then his health started to decline which he seemed to ignore.

In October 1995 he attended the annual Silent Film Festival at Pordenone, near Venice. Gerald Pratley wrote: "Walking from the railway Station down a tree-lined street under a sunny autumn sky I saw a lone figure sitting silently at an outdoor café. As I came near I recognised my dear friend,

John Gillett, with whom I have attended a hundred festivals during the past 35 years. He looked up and smiled a welcome, but seemed and was quite ill."

"His enthusiasm remained unquenchable, even though he had grown increasingly ill," wrote David Robinson for the journal *Griffithiana*. "In Pordenone, though barely able to walk, he was overjoyed to see a long-lost early film by one of his idols, Ernst Lubitsch. This was to be the last film he saw. The next day he fell seriously ill and was subsequently cared for at the Santa Maria degli Angeli Hospital. On November 26 he was moved to London where he died on December 8." John was 70.

John's funeral was packed with his BFI 'family' and many others. The tributes flowed with warmth and affection, though Tony Sloman used the occasion to attack the BFI for its many shortcomings. John wouldn't have liked that at all because he was totally without malice. He belonged to the last generation of people who grasped the entirety of world cinema history. Hardly anyone today has that level of interest or that degree of dedication. Leslie Hardcastle recounted his last meeting with John, at Pordenone: "The last words he said to me were 'I thought the live accompaniment to Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* was a trifle loud and that the focus of the Henry King silent feature was not good.'"

That was so typical of the man I knew. He gave his entire life to the cinema. I hope, in the end, he thought it was a good trade.

26: VIVE LA FRANCE!

The first time I went abroad was a day-trip to Paris. I think this must have been around 1960. We drove down to Lydd Airport in Kent, boarded the Silver City air ferry plane which also carried cars, and hopped across to Le Touquet. We then took a coach down to Paris for the day. You can see the sort of plane it was in *Goldfinger* and *Two for the Road*.

As a souvenir I bought the French equivalent of a Dinky Toy, a beautiful replica of a Simca Aronde saloon car. I loved cars from a young age. My grandfather had an Alvis, also a Wolseley, and someone whom I called uncle but was really just a family friend had an AC and also a Delage roadster. Another 'uncle,' the one who owned the farm in Leicestershire, had a bizarre collection of vehicles - a German-made DKW, a left-hand-drive US Army Jeep (ret'd) and a Jowett van. In the village someone used to drive past in a red and white Chevrolet Corvette, the model seen in the TV show *Route 66*. Most days I used to hang around on the gate until I saw him flash by smiling and waving, like the firemen in *Blue Velvet*.

My father drove a French car, a cream Renault Dauphin, which would not have been my *voiture de choix* (that would have been a Facel-Vega at ten times the price) but even a Renault Dauphin seemed pretty exotic for suburbia, a mild protest at the conformist world of Morris Minors and Triumph Heralds. It crashed badly in Cornwall, near Looe, when a motorcyclist came round the bend on the wrong side of the road and hit us head-on. The Renault was rear-engined so the front just concertina'd.

I collided or coincided with a great revolution in French cinema, known as the *nouvelle-vague*. The well-trodden story goes that the Nazi Occupation of France put an end to the import of Hollywood movies. Normally this would not have mattered as the French are very chauvinistic (I am unsure of the French word for this) and disdain all things American. Except for a small group of swarthy young men who fell upon the great tsunami of Hollywood movies which washed up in France once the *le guerre est finie*. These guys wrote for movie magazines, especially one called *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, and they attended screenings at the Cinematheque Française which was run by a guy called Henri Langlois who looked like Michel Simon. Suddenly directors like Hawks, Hitchcock, Preminger and Nicholas Ray were getting postcards from Paris saying what geniuses they were. They were now serious artists, not mere studio employees. They were *Auteurs*.

My favourite French director was and remains **François Truffaut**. There is only one film he made - *Such a Gorgeous Girl Like Me* - which I really disliked. All the rest are either lovely, touching or just plain gorgeous. There was a humanity and humour to Truffaut that I responded to. My wife usually says *Jules et Jim* is her all-time fave. I would always include *Day for Night* in my Top Ten. My other favourite Truffauts are *Baisers Voles*, *The Bride Wore Black* and *L'enfant sauvage*.

Meeting Truffaut was a real honour for me and I had lined up a fantastic interviewer named Don Allen who had written a book on the great man and was totally bi-lingual. Truffaut famously did not speak a word of English. Until it came to ordering lunch.

Truffaut wanted to be booked into the London Hilton on Park Lane. This was not a hotel we had ever used before because it was full of tour groups and couldn't offer the sort of service levels and privacy my guests would require. All the Hilton could offer were spectacularly lofty views of the Queen doing the weeding in her garden at Buckingham Palace. But Truffaut had stayed there for several weeks in 1964 when he was in England filming *Fahrenheit 451*. He was a creature of habit, perhaps rather nervous of

the unknown, and did not like the unexpected. I thought he might like a decent lunch at one of London's brasserie-style restaurants. *Non, absolument*, when he was making *Fahrenheit 451* he only ate at the Hilton so he would eat there and nowhere else. Don and I met him in the lobby and we headed for the all-day coffee shop. He was wearing that trademark black leather jacket. He looked exactly like François Truffaut. No one seemed to recognise him.

The menus arrived. It was all in English. "I'll have a cheeseburger with French fries," he told the waiter. I hope he missed the look of shock and abject disappointment on my face. Down at the NFT, I gave him a signed copy of my book on Billy Wilder. I got him to sign my first UK edition of *Hitchcock*, his legendary book of interviews with the Master of Suspense. Don chaired the *Guardian Lecture* to a packed hall. And then he was gone. Truffaut died of brain cancer within five years, aged 53. When the news broke, I cried.

Jeanne Moreau wanted to stay at Claridge's and was alone when I picked her up at Heathrow Airport. I'm sorry, that doesn't sound very good. I didn't pick her up. I went to meet her. When we arrived at the hotel I noticed that a young man was waiting for her and they went upstairs together. I subsequently learned that the man was Brad Davis, the star of *Midnight Express* and Jeanne's co-star in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's lurid gay drama *Querelle*. There was always that dichotomy about Jeanne Moreau - she could play in the most sophisticated of movies like *Jules et Jim* or *La Notte* and yet seem equally at home in the most sordid productions like that Fassbinder epic. To put it crudely, she could be serene and a scrubber. Middle class me from suburban Surrey was a little scared of her.

The next day she picked me up in the lobby. I was loitering to be sure. I knew about Claridge's dress codes and was wearing a jacket and tie. Jeanne swanned out of the lift in a black leather trouser suit, cigarette in hand. We walked into the cocktail bar - no one played *As Time Goes By* - and after a moment or two a manager came up to us and with tried-and-tested charm told me that my companion was improperly attired. We didn't make a song and dance about it. We just left and went down the road to a pub. I have always felt proud of being thrown out of Claridge's with Jeanne Moreau. Trousers in Claridge's! *Mon dieu!*

Her interviewer at the NFT was my go-to Francophile Don Allen. He had been so on the ball with Truffaut, gauging the director's mood perfectly. With Mme Moreau he seemed rather more than silky smooth. He seemed to flirt with her which she seemed to like. He did the same with **Stéphane Audran** who I thought was rather frosty throughout her time with us.

However, that approach was a bit of a risk when it came to engaging an interviewer for **Catherine Deneuve** because it was being filmed by the BBC. If you wanted to flirt with an actress your name had better be Michael Parkinson. On the other hand, if you wanted to flirt outrageously on stage with the NFT's translator your name had better be **Gérard Depardieu**. And it was.

La Deneuve created such a buzz at the NFT you got an electric shock just by touching a wall. She wanted to stay at a hotel in Kensington called Blakes which was the *hôtel de jour*, fit for our own *Belle de Jour*. The hotel was the creation of Anouska Hempel and was several town houses joined together with the exterior brickwork painted in the blackest of blacks. Inside it was a fusion of Balinese and Moroccan style, all greenery and wicker chairs, patterned carpets, silken wraps, joss sticks and nirvana. I found myself putting quite a few people in there - De Niro for instance - but I think Catherine was the first. We arrived from the airport, just she and your humble reporter, and we checked out three suites before she found the one she wanted. It was all to do with the bathroom and the size and shape of the soaking tub. I can say in all honesty that I went to the bathroom with Catherine Deneuve on several occasions.

On stage at the NFT Catherine was terrific value, gently coaxed by her interviewer Michael Billington, the theatre critic of *The Guardian*. There was a reception afterwards, upstairs in NFT3. I remember introducing Catherine to two of my friends, both of them film critics for *Time Out* magazine, both called Chris. Confronted by the presence of La Deneuve they froze, open-mouthed, unable to utter a single word. They were like schoolboys and I'm sure they both wet their pants.

Bertrand Tavernier was everyone's idea of the French cinephile. Maybe Jean-Pierre Léaud in *Day for Night* is the fictional ideal but Bertrand was the real thing. He sort of dominated you physically - he was fairly scruffy, big and bulky, he stood or sat very close to you and smothered you with his enthusiasm and passion for movies, for jazz, for food, for women. I got to know him at the London Film Festival when we ran his movies *Death Watch* and *Une semaine de vacances*. He handled the Q&A sessions superbly and he spoke excellent English.

I used to go to Paris two or three times a year, mainly because I used to organise my flights back from Eastern Europe through Paris so I could check out various hotels, have fancy Michelin dinners, buy kitchen equipment, go to galleries and meet movie people. I met Bertrand on a few of these

occasions and I remember being desperately upset when he once took me to lunch. Bertrand was a great gourmet, so much so that he is mentioned in Nico Ladenis's 1987 cookery book *My Gastronomy*: "One day, Bertrand Tavernier, the great French film director, walked into our restaurant, ordered *Poulet au Vin Jaune*, drank two bottles of Jura wine and exchanged all this for a subscription to *Gault Millau* magazine!" So when Bertrand suggested lunch I fully expected some regional French blow-out at a little place he knew. Imagine my shock and disappointment when we went to a Chinese joint near his apartment. He also invited me to a dubbing session for his new film set in Africa called *Coup de Torchon*. There was a rather pale, silent and slightly hostile young man in the studio with us. He looked a bit like John Hurt. Bertrand introduced him as Johnny Hallyday. I'd never heard of him.

27: CLINT

One day in 1984 Julian Senior called me up and said, "How would you like a *Guardian Lecture* with Clint?" I didn't reply, "Clint who?"

Julian was a tough-looking, sharp no-nonsense South African who headed up Warner's publicity department in London. He was also Stanley Kubrick's go-to man in the whole wide world. Once a month or so Julian would have to negotiate with the Soho council and the police to reserve a parking space in Wardour Street so that Stanley didn't need to find his own parking space or take the Tube. If you dealt with Stanley you might have to take a lot of shit from him but no else.

Mr Eastwood was on an international mission to portray himself as a cultural icon and significant *auteur*, not just a charismatic movie star who killed a lot of people. This didn't happen by accident; it was a definite strategy, encouraged and underwritten by his studio, Warner Bros. He had done a personal appearance at somewhere like Lincoln Center or the New York Film Festival to deflect hostile Yank critics like Pauline Kael. Britain's answer to the acerbic Ms Kael was the warm-hearted Dilys Powell and she was a big fan.

Clint could have filled the Albert Hall twice over but Julian knew the NFT had the cultural kudos. And it was manageable as far as security was concerned. Julian would need to inspect the building and know exactly where Clint would be going and when and how. This was like a Royal visit. I know. I organised one.

More importantly, I had to make a decision about who would grill The Man With No Name. It would be recorded by Channel 4 TV. Julian wanted

Iain Johnstone and who wouldn't? I knew Iain and had engaged him for a few of these events before. He was super smooth on stage and had vast experience at this sort of thing. He had presented movie programmes on BBC-TV and had done many location reports with some tricky people, such as John Wayne and Howard Hawks on the set of *Rio Lobo* and Dustin Hoffman and Sam Peckinpah on the set of *Straw Dogs*. He had also interviewed Clint on several occasions. They got on well together. They were like Butch and Sundance.

I put my biggest BFI thinking hat on, pondered long and hard about our own cultural heft, had a stiff drink and called Julian and said no to Iain Johnstone. It was too much of a done deal, a Warner Bros package. Channel 4 agreed. They didn't want a cosy Parky thing at all.

I thought of Christopher Frayling who had written the definitive book on Sergio Leone and the Spaghetti Western. Then I thought that might get a bit bogged down, a bit esoteric. I thought of another western aficionado and respected cultural pundit, Philip French, but he had a profound stutter. Then I had a brainwave: Lynda Myles, the hugely respected Director of the Edinburgh Film Festival. I only knew her slightly but she had all the right stuff for this Clint gig. She was smart and glamorous, she was a feminist, she was steeped in genre movies and she had coined the phrase 'movie brat' in a book she wrote with Michael Pye. Only she could tackle Clint about screen violence and the perceived misogyny of his movies. It would be a great, perhaps slightly edgy event, just what Channel 4 wanted.

Julian rather reluctantly agreed and said Clint needed to meet her. So Lynda and I found ourselves on the Eurostar to Paris where Clint had just been awarded the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. We all had lunch at the Plaza Athénée Hotel on the Avenue Montaigne. The ornate dining room was caught in a freeze-frame, everyone fixated on our table. Clint was accompanied by Pierre Rissient, an interesting character to say the least, who was a influential publicist and a lot more besides. Wearing a corduroy jacket with elbow patches, a shirt and tie, Clint could have passed for a university professor. He was supremely relaxed, charming, and Lynda was a bit nervous, I think, and why not? We talked around a few things and it helped that Pierre had known the NFT for years and he knew Lynda, too. Clint seemed very happy with her and reassured. We enjoyed the food and wine. Piece of cake, we thought, as we rode the train back to London. We didn't plan a stitch up or ambush Dirty Harry. We just wanted to challenge him a

little bit in a way that would not feature in his TV interviews with Michaels Aspel and Parkinson.

Lynda said something on the train that I've never forgotten. We were talking about our work in cinemas, or *cinematheques* if you want to be precious about it. Maybe I said that it was a bit frustrating sometimes, going to enormous effort to get stuff done and get it right, and then for it to have absolutely no impact at all. She said our work had a 'ripple effect,' meaning that things happen slowly yet somehow seep into the mainstream of culture and received opinion. I valued that a lot.

After a lunch in Paris with Clint Eastwood you might think, dear reader, that we just parted and went home or continued our philosophical discourse at the nearest wine bar. Not a bit of it. As soon as our train arrived in Waterloo it was a manic rush for us both as we had to make the press screening for David Lean's *A Passage to India* at the ABC Shaftesbury Avenue.

Julian showed up at the NFT with a clipboard, a stopwatch and a pen. The Channel 4 producer was there as well. We walked the route from the riverside entrance, through the restaurant and up the awkward spiral staircase to NFT3 which would be the green room and then the room where the reception was held. Julian seemed most concerned by the drinks we would be offering. He was adamant that Clint only drank a certain type of American beer. It was unavailable in the UK but not to worry, Warner Bros would be importing a large supply. I took myself off to Harrods and bought two cases of Californian wine, a Stag's Leap cabernet and a lovely chardonnay from Sonoma-Cutrer. Of course, I had a private tasting at home, just to check they were quaffable and Clintable.

I don't think Lynda will mind if I say she was very nervous on the night. She had done this sort of thing countless times in Edinburgh but possibly not on this scale and sometimes the tension of an occasion gets to you. Clint was as big as they get, Warner Bros' top brass were there, Channel 4 were telling Lynda to do this, don't do that, and it all got a bit much. Nevertheless, it went ahead, Clint exuded a certain cool, spoke in that commanding whisper of his, proved to be a raconteur, and everything was yankee doodle dandy. I thought Lynda was fighting a little inner battle with herself about her date for the evening - 'yes, he's a male chauvinist pig but I don't half fancy him.'

We all ended up in NFT3 where quite a group was gathered, wanting to shake the man's hand. Dilys Powell, then aged about 85 and still writing weekly reviews, got to meet her hero. Clint knew all about her and was

extraordinarily gracious. My wife Andrea actually received a kiss on the cheek and she hasn't washed since. I steered Clint over to the bar and offered him a beer. "No thanks," he said, "I'll take a glass of that lovely Californian chardonnay." That made my day.

28: HUNKY DORY

The BBC had recorded a couple of seasons of *Guardian Lectures* at the NFT which were shown, quite successfully, on BBC2. The second season was a nightmare - five guests on five successive evenings so that the auditorium could be rigged for cameras and lights just the once rather than de-rig multiple times. When no third season was scheduled, we were approached by Channel 4. The punky-looking producer said she wanted to strike a completely different tone, make it more lively and interactive. She thought the BBC programmes were 'like going to church.' She was right, if only because of the saccharine violins playing over the opening credits. One of the researchers on the C4 programmes was a young man called Jonathan Ross. Dead keen, a movie buff, Jonathan was obviously going places. We drew up a list of people we wanted: Connery, Eastwood, Streep and . . .

I sat down at my desk, lit a Pall Mall, sipped a black coffee and I might just as well poured myself a Jack Daniel's on the rocks. I was bracing myself to make the telephone call. I had called many a famous name in my time - stars, directors, producers - and hadn't felt as apprehensive as I did that afternoon. I picked up the phone and called the Connaught Hotel.

"**Robert Mitchum** please," I said. Waltraud, Helen and Jane, the women with whom I shared Ken's outer office, all seemed to blink. The level of the Thames outside sank a few feet.

How shall I say this? Mitchum had a fearsome reputation. He gave a new meaning to the word 'attitude.' His very appearance was intimidating - you know, the bulk, the eyes, the way they always seemed to look down his nose, the rather abbreviated forehead. He wasn't a conventional-looking man and certainly not a man with movie-star looks like Cary Grant or Gregory Peck. That was his ace in the hole. No one else looked like Robert Mitchum. To me, he looked like a lout, a hunk. And he often behaved like one, even turning up drunk for his appearance on the *Parkinson* show a few years earlier. He would have shown up drunk going to see the Pope.

In answer to a member of the NFT audience he said, "I remember the first time I saw myself on screen in a public theatre. My wife and I were

sitting behind three women and one of them said, 'My God, who is that? That is the most depraved face I have ever seen.' The word spread."

But then people said how kind he was, how dedicated he was to his craft, not diffident at all, and he wrote poetry. It all depended on his mood from one day to the next and if he liked you. Or not.

"Mr Mitchum? Hello, this is Adrian Turner at the National Film Theatre." "Oh hello Mr Turner," said the oh so familiar, drawly rather nasal voice, "I was expecting your call."

Mitchum was on his best behaviour with us. He came over from California a few months later with his wife Dorothy and they stayed in a mews house in Chelsea which belonged to the actress Jan Sterling, the star of Billy Wilder's *Ace in the Hole*. The NFT event was held on 24 June 1984 and chaired by Derek Malcolm, the film critic of *The Guardian*. Don't ask me how or why but Derek was writing or had written a little book about Mitchum. He was way out of his comfort zone and at the start Mitchum wasn't in a great mood because he was wearing a white suit and when he got out of the limo he was mobbed by those creepy autograph hunters who, in their excitement, blotted his smart suit with their ballpoint pens. As soon as he got on stage he relaxed and turned in one of the best performances we ever saw - nearly two hours of anecdotes and wonderful mimicry. He was withering in his mockery of David Lean who directed him in *Ryan's Daughter*. In the audience was his co-star from *Ryan's Daughter* and Michael Winner's woeful remake of *The Big Sleep*, Sarah Miles who came dressed as Wimbledon - a sort of net thing draped over a body which was wearing apparently little else.

Sean Connery showed up at the NFT wearing a three-piece suit, looking every inch the city banker or retired brigadier-general. His wife, Micheline, wore a figure-hugging black leather mini-skirt and stiletto heels.

Mr Connery was one of my favourite actors, not only because of the Bond movies, which I loved, but because he had been able to forge for himself a remarkable career parallel with Bond and beyond Bond. He was a man to admire.

In the 60s Connery was superb in gritty dramas like *The Hill* and *The Offence* while in the 70s he appeared in a sort of trilogy of period pictures - *The Wind and the Lion*, directed by my pal John Milius, John Huston's lament for Empire, *The Man Who Would Be King*, and Richard Lester's elegiac masterpiece *Robin and Marian* which brought Audrey Hepburn briefly out of retirement. And then Connery went on to things like *The Untouchables* which

won him a long overdue Oscar, though Connery never went as far as Pierce Brosnan committing himself so wholeheartedly to two *Mamma Mia* movies.

Connery was an interesting man of many contradictions. He was said to be the most litigious man in the movie industry, a claim I can perhaps bear witness to. None of our guests, ever, got their lawyer to draw up a legally-binding contract for their NFT appearance. Except Sean Connery. He was not being paid a fee, nor were we paying for any of his expenses but as the event was being recorded by Channel 4 Television he stipulated that he would have the right to approve the version intended for transmission and that there could only be a single showing. If C4 wanted to repeat the programme they would have to negotiate a separate contract when fees might apply.

On the day, Connery's nerves about the whole thing were soon soothed by Iain Johnstone's relaxed approach and the obvious admiration shown by the audience. And that, I thought, was that. I had met James Bond and the Raisuli. Until one day a few months later I was dining alone at Hernando's Hideaway, a restaurant in the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, which was owned by a colourful character called Hernando Courtright. Connery came padding into the restaurant alone and was seated across from me and down a bit. I smiled, he smiled, I wasn't sure if he remembered me and everyone probably smiled at him. But then he sent a waiter across to ask if I might like to join him. I would like, thank you. And we had a lovely dinner together. He wanted to know what I was doing, who I was going to be seeing, and I tried not to fall into film fandom or fall into journalist interrogation mode. The thing I remember most from that dinner is that he taught me how to eat soft shell crabs.

In 2001 Andrea and I spent a week in the Turks & Caicos Islands, a British Overseas Territory in the Caribbean known for its powdery beaches, its tax advantages and its beautiful laundrettes where the machines take any currency you like and wash it clean. There was a newish hotel on a private island named Parrot Cay and you got there by flying into Providenciales and then taking the hotel's launch.

Parrot Cay had regular rooms in the main building, a sort of clapboard New England thing, and a string of spacious beach villas. One of these was apparently owned by **Bruce Willis**. And on our first walk on the talcum powder sand we duly encountered the star of three *Die Hard* pictures. He was alone, shuffling along barefoot, and he said a very polite "Hi!" and we said a very polite "Good morning" back.

A few days later I found myself standing at the beach bar looking for nothing more ambitious than a jug of ice to take back to our room. That probably says something about service levels at the hotel at that time. It might also say we had a bottle of duty free booze in our room and didn't want to pay for drinks at the bar. Anyway, there I was at the beach bar waiting for the single barman to serve me. But he was very busy serving the only other customer, namely Mr Willis, who had several children with him, plus a couple of women. Their order for drinks seemed to be as complicated as the NASA space programme which sent Mr Willis and other brave souls to save the Earth from extinction from an incoming haemorrhoid or something. That was in the 1998 movie *Armageddon*. I could easily have thanked Mr Willis for that heroic effort but I thought, no, I don't want to invade his privacy. He is on vacation with his family. So I just stood there, gazing out to sea, looking out for ospreys, patiently waiting my turn. And when Mr Willis's drinks order was completed he looked across at me and said, "I'm sorry we took so long. You've been very patient." I said, "Oh, that's OK, I'm in no hurry." And then Mr Willis gave me a long searching look that seemed to say, "*He doesn't know who I am.*"

Sylvester Stallone was a surprise. To be honest, I had little interest in him - the *Rocky* and *Rambo* franchises seemed so worthless, though I could just about appreciate how the original, low-budget *Rocky* had become such a global phenomenon. Its optimism was infectious.

I can't remember what movie Stallone was selling when UIP called up to offer us a *Guardian Lecture*. I said yes, of course. I asked Chris Auty to do the interview - he was a *Time Out* guy who had switched over to a rival London listings magazine called *City Limits*. Chris was a highly skilled interviewer, with a deep background knowledge of contemporary cinema, and he looked about fourteen. He showed up wearing a watered down Hell's Angel costume - all black leather, boots and chains. Maybe he had left a motorcycle outside.

Sly showed up wearing one of the most sharpest, most expensive-looking three-piece suits I have ever seen. A shirt and tie that seemed to shimmer and incredible hand-sewn shoes. He was utterly immaculate, courteous, friendly, glad to be here. I have to say, seeing Hell's Angel Chris and Mafia boss Sly together on stage together was quite a sight.

When it was over, Sly asked if he might go to the Manager's office where his minder said he would call Le Gavroche for a table. I said the

chances were remote as it's booked solid for weeks if not months ahead. Of course they had a table. Silly me, always under-estimating star power.

29: ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

Rogers & Cowan was an old-school PR company. They were headquartered in Beverly Hills and their London office - on Dover, maybe Albemarle Street in Mayfair - was run by Margaret Gardner, a fearsome New Yorker of some physical stature. She was big and muscular and came across a bit like the governor of a woman's prison. She wasn't remotely showbizzy yet this had been her professional world for many years. She lived in a magnificent company apartment in Onslow Square, South Kensington, and often held soirées to which I sometimes found myself invited. Another fixture at these was the *Evening Standard's* film critic Alexander Walker. Also ubiquitous was Margaret's assistant, Jeffrey Lane, a startling looking man, barely five feet in height, so baldy white and thoroughly scrubbed as to be slightly albino. David Castell, a friend, film critic and my very first publisher, thought Jeffrey was the living embodiment of the white rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*. Apparently Jeffrey had a twin brother, leading the showbiz journalist Peter Noble to christen them 'Two-Lane Baldtop.'

Margaret saw the cultural value in having R&C's clients visit the NFT and it was through her that many great movie stars did *Guardian Lectures* and, before that, John Player Lectures under Søren Fischer. Maybe Søren or perhaps his partner Brian Baxter told Margaret about me; anyway, I suddenly found myself on her Christmas card list and there were solicitous lunches at the private White Elephant Club on Curzon Street when she'd say things like, "Natalie Wood will be in town next month . . . any chance of fitting her in?" or "Richard Dreyfuss is at Blakes. Can you have breakfast with him? He's feeling lonely and unwanted."

Margaret called me one day to say she had a movie she wanted me to see. It was called *An American Werewolf in London*. It didn't sound like my cup of tea at all. "You've got to see it," she said, "It's nothing like you think." You didn't argue with Margaret so I went along to a preview theatre, just me. Well . . . you know that movie don't you? Talk about wrenching you out of your seat in fits of laughter and terror and shock and awe. It seemed tailor-made for the London Film Festival which needed to be rescued from its art-house ghetto.

A few days later I met *American Werewolf's* director, John Landis, who unnerved me just a little bit by recalling an interview with Richard Lester I

wrote a year earlier for *The Guardian*. I had met Lester at Twickenham Studios where Landis had based his movie. Lester briefly introduced me and then said, rather hushedly and perhaps rather resentfully, "He spent \$30 million on a car crash," referring to Landis's movie *The Blues Brothers* which was a huge hit. I quoted Lester in the interview and that obviously didn't go down well with Landis: no one wants to be thought of as profligate.

We ran *American Werewolf* at the Odeon Leicester Square. Before the screening I took Landis and his leading lady, Jenny Agutter, on stage. Now I had hosted scores of people on stage at the NFT but that was nothing like going on stage in this vast cinema - looking out at the auditorium all you saw was blinding light. The movie went down a storm and led to a pleasant relationship with Landis as well as Jenny Agutter who, a year or two before, had made an obscure spaghetti western called *China 9, Liberty 37* for cult director Monte Hellman. Her co-stars were Warren Oates and Sam Peckinpah in a rare acting role. You get the picture, I'm sure. Three drunks on location and a lovely posh English girl. In 1982 the NFT had somehow dredged it out of whatever gutter it was lurking in so I rang Jenny and invited her to the screening and a Q&A session. She asked me if I had seen it. I said I hadn't. "Had anyone?" I asked. She asked me to see it beforehand because she wanted to know which version we had. She explained that if I saw her naked titties and much else besides, or below, she would rather not come to the screening. So she didn't. No wonder she ended up playing nuns.

I next met John Landis at his office in Hollywood. The first thing he did was show me a page from a porn magazine which featured something black and unusually large. He showed it to everyone. I guess you could get arrested for doing that today. I was in LA on one of my regular trips scouting for *Guardian* guests. I was also commissioned to do a feature on Landis for *Sight and Sound*, the BFI's highbrow quarterly movie magazine. I described him like this: "A meeting with John Landis is an effective way of appreciating how self-confidence inevitably leads to success. Landis sports an old Beatle-style haircut, a thick beard and fires rapid, well-formed sentences at his interviewers, invariably before the question had been fully articulated. He's simply buoyed up with enthusiasm which makes one wonder if a box-office catastrophe might prove too unsettling." Writing for *S&S* made everyone come over all pompous.

Landis did something that no one else ever did. "Who are you going to meet and who do you *want* to meet?" he asked me. I said the man I most

wanted to meet was John Milius who was proving a bit elusive. Landis buzzed his secretary and said, "Can you find John Milius for me?" Within minutes Landis had Milius on the phone. "Hey John, I have this guy here who would love to meet you. He's from England, the British Film Institute, and he writes for *Sight & Sound!*" The next day I found myself sitting next to John Milius in a dubbing theatre where he was finishing up on *Conan the Barbarian*. For a few years I followed Big John wherever he went, even to Borneo, as you will shortly discover.

I will always be grateful to John Landis for that and for many other kindnesses. And also for introducing me to a novel dining experience. He and his wife, Deborah Nadoolman, the costume designer, took me out for dinner in Los Angeles. We went to one restaurant for appetisers, another restaurant for main courses and then all the way to Malibu for ice-cream desserts. At all three places he was welcomed as Hollywood royalty, mostly because *The Blues Brothers* hit the jackpot. Not even a tragedy a year later, when a stuntman and two children were killed on his set for *Twilight Zone*, could dampen his career.

We had his fine comedy *Trading Places* at a later London Film Festival where he personally encouraged his star Jamie Lee Curtis to attend the three screenings. I conducted the Q&As and recall how unusually close Jamie sat with me on the edge of the stage. Not so much close as pressed against me. Maybe it was Jamie's nerves, maybe just my personal magnetism. I'll never know.

30: THE LAST SAMURAI

When we hosted John Huston at the NFT I asked him about John Milius. Huston had directed one of John's early scripts, *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* which starred Paul Newman. Huston said, "John is a throwback to a different age, a Viking perhaps or a samurai, an extraordinary individual with a personal code of conduct."

There have always been great stories about this bear-like man with an expansive personality. How he asked for a shotgun from the London gunmakers Purdey as part of his fee and time off to admire it. How he charged \$150,000 for his screenplay for *Judge Roy Bean* on condition that he direct it, then charged \$300,000 when the producer said Huston was directing it. How he used to have a Claymore mine on his desk at Universal which he would click threateningly when an agent or a producer came for a meeting.

Then Oliver Stone showed up and said, "Hey, you've got a Claymore! Wow! I was nearly killed by one of those."

I discovered John Milius in 1975 at a press show for an unheralded movie called *The Wind and the Lion*. I saw it in 70mm at the Dominion on Tottenham Court Road. I remember sitting next to *Time Out* writer David Pirie and we were both taken aback by the film's sense of high adventure. It was a throwback to the days of Ronald Colman and Errol Flynn but with a thoroughly contemporary, sceptical slant on history and America's place in the world. It also featured fabulous turns from Sean Connery as a Scots-accented Arab chieftain, Candice Bergen as the feisty woman whom Connery kidnaps, Brian Keith as a buccaneering President Teddy Roosevelt and Huston himself as a Presidential adviser. Stylistically it owed a lot to the samurai pictures of Akira Kurosawa and the ancient code of honour they evoked.

The Wind and the Lion went straight into my Hall of Fame and after that I followed Milius with keen interest. Next up was his surfing drama, *Big Wednesday*, which became a cult movie on the day of its release. It was quite unlike those cheesy Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello pictures and had a sort of Melvillean grandeur which could be ridiculous and also oddly moving. Then came *Apocalypse Now*, the 2001 of war movies, complete with a psychedelic trip and a Room At The End. John wrote that epic Coppola picture which had some of the greatest lines in cinema history - you know, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning" and so on. Prior to this, John had given Dirty Harry his best lines and he wrote the famous *USS Indianapolis* scene in *Jaws*. He also directed a fine gangster picture about John Dillinger and gave the most extraordinary interviews, creating a mythical figure of himself as a right-wing, gun-toting anarchist, quite at odds with Hollywood's liberal elite. I felt I had to meet him and, as you will just have read, John Landis enabled our meeting.

John lived in a house in Bel-Air with a great view. Inside it was like a ranch house, with dens rather than rooms. In the Red Room, all leather furnishings, there were framed quotations from the revered Teddy Roosevelt and a world map stuck with pins in countries such as Cuba, El Salvador and Vietnam. It was a Saturday and he and his son Ethan were building model aircraft. John unlocked a door and allowed me to enter the fabled gun room. "My family will be one of the last to go if it comes to a fight," he said, perhaps not knowing when or with who. He was fully prepared, though. On a wall in the kitchen he had stuck a primitive sketch of a mushroom cloud bearing

the scrawled legend 'Let's get it over with.' Thinking back to this from the vantage point of 2024, with the world in flames, I couldn't agree more.

With John that day was the actor Dan Aykroyd, an engaging guy who didn't feel the need to be funny all the time. He drove me back to my hotel in his Mercedes SL roadster. We had the hood down but there was still room in the trunk for enough weaponry, borrowed from John, to start a mini-insurgency in Beverly Hills.

A year or so later I introduced John on stage at the NFT. We had just had a preview screening of *Conan the Barbarian* in which there is quite a savage sequence at the end when Conan, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, decapitates the leader of a death cult, played by James Earl Jones. My colleague John Gillett, normally of a placid disposition, shouted "This is a absolute fascist film," and walked out in disgust. Someone else was disgusted when John Milius sat down on the stage because she opened her handbag and vomited neatly into it. After that, things went swimmingly and near the end John asked someone to join us on stage, the man whom Clive James once described as a brown condom filled with walnuts, the future Governor of California. It was quite a night.

So it was only natural for me to follow John to Borneo where he was making a movie called *Farewell to the King*. This was in 1987 by which time the once hottest and most expensive screenwriter in Hollywood had effectively been blacklisted because of a film he made in 1985 called *Red Dawn* which was set in Soviet occupied Colorado and showed how a group of school kids, who call themselves Wolverines, fight back and liberate the country. Liberals hated it yet it now seems a genuine piece of primitive art with a curious legacy - the unit which captured Saddam Hussein called themselves Wolverine in an operation called Red Dawn and Ukrainian fighters had the word Wolverines painted on their tanks. Milius had and still has traction.

The Borneo trip was a hoot. John's production team had built this wonderful tribal longhouse in a jungle clearing but this was no Werner Herzog, *Fitzcarraldo*-style mission of blood, sweat and tears. Milius and his army of actors and technicians were holed up at the moderately *luxe* Holiday Inn in Kuching, the main city of the Malaysian state of Sarawak where, to my amazement, I took part in a Bavarian rite called *Oktoberfest*, swigging German beer from *steins* watching Dayak Indians wearing *lederhosen*. A band played German tunes which echoed down the mighty Sarawak River and into the

jungle. This was all because the hotel's manager, Peter Müller, was feeling homesick. I think many people were.

I drove each morning to the set in Milius's car. Occasionally you'd see a big snake slithering across the road in front. I asked this Malibu surfer sitting beside me if he liked the jungle. "This is the other side of *Heart of Darkness*, this is a Rousseau jungle, a forest of the spirits," he said, hitting his stride. "In Conrad or *Apocalypse Now* the jungle is to be feared. Here you face your fears and you learn to live with them. I feel comfortable in it. I think perhaps it's because of a previous incarnation. I think maybe I was an orang-utan." Chuckles all round.

Farewell to the King was a World War Two yarn about an American deserter, Learoyd, who escapes a Japanese firing squad by fleeing into the jungle where he is adopted by a tribe of Indians. Learoyd inevitably becomes their leader - c'mon, he's blonde with blue eyes - and turns them into an army who fight the Japanese and liberate their ancestral land. There were elements in the story of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Lawrence of Arabia* as well as Conrad's *Lord Jim* and the historical figure of James 'Rajah' Brooke whose palace lay just across the river from the Holiday Inn. Learoyd was being played by Nick Nolte, there were major parts for British actors Nigel Havers and James Fox, and Milius found roles for his girl-friend and future wife, Elon Oberon, a Mexican surfer called Gerry Lopez and an ex-footballer called Frank McRae.

One of Milius's producers, André Morgan, was keeping a watchful eye on things. He slept during the day because he hadn't changed his watch from LA time. He was never seen on the set. He was thirty-five, smoked a lot, spoke three dialects of Chinese and once worked for the Kung Fu movie outfit Golden Harvest. At the bar one night, Morgan boasted to me that in one year he had fired John Huston, Sam Peckinpah and Robert Aldrich from various projects. Morgan's current partner was Al Ruddy who had produced *The Godfather* so I knew he must be a serious man. I wondered if he might be on the verge of firing John Milius. "John should be an A-list director," he said. "Always on the A-list are Kubrick, Woody Allen, David Lean and Richard Attenborough. John has been lazy but this movie will put him up on the A-list."

Although the Director of Photography was Australian ace Dean Semler, who would later win an Oscar for *Dances With Wolves*, I got the impression that the three most important people on the set were First Assistant Derek Cracknell, Stunt Co-ordinator Terry Leonard and Unit Armourer Harris

Bierman. Leonard was off somewhere shooting second unit so I never met him. Cracknell, though, was a hugely impressive man. Well, he would be after having worked with the likes of Cimino and Kubrick. Even Harris jumped when Cracknell barked. Cracknell had a tough job, keeping several hundred Malaysian extras on the case and generally preparing everything for a take before strolling over to Milius who is playing with all the guns. He says, "Wanna take a look, guv?" Milius gets to his feet, squints through the camera, the actors let loose a hundred rounds of blanks, things explode and that's it. One take. The smell of cordite hangs in the air and the thrum of insects and the screeching of hornbills resumes.

Harris Bierman was a scary guy, about five feet eight in all directions, clean-shaven with the look they call the one hundred yard stare. Like Colonel Kilgore, he had 'that weird light around him.' Harris was always around, always had a point of view. He'd been a cop and a soldier and now he was looking after all the vast amount of weaponry used in the movie. I sidled up to him at the longhouse and said, "This is pretty exotic, isn't it?" "Exotic?" he said. "Exotic is the casino at Monte Carlo."

He asked me if I'd seen *Full Metal Jacket*. "I had some early calls from Kubrick but I never worked on the picture. I liked it but the guns! Oh dear they fucked that up. They had Japanese models and that big guy with the carbine, well, his ammo bands held a different gauge bullet. I liked the girl sniper's rifle, a Czech UZ58 which is a very rare weapon in the West, but it's a spray gun, not the weapon a sniper would use. Now, John is very particular about his guns and every one in this picture is correct." I liked Harris but he was from another planet.

Nick Nolte was made up with flaming red hair, a huge tattoo and wild eyes. He was also sick. He hardly needed that make up. He just needed the can. I asked him what was wrong and he said he had "a mild case of acute dysentery." He had prepared for the part by living barefoot in the jungle, fending for himself. A nauseating little nematode had worked its way up from Nick's feet and into his stomach. Eventually he had to go to hospital to be de-wormed. He appeared on set when required but mostly stayed in his room with his missus.

The Brits, though, were made of sterner stuff and were the life and soul of the party. Milius had me join their merry band for dinner every night in an assortment of Chinese eateries around town. James Fox had just come off David Lean's *A Passage to India* and was full of tales about the old man's return to the director's chair. It seemed a rather strained production, not least

because David was being bossed around by his leading lady, the brilliant Australian actress Judy Davis, and because David's leading man Victor Bannerjee thought he knew more about Indian manners and customs than David did.

Nigel Havers had just come off the same movie and also Steven Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun*. I really liked both Nigel and James, two posh boys, who didn't behave like movie stars. They were just a couple of fellahs, although both were rather complex characters in their own right. James had some sort of epiphany or breakdown when making *Performance* for Nic Roeg and took a sabbatical of several years, becoming an evangelical Christian. None of that baggage was apparent in his easy-going charm. And Nigel was the son of Britain's former Attorney General, blessed with dashing good looks. He could/should have been a major movie star, except for two people, Margaret Thatcher and Daniel Day Lewis, the former for creating a cultural climate which most arty people found repugnant, the latter for simply being the better actor with the right political attitude. Nigel was just that blithe Tory actor with a posh accent. And then along came Hugh Grant.

After one of these dinners the heavens opened and we were all treated to a tremendous tropical storm. I'd never experienced rain like it. I called up my wife in London to tell her about the storm, all the crashing and banging, and the roads flowing like rivers, and she told me that she'd spent the night with our two cats, cowering under the bedclothes while trees were crashing down and cars were being thrown across the road. It was the 16th October 1987, the night of Michael Fish's non-existent hurricane. Borneo didn't seem quite so exotic or exciting.

John had his editor out there in Borneo. This editor was a legend, Anne Coates, who had cut *Lawrence of Arabia*. I think having people like that around made directors like John feel secure. Maybe even like David Lean. But *Farewell to the King* turned out to be a box-office failure, a critical failure too, despite some nice sequences. "I think John got very bored," Anne said to me when we met again in Almeria a few years later. "We often had to wake him up on the set." I think that was one of John's problems. He loved the *idea* of *Farewell to the King*, he loved writing it, but when it came to the labour of actually shooting it in that hot sweaty jungle with hundreds of people milling around, he just got bored with the whole thing. It's like Joseph Conrad and me. I *love* the idea of *Lord Jim* and *Nostramo* but I find them unreadable. David Lean also found *Nostramo* unreadable and he was going to make a movie of it!

After *Farewell to the King*, John made a Vietnam war movie called *Flight of the Intruder* which I have no memory of seeing. That was his last feature film. He went into TV and created and co-produced *Rome*, one of the finest TV dramas ever made which reminded me of a great chat John and I had about Roman epics when he first met. He said then that he fancied telling the story of Caesar's assassination as a political thriller. Well, *Rome* turned out to be rather more than that. They called it a mini-series but there was nothing minimus about it. *Rome* was total maximus and by far the finest depiction of Ancient Rome ever filmed.

Around this time John suffered two massive personal disasters. Firstly, a close friend who was also his financial adviser embezzled him and virtually wiped him out financially. A friendly producer stepped in and paid for John's son Ethan to study law. John paid him back with the proceeds of *Rome*. And then, in 2010, he suffered a serious stroke which left him temporarily unable to speak. A rather splendid documentary - *Milius* - was made about him, with contributions from Spielberg, Lucas, Coppola, Scorsese and others, and showing his determination to recover which, I am glad to say, he has.

John Milius was one of three contemporary directors who I got rather close to. The others were Hugh Hudson and Michael Cimino. They were all wonderfully complex, challenging characters with gargantuan talents and visions which, for various reasons, were unrealised. They all made mega-flops and all were ostracised by the industry. They certainly didn't need my shoulder to cry on. They were big boys. So I cried for them, the movies they never made and the movies I never saw . . .

31: GRAHAM GREENE

Organising these Guardian Lectures at the NFT was always fun yet it quickly became a routine - invite, hello, meet and greet, organise hospitality, engage interviewer, the event itself, wrap-up, thank you and goodbye. Next!

There were a handful of events that were truly special, major cultural occasions or just plain eye-catching. Four events in particular stand out in my memory and two of them did not involve filmmakers. The two that did were Robert de Niro and Clint Eastwood. They could have filled the Albert Hall and I describe them elsewhere. Then there was Stephen Sondheim who turned out to be one of the nicest showbiz people I ever met. He even accompanied me on a (fruitless) shopping expedition to Covent Garden where I wanted to buy a copper sauté pan from a kitchen shop. We had

lunch together at the basement theatrical watering hole of Joe Allen on Exeter Street where he caused quite the clamour.

To conduct the NFT interview I asked my friend Tony Sloman who was a professional film editor who put a lot of people's backs out because he knew more about the business than anyone else. He was also the archetypal film buff - he knew everything about every movie ever made. To put it bluntly, he was a complete know-all. His wife Simone, an ex-BFI staffer, often nagged me to get Tony to chair some of these events and I always bridled at the idea because I worried he would use the occasion to show off his vast knowledge. He sometimes said to me, 'I could have done that so much better.' When Sondheim was announced Simone pleaded with me again - Tony was his Number One fan. I said OK. And you know what? Tony was utterly brilliant. So brilliant, in fact, that I let him loose on Walter Matthau.

Sondheim attracted a whole new audience to the NFT - I guess people were amazed to see us staging such an event with a man of the musical theatre who had only a glancing connection with movies. The demand for tickets was exceptional. I reckon half the seats that night were freebies to the trade.

The novelist Graham Greene was the other major cultural event. His connection to the cinema was significant - there are well over thirty film adaptations of his novels and he seemed to hate almost all of them, apart from the few he wrote himself. Greene had appeared at the NFT back in the days of the John Player Lectures so he sort of knew the ropes. I invited him because my friend Quentin Falk was publishing a study of Greene's work in the cinema - *Travels in Greeneland* - and we had put together an extensive season of films. Greene accepted our invitation and asked to be housed at the Ritz Hotel on Piccadilly. He had a book of his own to flog, *Getting to Know the General*, so we went Dutch with his publisher.

Quentin had cleverly seduced the normally reticent Greene into collaborating on his book and had conducted interviews at the author's home in France. Quentin was keen to have a meeting before the NFT event but Greene wasn't so keen so I picked him up at the Ritz and just about poured him on stage, fresh out of the tin. He was a tall man, distinguished only in the way that a City actuary might look. The NFT audience included just about every literary pundit in London. There were Booker Prize winners all over the shop. It was like a farewell concert by Frank Sinatra. The BBC's Alan Yentob tried every trick in the book to persuade the 82 year-old Greene

to have the event filmed for posterity but Greene always turned down such requests as he believed authors should be as anonymous as possible. Indeed, perhaps the only proper film of him was his brief, uncredited cameo in François Truffaut's 1973 film *Day for Night*.

So I did a terrible thing. It tore at my conscience for all of fifteen minutes. I betrayed Greene's trust by putting a small video camera in the projection box of NFT1 and installed additional lighting on the stage. I never told a soul. As soon as Greene went on stage with Quentin I ran up to the box and recorded the entire thing. I wouldn't say the technical quality rivalled Robert Krasker's imagery in *The Third Man*, though mine was just as lop-sided, but I what I had captured was quite probably unique and would remain unseen until 2004 when extracts were included in a BBC *Arena* programme to mark Greene's centenary.

I recall something else about the Greene visit. I used to collect Modern First Editions and even had a complete run of the James Bond novels, including a pristine copy of *Casino Royale* which I bought in London for £400 and later sold in Los Angeles for \$5000. I believe Pierce Brosnan bought it from the dealer. I had a few Graham Greene Firsts and knew he was sparing with his signature. The day after his *Guardian Lecture* I sent a little package over to the Ritz with a note saying, 'Dear Mr Greene, I hope you enjoyed your evening with us and thank you for being such a splendid guest. I know you prefer not to sign copies of your books but I enclose three in the hope you might sign these. If you don't I will never buy you in hardback again.'

The next day a package arrived for me with three Firsts signed by the author. The inscription in *The Honorary Consul* read, 'For Adrian Turner who helped turn a frightening evening into a friendly one.'

32: WILLY, BILLY & FRED

i: Holding Oscar's Willy

I have written earlier about *Ben-Hur* and its importance to me. It was the movie that got me interested in movies, way back in 1960. So you can imagine how excited I was, 21 years later, to be driving to meet the film's legendary director, William Wyler, at his home on Summit Drive, right across from the famous Pickfair, home of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. Sadly, Pickfair was demolished a few years later.

The Wyler house was a fairly modest affair, exuding warmth and with quite a lot of clutter. It was unmistakably a European house. His wife of many years, Talli, came to the door and showed me into his study. It was

quite dark in there. I said something like what a privilege it was to meet him and he said, disarmingly, in a still fairly heavy accent, "Oh it's just great to meet someone who knows who I was." Willy - he insisted I call him that - hadn't made a picture since 1970 but seemed perfectly relaxed about his retirement, while Billy Wilder seethed with resentment.

He was famously deaf, having suffered damage to his eardrums while filming his wartime documentary *Memphis Belle*. His mind was still sharp and for a man who made rather serious films he was almost as witty as Billy, with whom he was often confused, so much in fact that Willy happily acknowledged praise for *Some Like it Hot* while Billy thanked the people who congratulated him for *Roman Holiday*. What I did not know was how ill he was. He seemed quite frail and I picked up a certain heaviness in his breathing but had no idea he was dying from emphysema.

My big treat that day was to hold Willy's Oscar for *Ben-Hur*. It was his third, following wins for *Mrs Miniver* (1942) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), arguably his best film. He had certainly made some of the best films of my life.

I was planning a complete retrospective of Wyler's career at the NFT to be written up by my friend Neil Sinyard. The highlight would be a *Guardian Lecture* which I would chair myself. Willy was up for this and planned a farewell tour of Europe, visiting his original home town of Mulhouse in Alsace and also going on a cruise of the Norwegian fjords. The *Guardian* budget would cover the airfares for Mr and Mrs Wyler and a week at the Connaught Hotel.

We held a big luncheon in the NFT's riverside restaurant. Willy's great chum Fred Zinnemann came along and it was quite moving to see these men embrace each other. My friend Neil would end up writing books about both men in addition to the book on Billy Wilder which he co-authored with me.

On stage Willy was superb, once I got the hang of asking him stuff at a level he could hear. He had some great yarns about Samuel Goldwyn and was at pains to debunk the myth that he routinely asked for 50 takes or more. The thing you had to understand about Willy was that he was not a cultured man or particularly articulate. When he asked for another take actors often asked him what he wanted. And he would say he didn't know but would recognise it when he saw it. He was, I suppose, a totally instinctive director. He also had one of the great Hollywood lines. A member of our audience asked if he had any trouble directing Barbra Streisand in *Funny Girl*. "No trouble at all," he said, "considering that was the first film she ever directed."

The Wylers left London for their European tour and got back to Summit Drive a few weeks later. Willy's daughter, Catherine, had organised a filmed interview in his study which formed the major part of a PBS documentary, *Directed by William Wyler*. Three days after the interview was recorded, on 24 August 1981, William Wyler died.

ii: Grumpy Old Men

In 1977 I received a letter from a university lecturer called Neil Sinyard. He had noticed how in several articles I had written for a movie magazine called *Films Illustrated* I would drop in a reference to Billy Wilder, often for no discernible reason. Neil said that Billy Wilder was his favourite director as well and, to cut a long story short, we ended up collaborating on a book which we called *Journey Down Sunset Boulevard: The Films of Billy Wilder*. Writing auteurist studies in those days seems now to have been an impossible task. Looking back, I have no idea how we - or anyone - did it. There were no VHS or DVDs available which you could stop, start and go back. You couldn't record off-air TV. You just had to see the wretched movie in a cinema and scribble notes in the dark as it went along relentlessly at twenty-four frames a second.

Our book was published in 1979 by David Castell and John Williams who owned *Films Illustrated*. It was their first venture into publishing and it was Neil's and my first book. I doubt if David and John saw a nickel from it but we got some nice reviews. We sent a copy to Mr Wilder and received a letter back from him - "Thank you gentlemen," he wrote, "It is the only worthwhile thing ever written about me. Maybe a bit too flattering but who am I to complain?" I'm sure he said that to everyone.

On a visit to LA in 1980 I got to meet him as well as his long-time writing partner IAL Diamond, known as Izzy. They had an office in the legendary Writers and Artists Building at 9507 Santa Monica Boulevard. I was thrown at first, not realising that in this section of Beverly Hills, Santa Monica Boulevard becomes two parallel roads, one big, one quite little. In fact, people called it Little Santa Monica. The building was in the Spanish-revival style which passes for Beverly Vernacular and had been occupied by movie people since the late 1920s. As I walked in I noticed a door with a nameplate which announced 'Mr Jack Nicholson.' I knew he wouldn't be in as he had been in England for the last eight-and-a-half years filming *The Shining*.

Messrs Wilder and Diamond were charming, welcoming, and Billy had a copy of the German edition of our book, *Billy Wilders Filme*, on the shelf behind his desk. I sat in a work of art - a Charles Eames chair which had been signed by the designer. Wilder puffed on a cigar and Diamond chain-smoked cigarettes. They were working on a movie script and all they would say was that it was based on a French farce. They seemed resigned to the fact that after several box-office flops in a row they could still find someone in Hollywood to finance them. After half an hour I could sense I was interrupting their work - Wilder started to pace the room, Diamond fussed with the space bar on his typewriter - so I left and crossed the road to an extravagant and luxurious bookstore called Hunters which was destined to become an Yves Saint Laurent boutique. It wasn't so great on movie books. For those you had to go to the world famous emporium Larry Edmund's on sleazy Hollywood Boulevard.

I next saw Billy in 1981. I had been to the set of Alan Parker's movie *Shoot the Moon* in Northern California and then flew to Ontario, also in California, where I was driven to a suburb of Los Angeles called Riverside. The downtown area was full of Spanish-style buildings and sheltering palms. It was here that Billy was making what would prove to be his last film, *Buddy Buddy*, based on that French farce they told me about. Jack Lemmon played a TV censor whose wife had left him and was living with a manic sex therapist. Walter Matthau played a gangland hitman whose current mission is thwarted by Lemmon who is intent on committing suicide. It's all set around the courthouse and a hotel across the street which they had to construct as a façade pinned to existing shopfronts.

Buddy Buddy turned out to be Billy's worst picture - worse even than *The Emperor Waltz* - but it was a great privilege to see him and Diamond working together, how Wilder would attend to the actors and the camera set-ups with Diamond standing close by, script in hand, ready to intercede if so much as a comma was overlooked by an actor, though he did tell me they allowed Matthau and Lemmon some leeway in the punctuation department. I spent a day there, lunching with Wilder and Diamond and also with Matthau who I quickly learned gambled incessantly on horses and was also a puzzle fanatic and Anglophile. As for Lemmon, he was civil but hardly friendly and after a take hurriedly retreated to his trailer where, I learned later, that he drank just enough not to impede his acting.

I caught up with everyone at the MGM studios in Culver City where Billy was shooting interiors. The production had been green-lit by a new

chief executive, David Begelman, who had survived an embezzlement scandal at Columbia, and was intent on reviving the studio's fortunes with a big slate of pictures. He also wanted to find work for some of Hollywood's giants of the golden age - Cukor and Aldrich were there as well.

Billy walked me round the lot. Nostalgia came calling. I conjured up Bill Holden and Nancy Olson wandering the Paramount lot in *Sunset Boulevard*. Billy's mind went back to 1939, the last time he worked at Metro, before he became a director. He pointed out his old office. "This is where Brackett, Walter Reisch and I wrote *Ninotchka*," he said. "Lubitsch would drop by to check up on us." By now we had reached the basement theatre where he viewed the rushes. "This is a historic building," he said, "This where Louis B Mayer first saw *Anna Karenina*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind*."

It was here, at MGM, that I got IAL Diamond to give me a proper interview. I think it was one of the most wide-ranging interviews he ever gave to anyone. It was published in the May 1982 issue of *Films & Filming*. While Billy was always fairly diplomatic when discussing modern movies and directors, Diamond was far more outspoken and disdainful. He was dismissive of directors such as Peter Bogdanovich and Lawrence Kasdan who created virtual remakes of classics like *Bringing Up Baby* {*What's Up Doc?*} and Billy's own *Double Indemnity* {*Body Heat*} and won vast praise. If he and Billy had done that, he thought, they would have been torn to shreds. He couldn't understand a movie like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and cited a sequence in which Harrison Ford swims out to a German submarine as it leaves harbour and then dives. We next see Ford hiding on a wharf having somehow got a lift on the submarine. "Now wait a moment," said Diamond, "surely there's a sequence missing here? But nothing had been written or cut because nobody cared. This is a sort of Nixonian contempt for the intelligence of the audience. But they were obviously right. They got away with it and made \$200 million."

Billy and Izzy were badly bruised by the failure of *Buddy Buddy*, a movie which showed just how out of touch they were with modern cinema and modern audiences. "I think if *Buddy Buddy* had starred John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd and was directed by a young filmmaker it would have had a totally different critical reception," Diamond said.

In June 1982 I had an interesting encounter with Billy in Rome where he was being honoured by an Italian movie magazine called *Filmcritica*. I told him how surprised I was that he had agreed to attend. He said, "A week in

Rome, all expenses paid. Are you kidding?" Festivities got underway with a big ceremony at the magnificent Campidoglio. The Mayor of Rome hosted and Audrey Hepburn no less came out and gave Billy a medal.

The event showed its true cultural colours a day or two later when eminent film historians, *moi aussi*, delivered learned papers, exegeses yet, testifying to the genius of that bespectacled man sitting on the stage looking bored out of his mind. My talk - a forlorn attempt to rationalise and contextualise *Buddy Buddy* - was in the afternoon and mercifully Billy decided to take a rain check. The following morning, at the end of it all, Billy was back on stage and was asked to sum up his feelings about the event. He started by saying it had been like listening to a funeral oration. He then said he had been assiduously making notes: "Buy shoes from Gucci. Tell my wife Bulgari is too expensive. Steal two ashtrays from Cafe Greco. Ferragamo closes early tomorrow." Billy sensed he wasn't going down too well and blamed the translators: "I was waiting for bigger laughs," he said, "Maybe the translation isn't fast enough, or maybe my jokes aren't funny, or maybe your skill leaves something to be desired." Billy showed a mean and nasty side to his character that day. It was rather shocking. I think it was born out of the bitter realisation that his career was over and all he had now was awards from film critics who took his work far too seriously. "I'm annoyed when I hear names like Oedipus and Narcissus mentioned regarding my films," he said, "If I had proposed such a script to Hollywood I wouldn't have received five dollars."

I last saw Billy in 1989. I was taking my friend Quentin Falk to meet him and we dutifully showed up at the appointed time at his office in the Writers and Artists Building on Little Santa Monica. Except that Billy wasn't there and the office was empty. He had obviously moved and hadn't told me! Panic started to set in. Billy hated people being late even if it was his fault. And then I noticed a name on another door in the building - Rex McGee. Now some of us are cursed with memories like flypaper and stuck there is a staggering amount of miscellaneous data, mostly useless. Because of this, I knew the name of Rex McGee. He had written about Billy for *American Film* magazine and not only that he appeared in Billy's 1976 film *Fedora* as a photographer in what I regard as one of the four or five finest scenes Billy ever shot, when Henry Fonda as the President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences arrives at Fedora's island villa to present her with an Oscar. The emotion in that scene - the magic hour light, the shimmering

Ionian sea, Rozsa's swooning music, the whole panoply of Hollywood memory and myth - reduces me to a quivering wreck every time I see it.

As luck would have it, Rex McGee was in and he told us Billy had moved to new premises above a bakery (or was it a laundry?) on Brighton Way, just down Rodeo Drive. I think maybe Billy had wanted to move as the old office on Santa Monica carried too many memories of his long-time partner Izzy Diamond who had died the previous year. Billy was devastated; Diamond had delayed telling him he had terminal cancer until the last possible moment. Rex said he would call Billy and tell him we were on our way. Quentin and I hot-footed it down Rodeo and found Billy's office within ten minutes. All the same old stuff was there - the Eames chair, the bound screenplays, the awards, the paperweights, the huge Picasso signature, the framed sign 'How would Lubitsch do it?' along with dozens of collectibles. We chatted for a while, then the porkpie hat went on the silvery head and off we went for lunch.

Two things stand out for me at that lunch. Billy had chosen a restaurant he had not been to before. It was called Magic Pan and was on the ground floor of the Beverly Professional Building, a magnificent office block on Brighton Way built in 1926 in a Spanish revival style known as Churrigueresque. Only in LA, huh? We arrived there a little early and the guy at the desk asked if we could come back in 15 minutes. I thought, *you are asking Billy Wilder, six-time Oscar winner, Hollywood Royalty, to come back in 15 minutes???!!!* He clearly had no idea who he was. But Billy didn't bat an eyelid, he said OK and we walked around the block. Times have really changed, I thought. Gone were the days when the manager would have seated us at the bar, given us all drinks and done some serious sucking up. Nowadays that only happened to Julia Roberts and Richard Gere.

Billy was on good form that day, spinning well-rehearsed yarns and debriefing us on what movies we had seen recently. Quentin had to leave early for another appointment and when Billy went to the men's room I made a big mistake. Huge. I paid the bill. Billy came back, discovered my infringement of protocol, called for the check, got my credit card refunded and paid the bill himself. His displeasure was obvious because he delighted in buying lunches for people. Happily, he quickly forgot about it and we walked up Rodeo drive to the Gucci store where we both bought trinkets for our wives. He drove me back to my hotel and although I didn't know it, that would be the last time I saw him. While we subsequently spoke a few times

on the phone, my visits to LA became rarer and then only as a tedious stopover to the South Pacific.

Billy died in 2002 and was buried in Westwood, just down from his apartment on Wilshire Boulevard. One of his near neighbours in the cemetery is Jack Lemmon whose tombstone reads, 'Jack Lemmon In.' Billy's tombstone reads, 'I'm a writer but nobody's perfect.' One day I'll pay him a visit.

iii: Dr Z will see you now

Another director I got to know reasonably well was **Fred Zinnemann**. In an industry not known for what might still be described as gentlemanly qualities, Fred was a real gent.

I think I first met him when he came to Willy Wyler's *Guardian Lecture* at the NFT. It was moving to see these two men embrace each other - they had so many common experiences, as they had with another of their friends, Billy Wilder. All three came from Europe, all had the shadow of Nazism etched in their souls. Billy and Fred both lost their families in the Holocaust and perhaps felt a measure of guilt at having escaped that nightmare and become rich and famous. They forged new lives, new identities, even new names and had risen to the top of the Hollywood food chain. All three had won multiple Oscars and had experienced life-changing success.

However, they all suffered at the hands of auteurist film critics, notably Andrew Sarris who, in his hugely influential ranking of American directors, dumped and lumped them in the most ignominious category called 'Less than meets the eye.' For many years that was the critical orthodoxy and I remember Fred telling me how upset he was that Richard Roud, a former programme director of the NFT, had omitted him entirely from his two-volume book, *A Critical Dictionary of the Cinema*. All that sort of thing seems a bit stupid and irrelevant nowadays in the age of social media and instant opinion without context. But back then, in the 1960s and 1970s, critical opinion and the ranking of directors was a hard currency. The top gods of the Pantheon were people like Ford, Hawks, Hitchcock and Lubitsch.

I must admit to finding a lot of Fred's films a bit too worthy, too earnest, too . . . OK, I'll say it, too heavy-going. One of his most famous films was the western *High Noon* which was produced by Stanley Kramer who subsequently became a director and took on hugely important topics like race, nuclear war, religious fundamentalism and the Nuremberg war trials and turned them into turgid, self-important melodramas. Otto Preminger

did that, too, but his movies had a terrific energy and style. The only Kramer film I liked was *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. Fred seemed to plough a similar furrow for much of his career, turning out rather solemn meditations on conscience such as *The Nun's Story* and *A Man For All Seasons*. Yes he did make *Oklahoma!* - in fact, he made it twice, once in 70mm and once in 35mm - but that was an anomaly. The only films of his I really liked were *From Here to Eternity*, which is a full-throttle melodrama, and *The Day of the Jackal* which remains a masterclass of directorial economy - there isn't a single superfluous shot in the entire 145-minute picture.

In the early 1960s Fred abandoned Hollywood and set up shop in London where he lived for the rest of his life. Fred and his wife had a lovely Victorian villa on Blomfield Road, in an area known as Little Venice, right on the Regents Park Canal where Richard Branson had his houseboat, but I always saw him - maybe once every two months - at his office on Mount Street, Mayfair, just across the road from the Connaught Hotel and near the entrance to Berkeley Square. Fred's father had been a doctor in Vienna and for a short time it seemed as if he might follow his father into medicine, or into the law. Going up in the shaky old lift to see Fred was like going to see a private doctor, perhaps a psychiatrist, perhaps a lawyer, not a big-shot Hollywood director. Despite the movie knick-knacks, his office was like a consulting room with a prim secretary outside who always called him 'Mr Z.' His voice was still heavily accented, quiet and clipped yet oddly authoritative. His humour, shown rarely, was bone dry, his stubbornness there for all to see. I never saw him without a jacket and tie. He wore two discreet and very expensive hearing aids which were his aerals on the world.

I, too, was one of his aerals and there were, I believe, many others. My colleague at the BFI, David Meeker, was a regular in Fred's consulting room, so was the film critic Alexander Walker, and so were several directors, notably Alan Parker who never released a picture before Fred had seen it. Like many directors of his generation, Fred felt increasingly isolated and forgotten and needed people like me to keep him up to date with the business. He would always take me to lunch - often it was a branch of the seafood chain Wheeler's and a few times it was a hotel on Grosvenor Square called the Britannia, later the scene of Alexander Litvinenko's poisoning by Russian agents. Fred chose the venues carefully for their quietness so he could hear much better.

He was toying with the idea of writing an autobiography. A publisher named Laura Morris, who (with Peter Cowie) pioneered the 60s boom in

movie books, and who later became my literary agent, was gently prodding and cajoling him. But Fred worried that no one would care or know who he was. "My early life and my first years in Hollywood are quite interesting," he once told me, "but after that it's just another boring success story." He always played down his achievements. Eventually Fred did publish an autobiography full of wonderful photographs and as little text as he could get away with and most of that was ghosted by Alexander Walker. And he also gave many extended interviews to Neil Sinyard who turned them into a book of his own published some 20 years later.

In his later career Fred learned how to cope with disappointment. In 1970 his long-cherished film of Malraux's *Man's Fate* was cancelled at the last hour. However, his 1977 film *Julia*, starring Jane Fonda and Vanessa Redgrave, was major success. His final film, *Five Days One Summer*, an Alpine drama with Sean Connery was close to Fred's heart (he was a skilled mountaineer) but a total failure, barely released and seen by hardly anyone. We held the premiere at the NFT as part of a complete retrospective. He chickened out of a full on-stage interview and dreaded even going on stage to introduce any of his films until I asked Edward Fox to take him on stage before we screened *Jackal*. He seemed genuinely touched by the welcome he got.

After that he gave up hoping to make another film and in the process was the source of one of the best stories about modern Hollywood: He was pitching an idea to a young studio executive, Sam Goldwyn III no less, who got the meeting going by saying, "Tell me Mr Zinnemann, what have you done?" And Fred said, "You start."

33: MY FAVOURITE FILM DIRECTOR

Many people have favourite films and favourite movie stars. Not so many have favourite directors. For years my favourite film director was Stanley Kubrick, mainly because *Dr Strangelove* was the first film to show me that a director was someone of importance, the creator of the film. It was four long years before Stanley had another film to show me and that was *2001: A Space Odyssey* which was shown in Cinerama, at the plush, blood-red Casino in Soho, and I must have seen it once a month for six months. Another three years and then came *A Clockwork Orange*. I'd never seen anything quite like it before or indeed since. Then came *Barry Lyndon* which completely wrong-footed me at first because - I don't know why - I expected some sort of romp

like *Tom Jones* or a satire like *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. *Barry Lyndon* was just about the slowest, glummiest movie I had ever seen.

Next up was *The Shining* which was the horror film that wasn't horrific. I saw it at Grauman's Chinese in Hollywood. That was the big thrill, the cinema not the movie. I then waited seven years for *Full Metal Jacket*. By the time *Eyes Wide Shut* came out twelve years later (!) I just couldn't face it and I still haven't seen it. The story, the whole Cruise & Kidman thing, the absurd amount of time it took to make . . . everything about *Eyes Wide Shut* seemed utterly irrelevant and I also felt great resentment to the movie as it had literally killed its director. Stanley died before it was released and no one really believes the version shown publicly would have been the real version had he lived to fuss over it again and again. And again.

People change and movies change too. Going back to Stanley's older movies, I find *Paths of Glory* and *Spartacus* rather preachy, *Lolita* far too long and crippled by being shot in Hertfordshire, *Dr Strangelove* still brilliant, *2001* still a unique achievement but it doesn't really work on TV or home video, much less a smartphone. It needs Cinerama. *A Clockwork Orange* seems thoroughly nasty and the one movie that deserves the warning which TV companies frequently use: 'This film contains flash photography.' While *The Shining* grew on me as time went by, *Full Metal Jacket* looked like an empty exercise: *Platoon*, *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* tower over it and preceded it.

That leaves me with *Barry Lyndon* which slowly became one of the five films I now regard as the greatest ever made. It is hypnotic, mesmeric and I adore every one of its lingering, lambent 185 minutes. As I said, maybe I was expecting something like *Tom Jones* which took as its main influence the tricky techniques of Godard and the *nouvelle-vague*. Today, it's all but unwatchable. Kubrick, on the other hand, only seems influenced by 18th century art, composers and artists. I wrote a 'second opinion' review of the film and received a letter of appreciation from Stanley. I see it often and I visit the locations and marvel how he created those ravishing images.

The carefully cultivated mystique of Stanley himself was and remains very powerful and the way he conducted his life and career was I believe unique in the mainstream commercial cinema. How ironic it was that he didn't live until the year 2001. The day after his shockingly premature death in 1999 a newspaper asked me to write his obituary. I fiddled around with a few crappy opening paragraphs and gave up. I went down to the local shop and bought a pack of unfiltered Pall Malls, even though I had recently given

up smoking. I got back to my home office, lit a ciggie, poured a black coffee and started work on it again. By lunchtime I had nothing to show except a cough, a sore throat and a migraine. Stanley was making me ill. For the first time I had to throw in the towel. Stanley had meant so much to me over three decades yet I couldn't get close to him on paper. He was tearing me apart. He long ago ceased to be my favourite film director.

Billy Wilder was also a candidate for being My Favourite Film Director. The first film of his I saw was *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. Unlike Stanley, I got fairly close to Billy and feel intensely privileged to have done so. But there are many Wilder pictures that I can live without - especially those raucous ones like *One, Two, Three, Kiss Me Stupid* and *The Front Page*. Interestingly, Billy was a big fan of Stanley's pictures with the sole exception of *Barry Lyndon*, explaining to Cameron Crowe, "He worked like six months to find a way to photograph somebody by candlelight, not artificial light, and nobody gives a shit whether it is by candlelight or not. What are the jokes? What is the story? That's the only Kubrick picture I did not like. I cannot discuss it with anybody because people have not seen that movie."

Billy shot pictures as quickly and as economically as possible. He described himself as a 'company man.' He made five or six outright masterpieces, I co-authored a book about him, but as a living person he lacked much in the way of mystique. He was too easy to like, too accessible, too out-going. My favourite director needs to be more than just a film director. He needs to be elusive, a bit of a mystery, a myth of his own making.

Which brings me to the man I first saw walking in one of the arcades which surround on three sides the Piazza San Marco in Venice. This was in 1973 and I was there on holiday. I saw him out of the corner of my eye and knew it was unmistakably him. He was so striking-looking. A magnificent strong face, silvery hair, enormous ears, a blindingly white shirt buttoned to the neck without a tie, casual trousers, soft leather loafers worn without socks, a Leica hung on his shoulder. He held the hand of a gorgeous blond, many years his junior. Yes, this was David Lean.

I next saw him coming into my corner shop, the Everyman in Hampstead. The blonde, Sandy, was with him of course. They had come to see Fred Astaire in *Top Hat*. He paid for his tickets and I remember welcoming him to the cinema and asking if he was making another film. He was a bit vague on that. This would have been in 1974.

I wish I could say that David Lean was my favourite film director, even back then. But he wasn't. Back then I was deep into my Kubrick phase and I was also flirting with Billy Wilder because I just adored *Sherlock* and his latest movie, *Avanti!* However, I did greatly admire Lean's pictures, mainly because they took me to some wildly romantic and spectacular places. I luxuriated in the look of *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Doctor Zhivago* and, yes, *Ryan's Daughter*. In 1976 we even made a pilgrimage to Dingle, Ireland, and toured all the *Ryan's Daughter* locations. But back in the 1970s David Lean didn't figure on the radar in serious critical circles. He was just so . . . old-fashioned, a purveyor of bloated, middle-brow, anodyne epics. I got an acute sense of this several years earlier at the National Film Theatre when I attended a John Player Lecture by the American director John Frankenheimer. He had made some seriously great pictures in the early sixties such as *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Seven Days in May* and *Seconds*. I thought he was in the Kubrick class. And Frankenheimer could hatch two or three pictures in the time it took Kubrick to decide if he wanted a boiled egg or a poached egg for breakfast.

Frankenheimer drew a large and appreciative crowd at the NFT. Near the end, a member of the audience asked a simple question, "Mr Frankenheimer, who is your favourite film director?" We all waited expectantly. Who would it be? John Ford? Hitchcock? Godard? Fellini? "I have to say it's David Lean," he said. You could hear the audience wince.

Before we get back to David Lean, I'll tell you more about John Frankenheimer. He went a little haywire in the late 60s because on 6 June 1968 he drove Senator Robert Kennedy to the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. Frankenheimer had been a close friend and one of many advisors to the Presidential candidate and the assassination of RFK in that hotel on that fateful day hit him as hard as anyone. He drank heavily, he moved to France, he worked as a *sous-chef* in some fancy restaurants and he made some terrible films, redeeming himself with *French Connection II* and *Black Sunday*. In 1985 he showed up in London to make *The Holcroft Covenant* with Michael Caine. I spent a day on the set and John agreed to give us a preview of the movie and do a return visit to the NFT. A few months later I saw a rough-cut and I called John to cancel our arrangement. I didn't want to . . . embarrass him. The film was terrible. He died in 2002 during spinal surgery, aged just 72.

Back to 1977 and my phone rang at the NFT. It was Hilary in the box-office who said she had just got a phone booking from David Lean. She wondered if I might want to hang around to greet him. That night we were

showing Carol Reed's *Outcast of the Islands* and *The Third Man*. I showed Mr Lean and Sandy to their seats and during the break I took them up to NFT3 and served them drinks and sandwiches. Mr Lean asked me to call him David so he will be David from now on.

I showed him a copy of the NFT programme booklet containing a season of his films which was, in fact, the first season I arranged. David looked at the cover photo of himself - standing on a beach in Ireland, dwarfed by the landscape - and tried to open the booklet until he realised he was on the back cover. Brian Baxter, who edited the booklet, had insisted on putting Carl Theodore Dreyer on the front cover. That rankled with me and it also rankled with David himself, confirming his worst suspicions about the BFI as an organisation instinctively prejudiced against him because he had abandoned Britain and had sold out to Hollywood unlike, say, Michael Powell who had remained true to his cultural roots and made more innovative movies than David. But Powell's career petered out and didn't extend much beyond the 1950s. I met him several times and thought he was thoroughly unpleasant, though I did love his entry in *Who's Who* where he listed as his pastime, 'leaning on gates.'

For me, David Lean was the ultimate movie director. This is partly because he had a life as well as a career. He seemed haughty yet also vulnerable. I somehow responded on a cellular level to his movies, I engaged with his complex relationship with England, his taste for faraway places and vast landscapes, his nomadic lifestyle. He seemed such a romantic figure for whom the word compromise did not exist. When I met him at the NFT he was at the start at what became one of the biggest disappointments of his career, a two-part film about the mutiny on the *Bounty* in 1789. Now, if you have been paying attention at the back, the 1962 film about that story, starring Marlon Brando and Trevor Howard, had been one of those formative experiences of my youth. David's project filled me with excitement and he, too, was all fired up about it. He had spent that afternoon visiting the grave of William Bligh which was just down the road from the NFT in St Mary's, Lambeth.

At this time David was an elusive figure. In fact, he was fairly elusive since the mid-1950s when he gave up on England and moved abroad, not that he put down roots anywhere. He might have had a house in Rome for a while but mostly he just lived out of the boot of his Rolls or stayed at hotels wherever he pleased. The box-office bonanza that was *Doctor Zhivago* had set him up for life. But in the late 1970s the *Bounty* project took him to Tahiti for

several years and when that foundered he was off to Bangalore to make *A Passage to India*. I don't think I met him again until 1985 by which time he had moved to London and built a riverfront house. His fifth wife Sandy had left him shortly after *A Passage to India* was released and then David found another Sandra, Sandra Cooke, an exotic London art dealer, whom he met in Harrods food hall.

We scored something of a coup when the great Japanese director Akira Kurosawa was persuaded to give a *Guardian Lecture* at the NFT - his movie *Ran*, an adaptation of *King Lear*, was being released. He didn't speak much English but he came with an interpreter and his producer, the mercurial Serge Silberman. Kurosawa was a major figure, on a par with John Ford, Hitchcock or Fellini or Jean Renoir, one of the building blocks on which the modern cinema was built. So I dreamed up the idea of a dinner for him where he would be honoured by as many British directors as I could muster. I took my time deciding on a venue and opted for a private room at the Inn on the Park Hotel, now the Four Seasons Park Lane.

Every significant British or British-based director was invited and the acceptances were impressive: Hudson, Boorman, Lester, Parker et al. Lindsay Anderson declined because he preferred to stew in his own resentment in his moral high ground in West Hampstead. And I didn't invite Michael Winner because he was so obnoxious. I put a call through to Maggie Unsworth who had been David's right-hand-woman for many years and asked her if David might conceivably come to this little bash of mine. He was famously resistant to this sort of thing. To my amazement he agreed and overnight this became, in my mind at any rate, the David Lean Dinner. Kurosawa just happened to be there as well. And so was Serge Silberman.

Only a few days after the Inn on the Park dinner Sandra called and asked for the guest list. David's birthday was coming up and she wanted to invite everyone on the list because David had enjoyed himself so much. He had been away from England for so long he hardly knew anyone. This started a pleasant friendship with David. I never invited him for one of those *Guardian* interviews at the NFT because I thought that might compromise our relationship which I placed a high value on. I saw him reasonably often, sometimes at his house in Narrow Street which had been two Victorian warehouses which he knocked together, one of them becoming a huge walled garden complete with a 'beach,' the other a glorious living space complete with an underground garage equipped with a turntable for his Rolls-Royce convertible.

I found David remarkably warm towards me. I suppose he recognised a fan. He asked me quite early on where I was born and when I said Croydon he looked as if he just swallowed a wasp. We were both Croydon lads. "Oh dear, did you want to escape?" he asked. "As soon as I could walk," I said, though I did mention that I came from Shirley, the posh part of Croydon, as if that made a difference. (Nowadays, Croydon is a war zone.) Sitting with him, either at his home or at a hotel in France, he could be hugely enthusiastic or quite disconcerting. He had this habit of suddenly stopping in mid sentence and turning his head so you got that imperious profile of nose, ears and downturned mouth. He would sometimes telephone out of the blue, asking if I knew this person, if I had seen a particular movie or what I thought of a new actor. He seemed to know that he was a sort of relic from a vanished age of filmmaking, somewhat behind the curve, and I was just one of many people he called to ask what I thought about the curved screen at the Odeon Marble Arch where *Lawrence of Arabia* would be running. As I mentioned earlier in this memoir, David disliked it and had the power to get the screen replaced.

While I saw David quite often, I also saw him fade-out. The restoration of *Lawrence* was an enormous boost for his reputation and he enjoyed this late flowering renaissance to the full. He was trying to make a movie from Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* and following the Inn on the Park dinner he secured a deal with Serge Silberman. He had started out with Steven Spielberg as his producer and Christopher Hampton as screenwriter, eventually exhausting Hampton and alienating Spielberg. Serge Silberman came to the rescue and David's old sparring partner Robert Bolt came back to re-write the script. But by then it was too late. It was desperately sad to see this proud, handsome man deteriorate so quickly as the cancer in his throat took hold. I last saw him at the Colombe d'Or hotel in St Paul-de-Vence, in the hills above Cannes, and did an interview with him for *The Sunday Times* in which he said he now found reality a sort of bore. I was positive that David could have run the entire movie of *Nostromo* through the projector of his mind's eye for me. I settled for the opening sequence. I asked, "What do we see, David?"

David's eyes changed focus, his arms stretched out to Super Panavision 70 and his voice quietened to a conspiratorial whisper: "I want to say to the audience at the very beginning that this is a bizarre story with some rather strange images in it. We are underwater. We track along the seabed and see some ingots of silver lying around. Then we come upon a skeleton, sitting upright, and we track right into its face. A bubble suddenly slips from the

mouth and we follow the bubble up and up to the surface where we see the bay, the town of Sulaco and the huge snowcapped Andes in the background.” The hands fell down to his lap like curtains, he sighed and readjusted his focus, and he was back in St Paul-de-Vence.

Nostramo was never made. David died at home in London on 16 April 1991. Maggie Unsworth called and invited me to the funeral at Mortlake and then to a reception at Narrow Street. I met my friend, the director and film historian Kevin Brownlow, who told me he had been conducting many intensive interviews with David as the basis for his autobiography. That would now become a full-scale biography which, a few years later, I ended up editing, the most enjoyable job of work I have ever done.

Sandra, who had become David’s sixth wife and the second Lady Lean, called to ask if I could assist her with the programme for David’s Memorial Service. She had lined up several of his collaborators who asked what they might say at the service. For John Mills I chose the opening on the marsh of *Great Expectations*, for Omar Sharif I selected a famous passage from T.E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and for Tom Courtenay a passage from Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*. Peter O’Toole chose for himself John Donne’s sonnet, *Death Be Not Proud*.

Sandra had taken upon herself the role of keeper of the flame. She was determined to keep the memory of David alive and started off with a major statement of intent: no little church or cinema was good enough, the memorial service was held on 3 October 1991 at St Paul’s Cathedral. Beneath us, in the crypt, lay Admiral Lord Nelson and also a bust of T.E. Lawrence. And as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Maurice Jarre, played themes from his films, I expect the entire congregation remembered an early scene in *Lawrence of Arabia*, re-enacting the memorial service for T.E. Lawrence, filmed in this exact same spot, when the vicar asks Anthony Quayle, “Did you know him well?” and Quayle replies, “I knew him,” and the vicar says, “Ah, but did he deserve a place . . . in here?”

34: KNOCK KNOCK KNOCKIN’ ON HEAVEN’S GATE

I was reading about the original, 219-minute roadshow version of *Heaven’s Gate* which was shown in 70mm at the 1982 Venice Film Festival and I smelled an opportunity to do something rather special. Philip French and my BFI colleague John Gillett had seen it and told me it was sensational, a revelation. A year earlier, Michael Cimino’s epic western had had a disastrous premiere in New York and was withdrawn after playing for less

than a week. I had seen the official, Cimino sanctioned cut version in London and liked it a lot and assumed that I would like the longer version a whole lot more. So I contacted the London distributors, UIP, who handled the film and they agreed to let the NFT run this 70mm roadshow print for, I think, nine or ten performances. As far as the NFT was concerned, this was a radical departure from its usual repertory-style programming. Eyebrows were raised but Ken Wlaschin and Leslie Hardcastle let me run with it.

I assembled an accompanying, contextual season of films called 'America, Americans' - this included a variety of westerns plus films about the immigrant experience as well as movies which seemed to me to have influenced *Heaven's Gate* in one way or another. These included *The Leopard*, *The Godfather Part II*, *The Anatolian Smile* and *The Great Gatsby*.

We treated *Heaven's Gate* as if it was a brand new movie, which is what it was. We gave a press show for all the national film critics and almost without exception (ie, Alex Walker) the film garnered some fabulous reviews, chief among which was Nigel Andrews in the *Financial Times*. Cimino often joked to me about this - he liked the irony of a financial paper supporting a film that burst its budget. (Another great Cimino supporter was Alan Stanbrook of *The Economist*.) As soon as the programme booklet was published every screening sold out immediately. We added more screenings. *Heaven's Gate* was a box-office smash! And then UIP announced it would transfer the picture to the West End. It ran for several weeks at the Plaza, Lower Regent Street, and then toured the country wherever there was a cinema equipped for 70mm projection.

Right from the start I hoped the apparently bruised and reclusive Cimino might attend the screenings and do a two-hour interview on stage. I asked Nigel Andrews to chair this. Contacting Cimino was very easy once I had established a link to his co-producer Joann Carelli. She lived on the east coast and I'd call her up and she would put a call through to Michael and he'd call me straight back. I never had a home number for him and I was never one hundred percent certain where he was at any one time. However, he was approachable, easy to chat to, and he said at once he would come over to London. He placed himself entirely in our hands. We flew Michael and Joann over from the States and put them up at Claridge's. Joann had a baby daughter with her, Calantha, who they called Callie. They seemed like a rather glamorous, happy, successful couple though I never knew if they were a 'couple' - I don't think anyone knew, ever - or who the baby's father was but Michael seemed like a doting father and dandled Callie a lot of the time.

A few years later the father was revealed to be the composer David Mansfield who not only wrote the beautiful score for *Heaven's Gate* he appeared as the angelic violinist on roller skates. Apparently Mansfield and Carelli got married in secret while filming in Montana and divorced in 1986. It's possible that Michael and Joann married some time after that.

Joann was a beautiful woman, very smart in all senses of the word, business-like and friendly because she knew I was on their side. We all were. She made sure Michael never had to waste time on things like transport, bookings, expenses. She handled him, she handled everything. Michael himself was immaculately groomed with a thick mane of black hair which made his head look slightly too large for his slight body. He dressed expensively and wore the most amazing embossed leather cowboy boots. Understandably, he seemed fairly apprehensive about his visit but he gave quite a few interviews to the press, including one to the BBC's weekday current affairs programme *Newsnight*.

One night Michael and Joann, plus baby Callie, came to see *Heaven's Gate*. My wife Andrea and I sat with them on the back row. It was incredible. Although the NFT didn't have an especially big screen, the projection standards were state-of-the-art and this 70mm print looked and sounded unbelievably sumptuous. The film had been shown a few times before this and the response was always the same: you could hear a pin drop until the intermission when there was spontaneous applause. And so it happened when Michael and Joann saw the picture. At the interval we whisked them upstairs and I noticed that Michael's shirt was soaking wet from perspiration. Having been virtually mauled to death by the American critics and the entire American film industry for his excesses he was on the verge of breaking into tears. I think the whole thing suddenly came back to him with a force that he hadn't experienced since the days of that painful New York premiere. "You know something, Adrian?" he said, "This is the first time I have ever seen this picture." He made a point of going into the projection box to thank the team for their superb presentation.

The next day was the on-stage interview with Nigel. Things got off to a tricky start. We ran a few clips of Michael's other films, including the hunting scene in *The Deer Hunter*. Suddenly, some firecrackers were thrown in the auditorium and there was a sort of half-hearted demo from animal rights activists. Michael was being pursued by them for allegedly mistreating horses when filming *Heaven's Gate*. This rather unnerved the already edgy Michael but we soon had the demonstrators humanely put down, and for

two hours Michael chatted with Nigel and the audience about the film and all the controversy of its making and unmaking. It seemed that everything Michael did was in some way controversial; ordinary was a stranger to him.

I saw quite a bit of Michael in the following years. What marked him out from many others is that he remembered stuff that was happening in my life, so if he called at home and Andrea answered he would ask about the house renovations, our trips and so on. He told me that his greatest sadness over the *Heaven's Gate* trauma was that in normal circumstances the photography of Vilmos Zsigmond, the music of David Mansfield and the production design of Tambi Larsen would have all walked away with Oscars. You can't disagree with that. Despite all the mess of his career and his obvious sadness, he still possessed a generosity of spirit, a humanity and an optimism that I found quite touching. But then, I didn't ever work for him.

I visited him in New York when he was preparing *Year of the Dragon*, a movie about Chinese organised crime in New York, which was being produced by the legendary Dino de Laurentiis. I walked into Cimino's expansive production office in New York and immediately recognised the other man in the room as Oliver Stone, one of the screenwriters I most admired. This led to a friendship over several years. Stone's Oscar-winning movie *Platoon* could not have been made without Cimino's support and encouragement. Michael was concurrently working on a project with Dustin Hoffman and he gave me tickets to see him and John Malkovich in *Death of a Salesman*. Michael and Oliver treated me to a lavish dinner somewhere in Chinatown. Michael was a very generous person and I think he felt he owed me a debt of gratitude for my early role in the gradual rehabilitation of *Heaven's Gate*.

I went over to LA for the first screening of *Year of the Dragon*, held at the Cary Grant Theatre on the old Metro lot, and afterwards had dinner with Michael, Joann, Dino and studio executive Mike Medavoy at the DDL Foodshow, a spectacular deli-cum-trattoria owned by Dino. Dino, by the way, was an incredible character, one of the genuine last tycoons. He knew all about grand, self-important, difficult genius directors, from Fellini to David Lean. I once learned a great lesson from Dino about power in the movie industry. It was after his own *Guardian Lecture* at the NFT. He was flying back to New York that evening and I asked him what time his flight was. "When I get there," he said. Of course, silly me, I thought.

I remember having breakfast with Michael at the Bel Age Hotel in LA, right across from Spago and Tower Records, when he tried unsuccessfully to

conceal the fact that he had arrived in a golden Rolls-Royce convertible. Not wanting to stand out from the crowd, he wore those cowboy boots, a stetson and a fringed suede jacket - he looked like Shane. I saw him once in Paris where we dined together at the Lancaster Hotel and then walked over to admire I.M Pei's pyramid which seemed to have landed from outer space in front of the Louvre. In London it was lunch at the St James's Club when he brought Mickey Rourke along and later took me shopping at Harrods - he wanted to buy pony-riding gear for little Callie. I desperately wanted to go out to Sicily to watch him work on *The Sicilian* but he wouldn't agree to that - "When I'm on the set, I'm not the person you think you know," he said, a comment that turned out to be eerily prophetic. That was probably the last time I saw him.

Michael made a further three features after *Year of the Dragon*, none of them worthy of his talent and all were critical and commercial disasters. His last movie, *Sunchaser*, was released in 1996 and after that Michael seemed to vanish. He managed to publish a couple of books, in French translation, and strange rumours began to circulate about him. He made a few public appearances at European festivals, where he was fêted, and he did an interview for the DVD of *The Deer Hunter*. The change in his appearance was shocking - the rather butch guy I knew had morphed into this anorexic, androgynous, weird-looking person. Some people thought he was transitioning into a woman, some said he'd had a sex-change operation, others thought he had simply taken a facelift too far.

He died alone at home in LA on 30 June 2016. He was 77. The cause of death was never made public but following hunches, and reading Charles Elton's superb and sympathetic 2022 biography, it would appear to be a case of the deadly Monroe cocktail of depression, drugs and booze. The car crash that was Michael's career is one of the great tragedies of modern Hollywood. That guy had serious talent, personal charm, maybe too much self-belief and arrogance and not nearly enough competence and strength from the studio executives he worked for. He made one outright masterpiece and one flawed masterpiece. Isn't that enough? And beneath all that? Behind the smokescreen he threw up about his personal life? He was probably not the man I thought I knew. Probably never was.

In 1999 Andrea and I did one of our then annual road trips to the States. This time we flew to Denver, drove up through Nebraska, stayed in Ken Wlaschin's home town of Scottsbluff, then on to Wyoming for Devil's Tower from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, past the Little Big Horn battle site, on

to Rapid City and Mount Rushmore from *North by Northwest*, then up to Montana and Glacier National Park for all the great locations in *Heaven's Gate*. We stayed at the Glacier Park Lodge and a hotel in Kalispell where the unit was based. We had David Mansfield's music on CD. Once you get Michael Cimino into your head it's hard to let go.

35: SHEILA WHITAKER

One day in 1984 Ken called me into his office and said he was quitting. I was moderately gobsmacked. He said he had been offered the job of directing the Los Angeles Film Festival, or Filmex, which had been taken over by the American Film Institute. I was thrilled for him. I felt he had done as much as anyone could at the NFT and that he needed some fresh challenges. However, I didn't think he was really a West Coast schmoozer, quite unlike Filmex's founder Gary Essert, but Ken could bluff his way anywhere. After all, in 1971, much to the dismay of the BFI staff, he had published a little book called *The Bluffer's Guide to the Cinema*.

When the Big W left the building the programming underwent a subtle but significant change. The NFT programme was done mostly by myself and a few others while Derek Malcolm, the film critic of *The Guardian*, was contracted to direct the London Film Festival for an interim period which lasted three years. It ticked along quite nicely. I applied for Ken's job. The only person that I knew for sure who had also applied was Sheila Whitaker. Frankly, I dreaded her. Leslie Hardcastle warned me that the BFI hierarchy wanted someone from the regions.

Sheila had several qualifications for getting the job. She was a woman, unmarried, and she was successfully running the Tyneside Film Theatre in faraway Newcastle, having previously run the NFA's Stills Library in London. She was a product of Warwick University, she was almost an academic. She cut a quite striking figure with her Angela Davis hairdo and her habitual, masculine black or grey suits and ties. She was interested in radicalism, experimentalism and many other isms. She played cricket. She was ideal, if that's the way the BFI wanted the NFT to develop.

I didn't have too many qualifications. I was a white, middle-class married male who knew the NFT operation backwards. I wasn't very interested in independent or experimental cinema, I wore Gucci loafers, I dined at Michelin starred restaurants and I went to places like the Seychelles for my holidays. "Why do you want the job?" I was asked at my interview. "It would be like editing *The Times*," I said. BFI Chairman Dickie

Attenborough purred with pleasure at that. No one else did. "How would you share the NFT with the regions?" I was asked. "Give people train tickets?" I said.

Sheila got the job, natch.

I won't beat about the bush. I was unhappy. I didn't like Sheila very much and she probably didn't like me. Leslie Hardcastle seemed to commiserate with me though you never knew what he really felt about things. He was barely hanging on himself. It was an unhappy time. However, I did still enjoy my job, I loved the idea of the NFT and I wanted to carry on.

Sheila didn't get off to a good start. She held a staff meeting and said she expected everyone to work a full 9-5 or 10-6 hour day. Now, the NFT was not like an office. People like Waltraud who had the colossally pressurised job of getting the 1000-odd prints a year from the far corners of the world to the NFT on time often worked late into the night or arrived at 7am if necessary. Some of us had to tie in with time zones from Los Angeles to Tokyo, so asking everyone to behave like 9-5 bank clerks wasn't going to wash. Privately I told Sheila exactly what I thought and she buckled, just a bit.

Then Sheila started to invade what I regarded as my territory, the *Guardian Lecture* series. Without knowing what she was doing, I suddenly saw in the programme an event with Delphine Seyrig, fully booked and scheduled. You may recall that Seyrig was the first movie star I ever met, on the set of *Drabble* or *L'Année Dernière à Hampstead l'ouest*. While Seyrig was more than OK with me, I would liked to have known about it and how much of my budget it would take.

We had a problem over Richard Brooks, the Hollywood writer-director, former partner of Angie Dickinson and husband of Jean Simmons for God's sake. Through a contact I got his home number and called him up.

"Richard Brooks?" I said.

"Y...e....s?" he said cautiously.

"Hello my name is Adrian Turner and I'm calling from the National Film Theatre in London."

"Y . . . e . . . s?" he said cautiously.

"Mr Brooks," I said, "I'm a big fan of *Lord Jim*."

"How can I help you?" he said, his voice suddenly full of enthusiasm.

A month or so later I went to see him at his house on Deep Canyon Drive, off Mulholland. It was a modest sort of place, for Beverly Hills, with a

great view. His walls were covered in books. He smoked his trademark pipe and yarned away for several hours. He had retired some years back and showed little resentment, unlike Joseph L Mankiewicz or Billy Wilder who always seemed bitter at the way Hollywood seemed to spit them out. Anyway, I thought Brooks was in the Mankiewicz and Wilder league (plus Peter Bogdanovich) for owning a store of fabulous anecdotes. He gave me a signed copy of his novel *The Producer* and a small roll of 35mm film which contained a statement from Sir Winston Churchill intended as a prologue to Brooks's 1957 film about the Mau-Mau troubles in Kenya, *Something of Value*. Brooks relished explaining how he persuaded Churchill to do it. It was a unique piece of film which I don't think has ever been seen publicly. I signed him up for an NFT season and a *Guardian Lecture*. He wanted a First Class ticket, fair enough, and wasn't bothered much about the hotel. Like many directors of his generation, he was thrilled to be remembered.

Sheila Whitaker didn't fancy the Brooks thing at all. Not worth the money she said. Where are the great movies, she wondered, fingering his filmography. She nixed the season. Maybe he was too macho for her taste. I had to go back to Mr Brooks and tell him the bad news. Maybe it was about that time I started referring to Sheila as Rosa Klebb.

Then there was the Fellini debacle. Sheila insisted we programme a *Guardian Lecture* with the Italian maestro, announce it in the booklet and accept bookings for it. All without actually asking Fellini if he fancied doing it or would be available on that date. What if he had booked a holiday to Rimini with the grand children? I knew for a total fact that Fellini would not do it. He was one of a fairly select band of people who never, ever, did this sort of thing. There was Humphrey Bogart (because he was dead), there was Greta Garbo (because she was bloody Greta Garbo), there was Stanley Kubrick (the hermit of Harpenden), there was Audrey Hepburn (too shy, too UNICEF) and Cary Grant (who just wanted vast money). So we cancelled Fellini and I looked a bit stupid. Maybe that was what Sheila wanted all along.

Then there was a far more serious occurrence. For her first London Film Festival as Director she chose as the opening film *A Prayer for the Dying* which was a pro-IRA drama starring Mickey Rourke and directed by Mike Hodges. It was a risky choice, not least because Hodges wanted to take his name off it. It was due to be screened on 11 November 1987, Armistice Day, but on 8 November the IRA killed a dozen people and injured many more by exploding a bomb in the town of Enniskillen. The tabloids got hold of the

NFT's plans and had a field day. Sheila was forced to pull the film. I thought her days were numbered but she clung on, got her act together, found a few allies, notably Clyde Jeavons, her old boss at the Archive, and did some impressive stuff.

She and I never saw eye to eye and she gradually blindsided or gaslighted me so I spent much of my last year writing newspaper articles and a book, often blatantly in the NFT office. There was also a new BFI director named Wilf Stephenson who was an obscure minor academic whose only known achievement was to have been best man at our Labour MP Gordon Brown's wedding. Wilf knew absolutely zilch about film or TV and quickly set about decimating the BFI staff by forcing out a lot of people who had reached the top of their salary grades and were over 40 years old. The entire Publications Department was exterminated. And so was I.

One evening in 1987 I was chairing a massive event about the Vietnam war as depicted in film and TV. On stage with me were movie director John Irvin, an amazing Vietnam veteran named Bobby Muller, who was in a wheelchair, the journalist John Pilger and a couple of others. The place was packed. It was a pressure cooker. Ten minutes before I went on stage, Wilf came up to me and said, "We must talk about you moving on from the NFT." Or words to that effect. That was what the NFT and the BFI were like in those days. Stalin would have been in his element. It took a year to negotiate my leaving conditions and at least another year for me to get over it, though I was on full salary for three years.

Sheila Whitaker left the NFT in 1991 though she continued to run the LFF until 1996. After that she went on to promote Arab cinema and started some sort of festival in the feminist paradise of the United Arab Emirates. She died in 2013, aged 77, of motor neurone disease, a cruel fate which no one deserves. Her place at the NFT was taken by a towering American named Deac Rossell who didn't last long. I sort of lost track with the place after that and in 2007 Leslie Hardcastle's worst fears were realised, the National Film Theatre was cancelled. It was reborn as the BFI Southbank.

36: THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO KOMODO

I have always liked the name Douglas. Maybe because that was the name I was born with. I had an honorary uncle called Douglas and he was quite exotic because he gave up his job in The City, drove a Delage and an AC and ran a pub in Sandwich, Kent. Douglas Bader was a hero of mine. Kirk Douglas was a nice bloke, too. Well, maybe. Anyway, he was Spartacus.

And another Douglas may have saved my life from snakebite or from being eaten by an overgrown lizard.

You may recall, at the start of this memoir, I explained how I was hugely influenced by many movies and some TV shows which compelled me to travel to the most exotic corners of the world. In 1956 David Attenborough travelled to the island of Komodo, part of Nusa Tenggara, formerly the Lesser Sundas, in Indonesia. In 1988 it was my turn. Were the man-eating dragons, deadly snakes, whirlpools and sacrificial goats just a legend? I determined to find out.

We flew to Jakarta and then on to Yogyakarta to see the great Hindu temples at Borobodur and Prambanan. Then it was on to Bali. Attenborough had been to Bali in the 1950s and later proclaimed it the most beautiful place he had ever seen. That was long before all the tourist tat arrived, the fast food joints and the choking traffic which makes Bali nowadays just another place to avoid. David Lean also went there in the 1950s and why he did so is one of my favourite movie anecdotes. J Arthur Rank called David to his office and told him they wanted to make some films in the new widescreen process called CinemaScope. They had just taken delivery of a camera and a set of lenses and they wondered if David fancied taking them out for a test drive. They probably expected him to do the tests somewhere outside London or maybe remotest Yorkshire. "I'd love to," said David, "I think I'll do the tests in Bali."

We checked into the Bali Oberoi on Legian Beach, then the only luxury option on the island. We soon learned that one of the private villas was occupied by none other than Robert Wagner and Jill St John. If we should bump into them I would probably have to remind RJ of my lunch with him and his then wife, Natalie Wood, who died so tragically in 1981. That might be a little awkward. Fortunately I never laid eyes on them throughout our stay.

To get to Komodo we flew from Bali to Bima on the island of Sumbawa. From there we switched to a small plane and flew to Labuan Bajo on the western edge of the island of Flores. We had a room booked at the Losmen Bajo Beach, a losmen being a sort of guest house. Our room had four thin walls, a rock-hard bed, a lamp, a shelf, a couple of hooks and a clothes' horse. The windows were high up, above eye-level, without curtains so at night the room was as bright as day as it opened onto the covered courtyard where guests mingled and ate their meals. The bathroom had a toilet, a washbasin and a *mandi* which was a tank of cold water into which you

dipped a plastic bucket and sluiced yourself, thus keeping yourself and your bathroom clean. Meals consisted of rice, fish, scrawny chicken and meatballs made from goat. Bintang beer came in litre bottles.

The fact that the room was always bright and prevented you from falling asleep was besides the point. The noise was incessant - electrical fittings buzzed even louder than the mosquitos, guests chatted noisily as the Bintang flowed, and the local cats and dogs seemed to fight or mate throughout the night. And above all this were the cockerels which crowed every hour on the hour and every minute in between.

Labuan was ramshackle and poor, stinking of the silvery fish which were laid out to dry on vast racks. There wasn't a road, just a track which would have become a mud bath in the wet season. Open sewers ran along both sides, spewing slime and garbage. Children played football and mucked about, men sat and smoked, women did all the work except go out on the boats. The surrounding landscape was gorgeous, a mass of islands, and the light was like liquid silk. In the skies, devilishly skeletal frigate birds and enormous sea eagles soared endlessly in search of a meal. Even old Joe Conrad might have been lost for words to describe the beauty of the place.

Our plan was simple. We would meet up with a local guide whose name was Condo and he would ferry us across to Komodo where we would stay two nights at the Komodo Safari Lodge. We would have two days getting to know the dragons and then sail back to Labuan, spend a night and fly to Bali's neighbouring island of Lombok for a few days. What could possibly go wrong?

There were maybe a dozen people staying at the Losmen and everyone ate at communal tables. We found ourselves seated with three English people whose conversation was riveting as they had just returned from Komodo, escorted by our very own Mr Condo.

Now, what are the chances of finding two people, complete strangers, in that remote place who both knew Steven Spielberg? This emerged after an hour or so of chat with this group of three. They were from the BBC. There was a producer, Gaynor Shutte, a naturalist Mark Cawardine and this other rather loud burly bloke called Douglas. I had no idea who he was. It was he who apparently knew Mr Spielberg.

These three were making a BBC radio series about endangered animal species. This was their first foray into the wild. In terms of numbers, the Komodo dragon has a sufficiently small population to be called endangered though in truth they are found on only three small islands and have a

bountiful supply of food, mainly small deer and the occasional human being. They have also been known to scavenge graves so the people living in the one small village on Komodo cover up their graves with piles of sharp coral rock. So the dragons are not, strictly speaking, endangered. They are happy and if their numbers look like exceeding supply then they simply eat each other in order to maintain environmental equilibrium.

Douglas & Co had sailed to Komodo across the famously turbulent channel and had stayed at the Safari Lodge. They had taken their own food, including four living chickens trussed together with string. As soon as they arrived at the Lodge a snoozing dragon leapt into action and ran off with the chickens, devouring one of them in one long agonising gulp. Douglas told us that the Lodge was crawling with rats and, as everyone knows, where there are rats there are also snakes. And there were the dragons themselves. We knew that one bite from a dragon is a death sentence as their saliva is heavily toxic. The BBC people sized us up and urged us not to stay at the Safari Lodge. We wholeheartedly agreed and decided to do Komodo as a day trip. We chickened out.

Mr Condo was tiny, wafer thin and of indeterminate age. He looked about 12 but he could have been 25. He must have had clout as he somehow procured the local police launch for our excursion and a policeman to drive it. We shared it with Mr Condo's assistant and a Japanese couple who could not speak a word of English. We could not speak a word of Japanese. Amazingly, Mr Condo did.

Komodo's serrated volcanic profile came up on the horizon looking like a row of dragon's teeth. After six months of planning we were suddenly here but something about this trip had always bothered me. I thought about it every day. And when we arrived on the island the source of my worry was waiting for us on the jetty. It was a goat.

Today, Komodo is a soft-sell excursion for cruise ship passengers but in my day it was seriously hardcore. Visitors needed to check in with the rangers office and they also needed to buy a goat. There was no opt out. It seemed that the goat was part of an agreement reached with the small population who lived on the island. The goat was not a souvenir. You would not be taking it home. Our goat was a sacrificial offering and the goat clearly knew it for it was already trembling and bleating.

From the jetty it was a 3km walk to the restaurant at the end of the world. We were accompanied by a ranger armed with a forked stick. Signs urged us to speak in whispers which was a bit silly because the dragons have

poor hearing and, anyway, our goat's panic level rose by several decibels. At the end of the walk we met a party of Australians walking back to the beach. "I think they are satisfied," one smirked. Nothing remained of their goat except a few pools of blood.

Our own goat was quickly despatched by Mr Condo's machete. His butchery skills were impressive: he hacked off the beast's horns and then severed a haunch. The body was attached to a blue rope and a hook, the stomach was slit open, spilling intestines, and it set sail over a small clearing where two dragons lay motionless. The place was buzzing with flies. A few minutes passed and then a third dragon arrived, an eight-footer, which immediately tore into our goat's suspended innards. In its grizzly way, it was wonderful to see this magnificent piece of lizard engineering doing what it does best. Then, on the brink of devouring the flesh and bone, our dragon lost interest and flaked out. This is when Mr Condo tied up the hind leg and threw that into the arena. The dragon fancied this choice cut and chased it up the bank so that the scaly beastie came within easy touching and smelling distance from us. The show was over.

On the way back from the killing pit we visited the Komodo Safari Lodge which was as filthy and as frightening as Douglas had described. It seemed that one of his chickens had somehow survived. If we felt a measure of disgust at what we had seen and done we showed no sign of it and would always look back on Komodo as one of the most extraordinary places we have ever seen. We had to stay an extra night back at Labuan because the flight was full. We checked back into the Bali Oberoi where our dinner was interrupted by an earth tremor. At the Mandarin Oriental in Jakarta we were awoken at night to see the doors our TV unit waving around like batwings. An earthquake was in full shake mode. I went outside to see hotel staff hugging the walls. Is this normal I asked? The panic on their faces gave me the answer.

We flew out of Indonesia, a country that shakes and has lizards that want to kill you, and arrived back in civilisation, the duty free zone at Changi, Singapore, then the best airport in the world. And there, in the airport bookshop, was Douglas. He was on the cover of something called *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Yes, this Douglas was Douglas Adams.

37: THE FAR SIDES OF THE WORLD

In the late 1980s I became aware of the Blair Brothers, Lawrence and Lorne, two rather exotic-looking young men who had somehow got Ringo Starr to

bankroll a trip around the Indonesian archipelago. They had 'gone native' and set out on a wonderful traditional schooner called a *bugis* and filmed themselves doing it, a sort of magical mystery tour. The completed documentary series called *Ring of Fire* was shown on the BBC. I was captivated by it, in particular by a small, inconveniently remote group of islands called the Bandas, the original Spice Islands. This is where nutmeg, cinnamon and cloves were discovered. Wars were fought over it. The Dutch had a vice-like grip on the islands and their forts, houses and plantations still stood in the shadow of a temperamental volcano called Gunung Api. I just had to go there.

And so in 1990 I did, flying from London to Singapore to Jakarta to Bali to Ambon to Bandaneira. It took several days and the planes got smaller and smaller. The last plane was a decrepit 12-seater turbo prop belonging to an airline called Indoavia which was owned by a remarkable man called Des Alwi who also happened to own our hotel, the Maulana Inn, right on Banda's waterfront, facing the smoking volcano. Somerset Maugham or Joseph Conrad would have felt right at home sitting in the rattan chairs on the upstairs veranda of this quirky little hotel, though it was rumoured that previous guests had in fact included Mick Jagger and Fergie, Duchess of York.

Des Alwi, a terrific movie buff, owned a 16mm Bolex camera with which he had filmed Gunung Api's recent eruption. He put his movie on for us one night in an impromptu outdoor cinema. Watching the fire and lava spewing out of the volcano on screen while the volcano itself was in the background was what one might term heightened realism. Des had other delights up his sleeve. He often sang to us, he made us nutmeg jam, and one afternoon he took us out on a boat where he met up with a fisherman from whom he bought a freshly-caught tuna. Back at the hotel this fish was sliced into the freshest and tastiest sashimi I have ever eaten. Another dish that evening had so much chilli that I had an allergic reaction, cured by Des force-feeding me with a bowl of sugar, a remedy I have never forgotten.

There was also a day in Banda that changed my life, not in a revelatory earth-shattering way, like a religious awakening, it was just a lifestyle thing. Des told us that a cruise ship was calling the next day and we could go aboard if we wanted to. We'd never thought about cruising before. We just knew about Cunard and dressing up, a terrible prospect. Sure enough, next morning this cruise ship came alongside at Banda's wharf. It was called the *World Discoverer* and seemed tiny. It carried about 100 passengers and was

owned by a US-British company called Society Expeditions. We went aboard and toured the decks. In the entrance lobby was a map of the world showing all the ports of call that the ship was making that year. One of those ports was Pitcairn Island in the South Pacific, the refuge of the *Bounty* mutineers and the place on Earth I most wanted to visit. Nowadays that would be number one on a thing called a Bucket List. I had a list back then but not a bucket to put that list into. I knew where I wanted to go and now I had unexpectedly found a ship to take me there. Problem was, I couldn't afford it. One day maybe I just might. It became more than a dream. It became an obsession.

For the next few years I ordered all the brochures for the *World Discoverer* and could sort of track its progress around the world. And then disaster struck. In 2000 we learned that the ship - *our ship* - had hit a reef in the Solomon Islands and had been left to rot. No one was injured, let alone drowned, and rumours surfaced that it wasn't really an accident at all. When the *World Discoverer* foundered, Pitcairn seemed to sink below the horizon as well.

But I never forgot that dream and seeing that ship in Banda took me out of luxury hotels and on to luxury expedition ships. I suddenly realised that hotels have one major drawback; they are anchored to the land. Check into a hotel in Athens and you are still there the next day. Get on a ship in Athens and you can be Ephesus the next day. By 2009 we had already made our first oceanic voyage, from the Seychelles to Zanzibar, on a ship called *Island Sky*.

In 2009 I met up again with my maritime mentor, my old friend the *World Discoverer*. We discovered an Australian ship called *Orion* which we boarded in Auckland and sailed up through Norfolk Island, New Caledonia, Vanuatu and on to the Solomons. We sailed past Guadalcanal, across Iron Bottom Sound, and there, off a tiny island called Nggela, was the *World Discoverer*, lying in the shallows, getting rusty and overgrown, and stripped inside of everything and anything that was useful. I snorkelled around its hull, gently touched its sides, spoke with it, and on land walked on its deck timbers and sat in a chair taken from the observation lounge. In a way, I had finally sailed the *World Discoverer*. And later that same year, aboard a similar ship called *Clipper Odyssey*, we watched as a small lump came up on the horizon. It was first sighted on 3 July 1767 by the crew of the British ship, *HMS Swallow*, commanded by Captain Carteret. The island was named after a 15 year-old midshipman who was the first to sight the island. His name

was Pitcairn. The island was charted wrongly. But Fletcher Christian found it. And in 2009 so did I.

38 : NOT FADE AWAY

Although leaving the NFT was quite a wrench, I had financial cushions, not least being on full salary for three years. I also benefitted from the support of many friends and colleagues. Richard Attenborough and John Boorman gave me food and a lot of moral support while Iain Johnstone put a lot of freelance work my way on *The Sunday Times* and Derek Malcolm, especially, tossed me several of his rejects, including many profiles for *The Guardian* as well as a book he had been asked to do on *Gone With the Wind*, a movie I didn't much like but was fun to write about. That led to a book I really wanted to do, about the making of *Lawrence of Arabia* on which I spent many times my advance doing research and found myself back at the old MGM studios taking a 70mm print apart with a pair of scissors. I always thought that picture was far too long.

My next job was a dream, editing Kevin Brownlow's monumental biography of David Lean. I took a pair of scissors to that, too, and did some structural re-organisation with Kevin's full support. That was a truly creative experience, I thought, something that I greatly missed on my next project, a biography of Robert Bolt which I called *Scenes from Two Lives*. I was paid handsomely for that and took about two years over it and when I handed it in to my publisher he took a week to read it and then called and said that's wonderful Adrian, thanks so much, we'll publish it just as it is. I knew I had over-written bits of it, some of it was a bit muddled, just like Kevin's book, and it needed the fresh eye of an editor. I was denied that collaborative process and that rather depressed me. But writing that book was always rewarding, sometimes exciting and sometimes uncomfortable as I got fairly close and personal with many members of Bolt's immediately family, including his son Ben and his widow, the actress Sarah Miles, who I sort of fell for and dreaded at the same time. She could be immensely attractive and seductive and she could make your loins wilt. She was one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met. I had her on the phone being all coy and flirty and I had her on the phone yelling and screaming at me. Writing these sorts of books often leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. When the job is done and your efforts are finally between hardcovers on a shelf in Waterstones, people you have got to know are suddenly gone from your life and you are gone from theirs. You move on.

I was offered books on Olivia de Havilland and Alan Bates and neither appealed to me at all. I pitched a few ideas to no avail. Then my publisher wondered if I would be interested in writing a biography of Richard Attenborough. They were offering a fifty grand. This was just up my street and I quickly outlined a book divided into four parts - Master, Mister, Sir, Lord. I knew Richard because he was the Chairman of the BFI and had been on the interviewing panel who decided to hire Sheila Whitaker. He was always kind towards me - he sometimes called me Sweet Pea because he couldn't remember my name - and he gave me a great interview for my Bolt book (Bolt had written the first version of *Gandhi*). Sadly, he turned me down as his biographer because, he said, he wanted to be the undertaker of his own life.

The debate about authorised and unauthorised biographies is interesting. Some writers would say that you can't write a proper biography if your subject is alive and kicking because they can create a lot of problems and compromises. A professional biographer needs access to letters, files, records, family, lovers, colleagues, husbands, wives, ex-husbands and ex-wives. A living subject may close those doors. An unauthorised biography of a living person can be merely skin deep. I suppose Kevin had the best of all experiences with David Lean. He drained as much information as he could from David himself and then, after David himself was drained of life, Kevin was left with all the rest. That's heartless I know but that's what I had been hoping for with Richard.

I heard that David Robinson, the film critic of *The Times* and one of Britain's most eminent film historians, was already collaborating with Richard on some sort of biographical work. David had written the definitive biography of Charlie Chaplin which Richard plundered for his feature film starring Robert Downey Jnr as the comic genius. David was an adviser on that movie. But their book which emerged in 1992, coinciding with the release of *Chaplin*, was hardly a biography of the man who had for decades been at the centre of the British film industry. More than that, one Attenborough or another, had been at the centre of British cultural life for longer than The Queen. And still is.

Richard's final years were truly wretched. His daughter and grand daughter died in Thailand in the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004. His wife of many years, Sheila Sim, developed dementia and lived in a nursing home until her death in 2016. In 2008 had Richard suffered a terrible fall after a stroke and was subsequently confined to a wheelchair and could barely

communicate. He died in 2014. There is still no biography of Richard Attenborough.

Writing three books back-to-back (I also knocked off a thing on *Goldfinger*) meant that my newspaper work had largely come to a halt. Entering the freelance market again, now as a well-reviewed author, I found that all my old contacts had moved on and were replaced by new young things with their own bunch of writers. The new arts editor of *The Guardian* asked me to send him samples of my work. I didn't mind telling him to piss off. The truth is, I had begun to lose interest in movies. It was probably an age thing. I found it quite amusing to see how the major, salaried critics - Derek Malcolm, David Robinson, Philip French, Alexander Walker - clung to their mastheads like limpets. They were all well into their sixties and what teenager would consider asking their granny or grandpa what film they should take their boy or girl-friend to see? Like Willy, Billy and Fred, I felt a little alienated.

There just didn't seem to be many movies which caught my attention. I always regarded myself as someone who was broad-minded with a narrow range of tastes. If I had become a salaried film critic I often wondered how long could I stand watching five or six movies a week which I wasn't remotely interested in seeing. Anything about drug cartels, American sport, teenage comedies, taxi drivers in Iran, sci-fi fantasies, feature-length cartoons, brothels in Senegal, mining in Bolivia, anything with Nicolas Cage, anything by Mike Leigh, were just not worth getting out of bed for. I liked *The English Patient*, *The Talented Mr Ripley*, *The Sheltering Sky*, *Shadowlands*, *Notting Hill*, *Dances With Wolves*, *Evita*, *Schindler's List*, *Master and Commander* and *Gladiator*.

I can trace my growing detachment from movies to 1992 when I went to New York to interview Debra Winger for *Time Out*, an interview by the way, that was enabled by Richard Attenborough. That was the last piece of movie journalism I ever published. I put it to Debra that she sometimes seemed despondent about the picture business and could drop out at any moment. She did. And so did I.

The final straw for me was Nigel Havers. I first met him in Borneo on that John Milius set and I had seen him a few times since. We got along very well, I thought. Out of the blue the *Sunday Mirror* asked me to do an interview with him. I'd never written for a tabloid before and worried that I couldn't adjust my style which tended to be in paragraphs rather than pithy sentences. Writing for a tabloid was a skill I didn't possess. Nevertheless,

Nigel and I met at his health club in Chiswick and we had a nice chat. I sent in my piece to the paper and when it appeared I was appalled to see they had got some staffer to eviscerate it and add a lot of salacious stuff about Nigel's alleged sexual adventures. I called Nigel to say how sorry I was and . . . well, our relationship was over. And so was my writing career.

In 2003 Andrea and I quit London for good. We sold our house in Ealing and moved to Norfolk which has vast empty beaches and world class bird-watching. Noël Coward famously said, "Very flat, Norfolk," and he was quite wrong. There are several hills and valleys and at the highest point in the lovely county town of Norwich you sometimes need an oxygen mask.

A work colleague of Andrea was appalled by our decision to move to Norfolk. "You'll never have a conversation with a neighbour about Alfred Hitchcock!" he said in a state of shock. He was right. We made a false start by buying a five-bedroomed part-Georgian farmhouse which came with an acre of land, a large pond, stables and barn. We heated our house with oil and we had what is known politely as private drainage. Or what my friend Quentin Falk calls a sceptical tank. We learned how to cook on an Aga. We did at least have electricity and mains water supply.

The house was five miles from the coast at Cromer but the road was far busier than we realised, there were no immediately accessible country walks and the pond spooked us one night by flooding right up to our front door. Our neighbours were a family with two school children who were doing up a big barn. We invited them for dinner and they showed up wearing fancy frocks and jackets and ties. They thought we were terribly posh. So in 2006 we moved once more, to a sensible new build, on a single track road overlooking open farmland, about five miles from the town of Attleborough. I had to laugh at the irony because one of my last freelance jobs had been to drive up from London to Attleborough to conduct a filmed interview with the composer Sir Malcolm Arnold for the DVD of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. The interview was never used because Sir Malcolm had significant mental issues. I was surprised to find him living in a suburban semi in a town described by Nikolaus Pevsner as 'uncommonly featureless.' That's now my local town.

We don't miss London for a moment though we did make long and expensive day-trips to see *The Hateful Eight* in Ultra Panavision 70 at the Odeon Leicester Square and *Dunkirk* at the BFI IMAX. I wished I'd waited for the Blu-rays. The Christopher Nolan movie was the last film I saw in a genuine kinema. Then Covid showed up, of course, but before that the

cinema-going experience had become so unattractive to me. Our local Odeon in Norwich is a sweet shop with cinemas attached. It stinks of hot dogs and popcorn while the multi-storey car park stinks of piss. Is this worth thirty quid for two? We sort of keep up with movies on Netflix and Amazon. I hardly ever read film critics. Do the newspapers still have them?

I look back on all this, all these memories, and think it was another life, someone else's life, in a world that really doesn't exist anymore. It was a golden age though you didn't realise it as you were living it. I regret not having the space to tell you about my encounters with so many other people - Gloria Swanson, Claudette Colbert, Faye Dunaway, Meryl Streep, Michael Douglas, Warren Beatty, Joe Mankiewicz, King Vidor, George Harrison, Bob Dylan and others of that ilk.

Oh and Paul Newman. What's that I hear you say? OK, you deserve an encore because you've been very nice following me this far. I went to see Joanne Woodward at the Connaught. She was giving a *Guardian Lecture* at Ye Olde NFT. I went up to her suite and there was Hud Bannon opening the door. Actually it was Paul Newman. *Hud* was (and remains) my favourite of all his pictures, a formative movie of my youth. It's odd how a character can be a true hero to a sixteen year-old and a real heel when you grow up. As his father, played by Melvyn Douglas, says, "You don't care about people Hud. You don't give a damn about 'em. Oh, you got all that charm goin' for yer. And it makes the youngsters want to be like yer. That's the shame of it because you don't value anything. You don't respect nothing. You keep no check on your appetites at all. You live just for yourself. And that makes you not fit to live with."

Paul said Joanne was out shopping. Maybe I'd like a drink. He sized me up, pushed a button and a waiter appeared in seconds. "I'd like a bottle of that Mersault I had yesterday," he said, "and my friend Adrian here will have a case of Jack Daniel's."

I asked him about a new picture called *Harry & Son* in which he starred with Joanne and which he had also directed. He sipped the golden burgundy and said, "Well, it's about a rich old movie star who wakes up one morning with a terrific hard-on. His butler enters the room and says, 'I see you have an erection, sir. What are you going to do with it?' The movie star says, 'I'm going to put some trousers over it and take it to London.'"

Well, that was the day I met Paul Newman. If I carry on anymore like this you'll think I'm just a pathetic name-dropper.

THE END

Acknowledgements:

This memoir got started two years ago when the film historian Margaret O'Brien asked me to write an account of my time at the Everyman Hampstead. Margaret had a website dedicated to the history of that cinema. I thought I might be able to write maybe 1000 words in an afternoon but it grew into something much longer, roughly what you read here. I subsequently pondered for a year or so about writing about my time at the National Film Theatre and all those extraordinary people I was lucky enough to meet. I started writing this in the summer of 2023 and finished it in January 2024. I would like to thank Caroline Audemars, Derek Elley, Quentin Falk, Waltraud Loges and Neil Sinyard for their help and encouragement along the way. Photos are from my own collection and courtesy of Sten M Rosenlund who covered most of the NFT events.