

Michael Parks

interviewed by

Ron Garmon

From his mid-60s star performances as troubled young men in *Wild Seed* and *Bus Riley's Back In Town* to his recent crankily naturalistic character work, Michael Parks' filmography has been a story of personal excellence within a fickle, amnesiac system. Praised by Henry Fonda and Bette Davis at the outset of his career as one of the finest young actors in America, Parks was on the verge of carving out a Brando/Nicholson-sized space for himself in Hollywood several times during his first decade here. Diverted energies, several stints on the industry blacklist and this curious failure of his highly regarded TV series, "Then Came Bronson," packed him off to the showbiz purgatory of character roles—ironically, the one place he wanted to go all along.

Now nearly sixty (and looking forty-five), the lean and wolfish Parks has become one of the glories of the national cinema. At no point during his long march through B-movies and underscreened art-house flicks does he seem to have lost his youthful fascination with acting as a tour through other peoples' inner lives. The actor's 90s output, ranging from a winsomely psychotic gangster (*Death Wish V*), through the gentle, crabbed old hermit who loves a chicken named Esther (*Niagara, Niagara*), to a drunken, gun-hoarding bigot (*Julian Po*) flashes by onscreen with a dynamic, freakish talent for conveying the unconquerable *weirdness* of his fellow beings. Parks stopped the Tarantino/Rodriguez *From Dusk 'Till Dawn* in its tracks with a masterful vignette as a Texas Ranger with only moments to live—compressing decades of dust, crust and orneriness into every gesture and side-long glance. He has major roles in two recent films—*From Dusk 'Till Dawn III: The Hangman's Daughter* (a brilliant turn as Ambrose Bierce) and *Bullfighter* (a sexy, bitterly comic phantasmagoria premiering at the next Cannes Film Festival).

Knowing of Parks' reputation for contrarian behavior (concocted by the industry press and nurtured along for decades by town gossip) and his low regard for most journalists, I was pleasantly surprised by the man's generosity, wit, erudition and charming self-effacement. He has a broad streak of old-school California individualism tempered by a compassion that is almost nonexistent in his ego-driven trade. Over the course of several hours, we knocked back entirely too many Coronas on a patio under a gray Santa Monica sky, and Michael spun his life and times for *Worldly Remains*. He trusted me not to misquote him, so here is the whole conversation, shorn of one or two mildly scandalous moments and with some names deleted to protect the howlingly guilty...



Worldly Remains: Let's start with the biographical questions. When and where were you born?

Michael Parks: California. April 24, 1940. They [the studio bios] all say 1938. I'm not being a *girl* here but it was 1940. I think the reason why was I had a license that said 1938. I was forced to. I had to be 18 in order to get work. So I got a draft card and a driver's license when I was 16. They gave me the job and about two, three weeks later the FBI knocked at my door. "What is this? Why are you late signing up for the draft?" I think they felt sorry for me.

WR: Christ! They threw the FBI on you?

MP: The FBI! Two guys at the door. Now, they wouldn't even bother.

WR: Tell me about your parents and childhood.

MP: Well, they're both gone. Ah, a wonderful journey, actually. Different than most folks. My father never laid a hand on me. I mean spanking. My mother would take a swat at me, but she could never catch me. She tried, too. I could make her laugh and that helped a lot.

WR: How did you get your childhood nickname, *Topper*?

MP: Well, my Uncle Buddy, who died in Corregidor—before he went away to war, my mother was pregnant and he said, "It's gonna be a boy and he'll top 'em all! Call him Topper."

WR: According to all the studio bios, your family traveled a lot; took odd jobs.

MP: Yes. We just traveled because. I didn't question my father. I didn't understand until years later what a failure he thought he was. He was the first \$50,000 bonus offer in the history of baseball. They were trying to get him to sign with the Detroit Tigers. He blew his arm and that was it. He was sensational! He came out of the leagues in Arizona and Texas.

WR: Wow...

MP: Oh, yeah... he was somethin'. Batted .350, .400, he was incredible. Good speed and he had fun. He was brilliant, I thought as a kid. He would drive the umpires crazy. A show in himself.

WR: You played baseball too, for a while.

MP: Oh, yeah. I played at it. I enjoyed it.

WR: You gave poetry readings as well.

MP: (laughs) Yep.

WR: Which poets influence you?

MP: Which don't? It's all pure logic. Edward Arlington Robinson, e.e. cummings, Dylan Thomas, James Weldon Johnson. I was thinking about him the other day. I don't know if you know the history of James Weldon Johnson...

WR: He wrote *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. I've read it.

MP: He was a black poet. Cunning and beneficent. Really something wonderful. The black artist will paint himself into a corner. It's race, again. A percentage thing. Once we've fully represented their twelve percent [of the U.S. population], some cat of another color is gonna say, "OK, that's it.

No more." They've got their twelve percent. It's like a giant hiccup; it never stops. The next Langston Hughes or Johnson is going to come along and he's gonna go to the network and it'll be, "Sorry, we've just got the last black yesterday. We've just hired Mike Tyson to produce his version of *Cinderella*." There's all that talent that will still be outside the gate. The first people they hire will be the first ones in line and they'll all look and act like them.

WR: What do you think you took away from the work and the restless life you led as a teenager?

MP: Well... it made *Hollywood* a lot easier. It's all high school, the teacher's pet, the PTA. It's really not much different. It's a small town and you're the new kid on the block. It's not easy, but you adjust to it and see through real quick.

WR: What made you decide to become an actor?

MP: Oh, I came to that *late*. My hero was Clarence Darrow, so I thought about being a lawyer for a long time. Maybe I should've been a doctor... or a priest (*long pause, puffs cigarette*). That's no joke. So when I was in my teens, I took the bull by the horns and I started auditioning. It was a little play called *Compulsion*. It was on the beach.

WR: Was this the *Compulsion* based on *Leopold & Loeb*?

"Renoir said it most clearly, 'The downfall of art in film in Hollywood is the star system.'"

MP: Yeah, *Leopold & Loeb*. I didn't play him swish, but you could see he was, decidedly of that persuasion. If you've seen the play you know.

WR: I saw the film by Richard Fleischer.

MP: Yeah, I saw the film with Dean Stockwell and Bradford Dillman!

WR: Orson Welles was the *Darrow* character.

MP: But if you've done the play—you have to say "Jeez, I'm so much better."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: Just kidding.

WR: Did you attend classes like most of the actors?

MP: Well, you had to at El Camino College because you couldn't do theatre unless you enrolled. So, I applied and said I graduated from high school. I said they'll send the transcripts. So, I sign up. Three plays later, the dean came by and said, "You know, it's amazing. Those transcripts never arrived." I said, "You *must* be kidding." He says, "Well, I'll tell you what. You do real good work. Keep it up." Now, today they'd probably have to make you leave.

WR: Oh, yeah.

MP: We've lost the forgiveness—the real forgiveness.

WR: Why do you think that is?

MP: Well, you can see it. You meet any nice cops?

WR: (Laughs) No!

MP: As a kid—I knew the town cop or whoever he was, usually a good guy!

WR: Oh yeah, back where I'm from, I was related to a few.

MP: Well, you know. And you didn't have to be related! They'd look at you as if you were their own. They can't today. Can't treat 'em like as if they were your own. They belong to *that* family and *that* family'll sue you—no matter how many bags of cocaine they're carrying.

WR: Well, the police tend to resemble the people paying their salaries. You see a lot of meanness.

MP: Charmless...they're charmless. The first time I ever felt really secure around a policeman was when I was in London.

WR: Yes. They're very approachable and very helpful.

MP: Yeah.

WR: You did a lot of TV early on starting from about 1960.

MP: Right.

WR: Various playhouses and series. You worked with Robert Taylor.

MP: Yeah. Twice.

WR: Do you have any impressions of him?

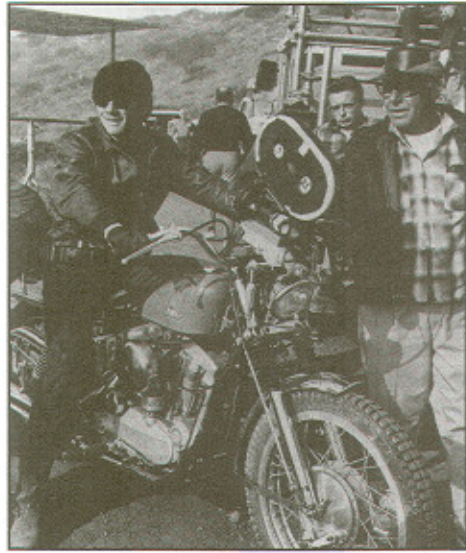
MP: Yeah. My first impression was he wore real dark eyeshadow on his eyes. Like a woman. But he wasn't. The women were nuts about him. He charmed them. Good looking, charming, there's nothing bad I can say about him. And he was working

for the best man, nicest man—big shot—I ever met in the business, Dick Powell. He owned Four Star. I never heard him yell at anybody. I started out there and he just kept getting me work. He'd see me on the lot and, "What are you out here for kid?" "Oh, I'm out here for 'Target: The Corrupters' [ABC 61-62]." "Oh yeah! I read that script. You'd be perfect for that!" And well, I don't know if I'll get it, but I'd read, I had to read. One time—I'll stray a little—William Conrad, I loved him too. He was directing, producing, acting out there, he had some projects. That's the way Dick would do it, "Go ahead. Do the whole thing." And I ran into Dick and he said, "Go over there to Bungalow 6. There's a show and you should do this character." Sure, well, I walk over. Conrad's sitting, he's a big man—not tall but big, you know—he's got his glasses on and the script on the desk, and I knock on the door and he says, "Come in, come in." and he looks up and he says, "Yes!" And I said, "Well, Dick Powell sent me over to see you about this part." I had just started out and he says, "Oh! Well, ya just don't look it kid. Ya just don't look it." And I can tell he's busy reading. And he says, "Maybe some other... what's your name?" "Michael Parks." "Well, nice to meet ya. But thank you anyway and just tell Dick I'm going in another direction." So I said, "Well,

I'd sure like to try and read for you." "Well, ya know, this guy, he's just vicious and mean..." So I said, "Well, okay." All right. I go to the door and I don't shut the door and he just sits there and is reading the script. So I went over and he didn't see me, I leaned over the desk—and as I talked to him I squeaked and I said, "Listen, if you want a mean son-of-a-bitch..." And he stops and he looks at me like this! [acid glare through heavy brows](Laughs) And he says, "What?!"

WR: (Laughs) You were putting the arm on him!

MP: So, later I get a call. And it's Powell and he's laughing and he says, "Well, whatever



On location: "Then Came Bronson."

you did you sure scared Bill!" But he was so wonderful to work with.

WR: You worked with James Whitmore as well.

MP: Yeah. We worked on "Ben Casey" [ABC 61-66]. I liked him. Great guy.

WR: Also with Bette Davis. She had a lot of nice things to say about you.

MP: Aawwww. I like her line, ya know, "Growing old is not for sissies."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: She was funny. Very funny lady.

WR: We recently saw the episode of "Channing" [ABC 63-64] you did with Peter Fonda.

MP: Yeah. Did you see it?!

WR: Yeah. Someone had a copy.

MP: Yeah?

WR: Aron Kincaid.

MP: Oh yeah!

WR: He was the fink who turned you in.

MP: That was the first show I did at Universal, I believe. And Lew Wasserman saw it and said, "I want him under contract." So the agent got a call, and said it was the best bet and a wonderful opportunity. He said, "Yeah, he saw you in "Channing""

WR: Yeah, that's the story I've heard.

MP: How do you get all this information?

WR: Research at the Motion Picture Academy Library in Beverly Hills. Henry Fonda called you one of the finest young actors in America.

MP: Awww, he's prejudiced.

WR: Well, he saw you in "Channing" with his son.

MP: Well, we worked together in *Stranger on the Run* (67), the first two-hour ever done for television. It was Terry Southern's favorite character of mine. You know Terry?

WR: Terry Southern wrote *The Magic Christian*. One of my favorite novels.

MP: Yeah. One of my best friends in life. He was very quiet. Very quiet—from Dallas. Terry was wonderful. I never had more laughs.

WR: He's a guy I wish I could have known.

MP: He was so sensitive—all the stuff you read—he was such a sensitive man.

WR: It's been said that that's one of the reasons why he wiped out in the early 70s—because of his sensitivity—and didn't publish much. He didn't like Hollywood.

MP: Well, he was—Hollywood's hard to like you know. It's like high school again—and if you're the new kid...

WR: Worse.

MP: Some can say anything they want. It's never misinterpreted. But you know, you can have an argument with a guy, a director, and, he happens to be Jewish, so he'll say you're anti-Semitic. If you don't like rap music, you're bigoted.

WR: It's more complicated than that. I've known people who didn't like R&B for bigoted reasons and people who were bigots who liked it.

MP: Well yeah! I just don't like the sound of it. Much too vociferous for me. Much too angry. I don't like that music. I don't really like it.

WR: A lot of rock 'n roll's like that.

MP: There is a lot of rock 'n roll like that. But if you're dealing with the question of ethnicity, that race card can be used. (Pause) There are professional Irishmen by the way.

WR: (Laughs) You were on "Alfred Hitchcock Presents" [CBS & NBC 55-65], you worked with the late George C. Scott.

MP: Late?

WR: Late. He died yesterday.

MP: Aahh! Jesus.

WR: It was on the news last night as I was writing down these questions.

MP: Oh, no. (Pause) I was not bosom buddies with George, but I liked him. I enjoyed his company and working with him. Yeah. Good actor.

WR: He was much different from you, as an actor. He was very bombastic.

MP: Yeah, George could be, yeah.

WR: You're more quicksilver and subtle.

MP: Well, I have played maniacs.

WR: Well you always play them as fairly self-aware maniacs. You know, people who know that they're smarter than everyone else.

MP: Weeilll, ya' know, that's a generalization.

WR: I was thinking of the character in the Charles Bronson film, *Death Wish V* (94). He just delighted in his superiority over other people.

MP: Well, I delighted in paying the rent.

WR: You began a film career at about this point. *Wild Seed* (65) was first. I saw it again last night by the way, I hadn't seen it since I

was young when it was on television. It's a really lovely film.

MP: Aahh. God! I'd hate to see it.

WR: The film holds together really well.

MP: I don't mean that. I mean Michael Parks. It's yourself. It just is yourself. I went to see a screening the other night, a film called *Bullfighter*. It's a very exciting film. Rune Bendixen directed, Kit Carson, and Cynthia Hargrave and uh...I can't think of Miken's last name.

WR: Kit Carson the writer?

MP: Yeah. Very enjoyable. Interesting cast. Nice guys, and there were some good lines.

WR: Tell about your character in that one.

MP: His daughter gets lured into the bullring. He owns fighting bulls. Don't know why, he's been on the run for years, but early on you see a big bull arena and she's lured in by the boyfriend and the bull gores her to death. The kid runs and I go after him. But that's the surface of it. It's a very internalized picture. Acting is pretty strange come to think of it, it's usually someone else's point of view. I've never done a film from my point of view. The "Bronson" [NBC 69-70] series I controlled from one aspect. You couldn't control the script because of the Writer's Guild. So it's really hard making it work but I could speak through the character.

WR: Where did *Wild Seed* shoot?

MP: We shot 23 days in Stockton. Unknown director. When it came to the producer and the director, the producer had never produced, the director had never directed. Brando was gonna do it, but he was too old to do it. So he produced it. [Elliot] Kastner took me to Wasserman and they said, "We're letting you do the film, this is the one you want to do." "Yeah." "Well, we can't let the producer produce or the director direct it." I said, "Why?" "Well, they haven't done anything. They have no record of anything." The budget was \$250,000. I think we came in at \$2,000 under budget in 23 days.

WR: Wow. That's really efficient.

MP: Well, we had Tommy Shaw. Tommy Shaw was the first assistant director, production manager and heave-ho on the picture.

WR: The great Conrad Hall was the cinematographer and he makes it look really beautiful.

MP: That was his first movie. He'd only done television before that. Bill Fraker was the camera operator. Oh, I loved Bill. Love Connie! They're good people.

WR: How was Hutton as a director?

MP: I liked him. I liked Brian, I haven't seen him in years and years and years. So Wasserman says, "Do you feel comfortable with these people?" I said, "Yeah. Yeah, I like it." "Well, okay. If you're comfortable." I loved working with Brian.

WR: Your character of *Fargo* was a disillusioned, sensitive drifter.

MP: He wasn't sensitive in the beginning!

WR: Well, no. He was a bit of an asshole.

MP: Yeah.

WR: He took her money. He just didn't think too much about her.

MP: That was Rupert Crosse in the box car with her. He was a friend of mine, we used to hang out together.

WR: I thought I recognized him.

MP: He's a beautiful cat.

WR: He looked very familiar. An incredible face.

MP: He's one of the two or three people in the world who can laugh and, just from his laugh, I would laugh. Even if I didn't know what he was laughing about.

WR: Wild Seed is what would now be called an 'indie youth movie.' That film could be updated very easily for today. Of course now, you would have Fargo as a heroin addict who dies in the rain at the end of the film, whereas the ending of this particular film is happy and hopeful. That's something that seems to have gone out of form these days.

MP: Yeah. Caring. They used to care a lot more then.

WR: The person I was watching it with was disappointed that there wasn't a sex scene. She was really digging your performance.

MP: Ah well, you know. These days if you're not fucking in the first reel, they don't want to do the movie.

WR: The film really is a little gem. Celia Kaye is in it. Jean Renoir saw the film and pronounced you America's best actor.

MP: I don't know if he said that. If he did he'd be foolish and he was not foolish. He liked me. I don't think he said American. He wanted me to do French movies too. He knew I could pick up the phonetics and pick up the accent of the area. So he never thought of me as Hollywood, as a movie star, but as an actor. We tried to get two different projects together.

WR: Really? He only did one film after that, The Little Theatre of Jean Renoir [71].

MP: Yes! Brilliant!

WR: I saw it a long time ago.

MP: See it again. For most actors, it happens as you pass the corner and somebody involved in a movie sees your face and says, "Oh, you know, he'd be interesting for that." I've never been in their faces enough. I've been down here, hanging around. I never went to Schwab's. Except one time when I opened the door and said, "Gabe!" Gabe Dell was in there.

WR: The Bowery Boy.

MP: Oh, yeah. Gabe was funny.

WR: He did a lot of bits. You had to look carefully to catch him.

MP: He was good in *The Man in the Glass Booth*.

WR: Was that on stage?

MP: Yeah. I saw him in a thing called—terrible play—and if I say the name everyone'll know who wrote it so...

WR: (Laughs)

MP: But anyway, he was in the play. And he improv'd, and changed and every night he would never say the same thing. Drove the other people crazy. (Laughs) He didn't care. He would just come in and take off. And he was doing a friend of mine, which

is why he got away with it. He was doing Al Lettieri. As we knew him as a friend.

WR: As you knew him as a person, not as the guy you saw up on the screen showing guns in peoples' faces and bouncing their heads like basketballs.

MP: Which one?

WR: I'm thinking of *The Getaway* (72).

MP: There was another thing with Bronson.

WR: Mr. Majestyk (74).

MP: Scared to death of acting.

WR: You wouldn't know it.

MP: *Wild Seed*.

He's the bar-

tender. One day.

WR: You went from *Wild Seed* to *Bus Riley's Back In Town* (65).

MP: Well, yeah. My wife had died and I figured the best thing I could do was go back to work. Elliot had this picture. It was based on a play—William Inge asked me to do it—*The Glory and the Flower*, a one-act. And it was a decent little picture. And then, they decided that it had tarnished Ann-Margret's image... so! So, we had to reshoot, we added scenes, it destroyed the picture. Bill took his name off the movie. I felt so sad for Bill, because, he knew at that point, he knew that he was through in Hollywood. I went to see him and I didn't know how—I didn't know how (long pause) depressed he was. He was always very cordial. A very sweet man. I remember, he made coffee. He was charming. He

wanted me to do a play called *Natural Affection*, and I didn't think it would work. I turned it down, which really bothered him. And it just went 3 days and folded. And after that, he died—killed himself. It was such a shock. I'd just been through that, you know. My wife. It was a very trying time and, I was lucky I had work to concentrate on. [long pause]

WR: You worked with Ann-Margret. How did you get along with her?

MP: Well I always thought that she could sing and dance. She had a natural, raw talent. But they were all wonderful to work with. Ann was sweet. Lovely girl. Jocelyn Brando was in it.

WR: Jocelyn Brando, Brad Dexter.

MP: I liked Brad. Brad was fine in the picture. He was a 'hail fellow, well met,' you know.

WR: You went from TV to low budget movies. Then to *A Pictures*. How did you feel about the difference? Were you getting the publicity build-up from the studio?

MP: Well, most of the publicity was manufactured by the studio. It said I looked a little...Jimmy Dean.

WR: Yeah.

MP: An actor hates that. I prefer character work, because personally I found myself rather...boring. I think we all should.

WR: But that's not an attitude common today. You're supposed to talk about yourself...endlessly.

MP: (Laughs) I know what you mean. It's not easy. I just tried to make a better life. They have to call first—before you work.

WR: You were compared to James Dean and Brando a lot. Personally, I find him a bit superficial. I find you far subtler and a better

On Forgiveness: "You meet any nice cops?"

actor than James Dean. He was given to shouting and pounding on the table.

MP: Well, he was an interesting actor though. (Pause) I thought he'd shot his real wad in *East of Eden* (55). He was perfect. I remember Kazan talking about it, he said to John Steinbeck, "I think I found your boy, Cal. I'll send him up to meet you. You won't like him, but I think he's your boy." So he went up there and spent a day or two talking about it, called and said, "Yep, I'm sure he can do Cal. But you're right. I don't like him."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: And what's her name who wrote *Giant* (56), [Edna] Ferber, said, "He was charming one moment and obnoxious the rest." So, when that reputation hit Hollywood before I arrived, and other actors—they swallow the whole pill! "Oh, it's another James Dean. Jesus



"Being with Rupert Crosse was like being with Terry Southern, I remember so many nights, lying on the floor of his small apartment in hysterics, just in tears."

Christ, that's all we fuckin' need." They'd tell the agents, and you wouldn't get in the office!

WR: They tried to cram you into a mold.

MP: Publicity, on one side it might be helpful but on the other side it'll kill ya'. I never screamed at anyone on the set. I never hit anybody. I've never been late! I knew my lines. I've had fortunate reviews. I don't know what the hell the story is, but I know that's part of it. The agent used to say, "Jeez, you've gotta change that." I'm not changing it! I'm not doing anything. You call and there's a part and I do that part.



Michael Parks and Celia Kaye in *Wild Seed*.

That's all I'm doing. I don't live like that. Beat bongos and insult folks.

WR: *Didn't beat the bongos, have a string of mistresses and tell Hedda Hopper to get screwed?*

MP: No, no! My God! I'd never work again! He was Warner's boy. Jack Warner loved him and that was it. I remember a review of *Wild Seed* from one old woman who was critiquing at the time. She said, "another almost European, depressing little story about misfits." And that was the review. So you know, you just should never ever take anybody's opinion. I don't know any critics. The last critics in this goddamned country were Stark Young and James Agee and I disagree with Agee's review of *Swamp Water* (41).

WR: *(arch) Really?*

MP: There aren't any more. And besides, as George Bernard Shaw said, "A critic would probably have known how to get there, he just didn't know how to drive the car."

WR: *(Laughs) Literally true in my case. You went from that to the huge John Huston/Dino DeLaurentis production of The Bible (66). You played the father of our race.*

MP: Tommy Shaw, first assistant director, production manager on *Wild Seed*? Made the whole picture work?

WR: *Yeah?*

MP: "Can you move that car?" [very gruff voice] "Sure." The sound of his voice was enough to move mountains. But a lovely guy, he had 12 kids, they all adored him. So Tommy calls me one day and says (as Shaw), "John's gonna do *The Bible*, and there must be something in it for this Parks kid I just worked with, and God-damn! he's a good actor, I told him that!" he said. "Well, thank you Tom." So he says, "You want a meeting?" "Yeah." "Beverly Hills Hotel tomorrow. Let's go. Pick ya' up." Okay. Picks me up. There's DeLaurentis and Huston. [*suddenly becomes wizened, old John Huston*] "Oh. Nice to meet you. Tommy says you're a wonderful actor. I have this part here. The part of Abel." I said, "Nah, I don't wanna do Abel. How about Cain?" "It's cast. It's cast. Richard Harris." So I said, "Well then, I'll do Adam." "Adam." "Yes." (Laughs) He was very pleas-

ant and sweet about it and says, "would you take your shirt off?" Because he wanted to see if there were any scars or tatoos. I said, "Not at all." He said, "David! You've got the part kid."

WR: *(Laughs)*

MP: So then, nothing happened! But Universal said they'd lend me out. You know, they get half of everything if they loan me out. But I didn't mind, I was very happy about going. DeLaurentis was an interesting cat, I liked him a lot. May be the best producer—first class producer, really first class—that I ever worked for. First Class. "What hotel do you want?" They offered the Grand and a big suite, but I chose a little hotel near the Piazza Novona. I went through seven drivers. It didn't bother him at all. He finally found one that drove slow. I mean, they all wanna win the race, those Italians.

WR: *(Laughs)*

MP: Nuts! I mean, at that time it was all horse and buggies and semis and tank trucks and Ferraris testing on the same little two-lane road going north. And the driver was trying to, you know, maybe take third.

WR: *(Laughs)*

MP: Nuts. And they never completely understood that I wasn't happy—it made him happy! Boy, those other drivers didn't stand a chance! They didn't have a shot at driving anybody else either!

WR: *You filmed in Italy.*

MP: Yeah. It was all location of course. Pallo la Ciali which was north and Etri and Sporlozza which was south.

WR: *You worked with an actress who played Eve named Ulla Bergryd and I couldn't find anything on her.*

MP: Ulla Bergryd. She never did anything before, and that was the only thing she ever did. She was an anthropology student in Sweden. The casting director was walking across the campus—John had sent this lady out to find Eve, sent her around the world. In her mind she saw this Swedish blonde beauty—but of course, Ulla had very red hair, pale, pale, pale skin. Subtle freckles. Wonderful gal! Absolutely wonderful. Eccentric as the day is long. I never saw anyone dress like that until the late 60s. I

mean, she was dressed in army fatigues. She never wore makeup, hair all askew.

WR: *Sounds like some of the anthropologists I knew in school...*

MP: Oh! And hated Italians. The men would whistle and pinch her butt. She thought they were just awful. And I used to laugh hysterically by the way. She'd make me laugh and I would get her laughing too. She was wonderful to hang out with. She was just wonderful, we had more fun. Everybody thought there was romance there but there was no romance, she was like a sister. We both saw the humor. Well, we're just walking around all the time buck naked in front of 150 people, you gotta be friends with somebody like that! I have this little trailer, if you came in I had to get out, but it was beautiful, right on the Mediterranean, no complaints, and I'm sitting there reading something. And I see her come by and she's—levitating. So... "Ulla! What's wrong?" "Have you seen the serpent?!?" (Laughs) So I get there and the snake's longer than I've been away from home.

WR: *(Laughs)*

MP: (Laughs) So I said, "John!" "What is it?" I said, in defense of Ulla, "I can't work with that!" [*as Huston*] "What?! We sent all the way to Brazil for this! There are 700 swans and we have a..." Oh God. Well.

WR: *Amazing.*

MP: Yeah. So, I refused.

WR: *One gets the idea that they probably shot a lot more than they used on those scenes.*

MP: Oh! Yeah, tons!

WR: *Did you get along with Huston?*

MP: Uh uh.

WR: *No?*

MP: I don't know, the first six weeks—well we shot for six months and I shot for four months and then I had to go back three or four months later and do another three.

WR: *You shot for seven months?*

MP: Well it was the Eden sequence, there were separate scenes. I didn't realize that I had to come back and do another three months. In Italian I said, "I hope my naked ass stays in my performance!"

WR: (Laughs) That was on a huge billboard in Times Square, I understand. It was used to promote the film. What did you think of that?

MP: Pamela Anderson.

WR: Well, considerably less silicone perhaps.

MP: There was nothing false.

WR: How about the accent you used as Adam?

MP: It wasn't mine. No, John looped that. It was awful.

WR: You were looped?

MP: Yeah. He didn't like my soft voice. John hated me at that point. And his way of—he was a strange bird, John, because he was cruel.

WR: I've heard that.

MP: Oh! You've heard it!

WR: Susan Tyrrell gave an interview [Psychotronic Video # 6] where she just read the guy the riot act. It was hideous.

MP: Well, while we were friends, the first six weeks, we had a conference. A big conference, people from all over the world came. Pepino [Acari, camera operator] was standing next to me, just off the stage, and he [Huston] introduced me as maybe the best film actor ever. I turned to Pepino and said, "Jeez, is he drunk?"

WR: (Laughs)

MP: But, when I saw him [Huston] in the first couple of weeks, and he said, "Is there a part you'd like to do yourself, for yourself?" and I'd just finished reading *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, and he hadn't read it. I brought it to him.

WR: He did it very soon after.

MP: Yes! I brought it to him. And the next day he says, "I want you and Marlon Brando. And Liz Taylor, and George C. Scott, and Monty Clift." Well, Monty died and George said no to the picture.

WR: You were going to do the Robert Forster part?

MP: Yeah. That was the idea. I mean, I love Bob but that's a true story. (pauses, puffs) As they all are. Bob was just right for the part. I might have done too much. Anyway, by God within a week he had everybody interested. And then we didn't even say good morning. He was cruel, mean, I can tell you.

WR: Yeah, he was a real hustler, from all reports.

MP: Oh, John was extraordinary, I mean he was ex-tra-or-di-nary, because sometimes we'd have older women visit, some executives or whatever and you could hear them when they left! (Eleanor Roosevelt voice) "Isn't he just wonderful! Oh! He's so charming! Isn't he just charming?" I'd think, "If you could see that son of a bitch with the snake you wouldn't think so!" (Laughs)

WR: (Laughs) You did *The Happening* with director Elliot Silverstein. That came out in 67.

MP: Don't blame me.

WR: (Laughs) It's a cult film now. It gets revived periodically. I was in San Francisco not too long ago and they were running it in one of the theaters on a double-bill with something else.

MP: I don't know why.

WR: I imagine for people to see it! They take a hostage that proves to be a lot of trouble for them. You worked with Anthony Quinn.

MP: Enough said.

WR: (Laughs) Yeah, I've heard a lot of stories about him too. And this was Faye Dunaway's first film.

MP: She's nice, I like Faye. And Quinn's funny! Quinn can be quite charming, and was.

WR: I understand he can be insecure about his acting.

MP: Well, aren't we all?

WR: To the point of asking Olivier for advice about his diction and walking around with marbles in his mouth, trying to improve it.

MP: Well, you know they did that. They did the play. *Becket*. And Quinn was cast as the King and when [Kenneth] Tynan was here, Tynan called him the truck-driver King, so—they then switched roles.

WR: (Laughs) I've been reading him of late. He was very bitchy.

MP: Oh, he's funny though.

WR: Oh, yes!

MP: If you're witty, or funny, you can say whatever you want as far as I'm concerned. He reviewed *The Visit* (64) and he said—he stuttered—and he said, [twee Tynan stammer] "C-casting Ingrid Bergman as a shr-shr-shrew in *The V-visit*, is like casting Eleanor R-roosevelt as M-ma Barker."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: He said, "Anthony Quinn always acts as if wearing a suit for the first time."

WR: (Laughs) You worked with some other people, George Maharis, Robert Walker Jr.

MP: Robert! Bobby! Well Bobby's Jennifer Jones' son. And when she was married to Norton Simon, I'll never forget, she asked me to come by and have dinner. I was living up in Ojai. I go down and I remember her asking if I would help Bobby to put up a teepee in Topanga.

WR: (Laughs) When was this? In the 60s when the hippies were all living there?

MP: 70? Anyway, I went up and I help him put up a teepee for him and Ellie.

WR: He was a slight fellow who always got cast in tough-guy, two-fisted roles.

MP: Yeah, he was cast as crazies for the most part. And he stopped doing pictures because he didn't want to do any more violence of any kind. Bobby was a very thoughtful boy. Nice kid.

WR: You said in an interview in the 60s, that you'd been blacklisted for a couple of years. Is this true?

MP: [Pause] Well—yeah. You can want to change your entire wardrobe after they've cut it and fit it. You can ask for the biggest

trailer they have on the lot with a sauna. They can bring hookers to your dressing room all day long. But if you want to change a line, you're a problem. Their lines are chiseled in stone!

WR: So, don't you think, perhaps, the hookers and the drugs and the limousines are the system's ways of keeping one from exercising any real power?

MP: Oh yeah! That's fine. All that's easy. "That's quite all right." I've noticed some of these boys that are being busted for cocaine

"In Italian I said, 'I hope my naked ass stays in my performance!'"

and shit, they let 'em off with a walk. I betcha if it happened to me I wouldn't work again! I betcha if it happened to me, and a few others, I'm not alone here...

WR: You'd be like Downey, Jr., currently breaking rocks upstate.

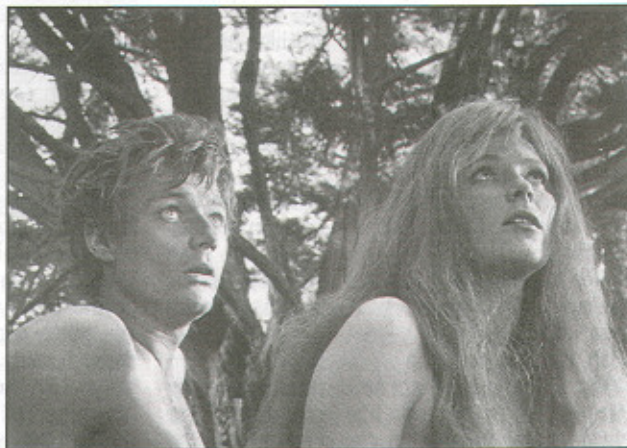
MP: He's not alone. There're others we could talk about. Boys in the business.

WR: You went to MGM and NBC for the "Then Came Bronson" pilot and series. This is after you left Wasserman and Universal, right?

MP: Yeah.

WR: How did "Bronson" come about?

MP: A guy had worked for the boss at MGM, a guy named Joe D'Agosta. Said, "You know an actor who can play this part?" And Joe said, "Yeah!" And he said my name and the boss said, "Can he ride a motorcycle?" Joe says, "Yeah!" And that's how I got into it.



Michael Parks and Ulla Bergryd in *The Bible*.

WR: (Laughs) It was that simple?

MP: Yeah. "Yeah! He rides motorcycles." "He does? Send him in!"

WR: You turned "Bronson" down 3 times.

MP: Yeah. 3 times. Third time he says, "Well, come in and talk about it. What is it?" I said, "A lot of this is monosyllabic." And he said, "Well, change it. You wanna change the line, just change it." Head of the studio. "Okay." So I changed 35-40% of it and improvised most of the rest. It's not very good but it was different. "No you're not man! And ya' know, like uh, why don't you drop the kids and the wife and station wagon man and the dog and like split man and really try to find out what it's

"You can ask for the biggest trailer they have on the lot with a sauna. They can bring hookers to your dressing room all day long. But if you want to change a line, you're a problem."

like, ya' know man?" And I said, "I'm not saying this shit." The director says, "Well, okay. What are you gonna say?" I said, "I don't know." I said, "I'll think of something." So I drove around to get back up to speed to get back into the scene, and on the way around I thought, "I gotta get out of this business."

WR: (Laughs) It just came to you?

MP: Well, many times it's come to me. Every time I work.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: I thought of Zoot Simms and Zoot said to me one time, "No, you got too much talent man. Don't do that. Hang in there!" So the guy says to me, "I wish I were you." And I said it, "Hang in there." Oh! The studio hated it, but they got 25,000 letters saying, "Hang in there!" They put it in front of every show. Every President has said it many times. Foreign dignitaries. People on the street will say to me, "Hang in there." They don't even realize I started it.

WR: That was the phrase, yeah. (Laughs)

MP: It became a part of the American idiom. Have you not heard people once a day say 'hang in there'?

WR: I started hearing it at about the same time you first said it.

MP: The powers hated it. It's like an old Southern expression, "Keep on keepin' on."

WR: Yeah. Which the bluesmen used and rockers like John Lennon appropriated later on. But it was also the way you said it, with such sympathy.

MP: He was a martyr to the system. Wore a suit, paid the taxes. And I'm free on a bike. Thank you.

WR: Yeah. Don't lecture the guy about being a slave to the war machine. That's not cool.

MP: No.

WR: Especially since he probably already knew that anyway. At the point where the series came to an end, the press soured on you a bit.

MP: Cleveland Amory said it was the demise of good film on television. Very important. Said it was the best series.

WR: And the rest of them followed along behind?

MP: The vast majority were in favor of the series, they liked the series. It was easy on you.

WR: Well, a lot of people found it so. I watched it when I was growing up.

MP: You could say some of the shows didn't work, the stories didn't work. But as far as the concept, as far as the great, overall feel of it, I don't know of anyone who didn't appreciate it.

WR: I can only think of one one-season television show that had that kind of impact, and

has that kind of following still yet and it's Kolchak: The Night Stalker [ABC 74-75].

MP: The only series in the whole history of television that ran one year that was syndicated. It was the only series in the history of television that had only one running character.

WR: I almost want to say The Prisoner, but they had running characters on that too.

MP: Right. "Bronson" was so close to an anthology, they hated it. You scared the network to death with anthology. They want an ending, they want to blow up something with a car, the baby's born, the woman's raped, the guy's hung. Unlike life.

WR: You got to number 20 on the Billboard pop charts in 1970 with "Long Lonesome Highway," the show's theme.

MP: Well, that was because of Columbia House Album of the Month Club. It wasn't 'cause MGM promoted it 'cause they did not. They never did a damned thing. Columbia House put it out as album of the month and when that happened, they sold 250-300,000, and they used the tune for the series.

WR: They did the album before and they used the tune? That I did not know.

MP: Yeah, well actually, that tune—they said, "We need a theme for the series. We want to use *Mr. Tambourine Man*." And I said, "That's not right. I don't mind Dylan, but this is not about a guy who's smoking dope on the road. This is not that cat. So this is not the tune. I won't record it." They said, "Will you give us a tune?" I said, "Yeah." I called this cowboy kid named Jim Henricks, lives up in Ojai, next day, and I said, "Jim? You awake?" He says, "Yeah?" I said, "Well get your guitar. I'm gonna pick you up, we're going to MGM. We gotta record a tune." "What tune?" he says. I said, "We'll make it up on the way down." So, he's sitting in the back seat with his guitar all the way down to the studio. By the time we got there, it was "Long Lonesome Highway".

WR: A very gentle, countrified song.

MP: Yeah.

WR: It fits the character really well.

MP: Yeah. It was easy on him. I think TV strayed from the one-act. They tried to compete with the movies. And it's straining to compete with the movies.

WR: He's kind of like the late 60s everyman. You know, a young, professional guy, finds it really easy to get rid of all of his possessions, get on a motorcycle and go.

MP: Ah, yeah, but I worked! All the time in the series. I worked for a living, didn't leech off anybody. And, second season, if it had gone, would've proven what he was as a writer.

WR: He was a journalist.

MP: Yeah. He was a journalist. But, so I got out to shoot the thing and Billy Graham was the director.

WR: You'd worked with him before.

MP: Yeah. I'd worked with him before that. Anyway he directed it. I asked for Billy, 'cause I liked the way he used lenses. He had a good eye for the camera. Anyway, I asked for him and I got him...lucky...

WR: You got to work with some legendary performers on Bronson, like Akim Tamiroff. He's a great favorite of mine. The Great McGinty (40) is a favorite at my house.

MP: Lovely guy. Lovely guy. Friendly and warm—a hug in the morning—lovely cat.

WR: Gloria Grahame.

MP: (sings) "I'm just a girl who can't say no."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: Bob Steele's got a small part in that piece.

WR: The old cowboy actor?

MP: It's about a guy who went to prison, and he's coming back. And his girlfriend now has a new boyfriend, and he's a mean little fella and so the whole town is just quaking because he's coming back to town and they know he's gonna kill him. And the guy gets off the bus. He's a completely changed guy. So the morning before we shoot the scene—I always got together with the actors and we talked it and rehearsed it, and they said, "Oh, this is the way you work." The studio hated it but that's the way we worked. She sat, rollers in her hair and she's in makeup and I said, "Gloria. Come out, we're just gonna do a little read through and you can go back." She said, "Well, okay but I ..." "No, come on out." "But I just don't..." "Come on, we're just gonna read, then you can go back. Ya' got all the time you need Hon, you got plenty of time." It's about seven in the morning. And Bob's there. Now Bob gets off the bus and he sees her, and the first thing he says is, "Why...aren't you pretty." He hasn't seen her all year. So we're reading now, we're doing the read through and he's reading the script and he says, "Dorothy!"—or whatever her name is—"Dorothy! Why aren't you pretty?"

WR: (Laughs)

MP: And she goes [flailing and slapping]. "I'm gettin' in my makeup!"

WR: (Laughs)

MP: And I said, "Bob, I think maybe ... listen here a second. Just think about this Bob. The 'why' is just throw-away. (Laughs)

WR: (Laughs)

MP: "Oh God! I think I see what I've done."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: Why aren't you pretty?

WR: (Laughs) At this point, you began to give interviews to the mainstream press...

MP: Hmmm.

WR: ...in which you confused them on your stand on Vietnam, race, young people, etc. A very politically charged and paranoid time. Were you putting them on or were they all just thick?

MP: All thick.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: There's just, there are key phrases. A man might innocently say, "Well you know the problem of, the black problem." [Snaps his fingers.] I don't say 'Afro-American' because I'm not sure if the black I'm looking at is actually American. It's like saying 'white Anglo-Saxon Protestant WASP'. I've never known an Anglo-Saxon Protestant that wasn't white.

WR: (laughs)

MP: A black actor got me started professionally. We were doing *King Lear*. I had to leave the production because Universal wanted me to do uh, ya' know, "Doggie In The Window."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: I don't know what it was. (Laughs) David Susskind offered me *Streetcar* and I said, "That's been done!" And they compare me to Brando and Geraldine Page wanted to do it. She said she'd do it if I did. Good actress. And I said, "No, I don't wanna. You know what'll happen to me, it'll happen to you too! They'll compare you to Leigh." She said, "Yeah, you're right but we could sure have fun." I said, "I don't wanna do it." So he gets pissed off and then he came back with *Hatful of Rain*. He came back at a perfect time because I would have had to do this, whatever it was. So I went to Lew and I said—I might have gilded the lily a little bit but I said, "How much do you care about dope? What it's doing to this country? Kids on dope? Don't you care? This is a wonderful depiction of what to do." Right. So he let me out of "Doggie In The Window." But I did have to leave the *Lear* production. Go to new York to rehearse it and go to London to tape it. But Frank Silvera was brilliant, and he was the black actor who got me started. You know, one time I was on an airplane, going back East. There were two little black girls sitting next to me. Their father was sitting back two rows. The seats were arranged to where we could sit talking. I told them my background, said how difficult it was. One of them wanted to be an actress. And I said, "Well, I know it. And it'll be very difficult because you are black and it'll take time for people to understand that doctors come in all colors. It takes time. I've been pushing for it for a long time." And I recited a poem by e.e. cummings. And you'll know where the father went into orbit. "one day a nigger / caught a star / no bigger / than not to understand / he said i'll never let you go until you make me white / and so it did / and that's why stars shine at night" All he heard was nigger. The stewardess comes back, takes the two girls and moves them someplace else. There's a layover in Salt Lake City. The airport manager and the cops come on board and they make me get off.

WR: Holy God.

MP: The girls are waving to me like this. [mimics tiny hands waving] (sounding very

wistful) "Bye Mr. Parks." The father looked like Macy's window. [pause] "Their father told us that you were using the nigger word." I said, "Yes, I did." The airport manager and the FBI and whomever else, they thought I was a racist. Why do you suppose that is?

WR: It is simply a fighting word.

MP: It was used brilliantly and beautifully there! You can't define it any better than cummings did.

WR: And you know, a lot of his poetry offends the unwary still.

MP: You might call it prejudiced! You might call them that, ya' know? Tells us what was speaking genealogically and poetically. Thomas Wolfe wrote in *The Web and The Rock*, "We are all the sums we have not yet counted. Subtract them into night and nakedness and you will see. Begin in Crete 4,000 years ago, the love that ended yesterday in Texas. We suffer the slurs of a Georgia slattern because a London cutpurse



"You hang in there."

went unhung." Now, is it prejudiced against Georgia? Or London?

WR: No. I don't think that has anything to do with prejudice. I think that has to do with history.

MP: My old man would say, "You know, Harold's gonna come down later. Tell him I'll be back about two o'clock. I gotta get a transmission. So when Harold gets here..." I'd say, "Who's Harold?" "Harold! You know, he lives up there about 7, 8 houses..." "No." "Harold." "No, I don't know who he is." Finally I said, "Oh! Oh, you mean the black guy." "Well, yeah. That's Harold." That was my dad. That was my dad.

WR: He didn't think in those terms.

MP: Never! But boy! I don't know. Today it's tough. Today I mean, I'm the enemy. You and me, white males. It's only the white male. It's not women. They're a minority.

WR: They're an oppressed majority.

MP: And they're the great majority. But women are considered a minority. And the Spanish, Chinese, Jewish, Black. So we are the enemy. We are the enemy.

WR: Well, if some people think that way, it's probably due to history, too. Ugly things were done and still are.

MP: It's not mine. We don't know where I come from. I never owned a plantation. I didn't have any slaves.

WR: Some of my ancestors did and I feel like hell about that.

MP: I don't feel bad about it at all! I wouldn't if they did! They didn't but I wouldn't feel bad about it if they did! It hasn't a God-damned thing to do with me. Blood is not thicker than water.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: And I'm certain, I'm certain, that if I had been born in the 20s—even as late as the 20s—black, I'd a' been pretty God-damned close to Nat Turner. But not now. I've lost probably 10 or 15 parts in the last 5 or 6 years to blacks or minorities because they say, "They're going ethnic at the agency. We're going ethnic." Only because they have to get their 12%! It's not who's right for the part. It's the reverse of what I used to do in the late 50s, early 60s, saying, "It doesn't make any difference what color the guy is. He's a doctor. Rupert Crosse could play this doctor." And, "Well, but he's black." "Yeah, he's black. But it's a black doctor. Let him play the doctor. It doesn't make any difference, let him play the doctor." There's a guy in print [name withheld] you don't even have to put his name on it, 'cause I can't stand him, don't give him any credit for anything—

WR: (Laughs)

MP: —just say a rotten cretin. He came to visit on "Bronson." Begged me. I didn't want to do any PR because I know how you pricks are. They wanna make it—better than thou. "I see..." and "this is the way he really is." I mean he'd talk about Jesus Christ and say, "You know, I'll tell you why he doesn't wear his sandals anymore." Yeah. Anyway.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: So, he came out to "Bronson" on location and we were doing the show. Somebody said something like, "Maybe James Dean's alive and he could be your stand in." Some cowboy. Well, he puts down that I said it—and this is how cruel these sons-a-bitches are—and Lemarr, the cameraman will testify to this as anyone else will. I would not change shots. I would change writing to help make it at least interesting, with no violence. No violence in the show at all, they had to agree to that—they hated that. "Wouldn't work without conflict!" I said, "This is conflict. This is internal conflict. It's character conflict. You don't need to smash someone's head in." Anyway, so—it was hard to make it work and hard to do it. Now, Lemarr at one point, he's sitting there watching me and he says, "Hey kid! C'mere I wanna show you something." And I go over and look through the camera and I said, "Oh, that's beautiful, yeah." And he says, "That okay with you?" Kidding...always kidding 'cause he loved when he could shoot something beautiful, and show me. He'd often say, "What you do kid is impor-

tant up on that screen. I can teach you what I do in about two months." He was really humble. So I said, "Oh, that's great!" So, he puts in the article, "Nothing goes without Parks' okay. He has to look through the camera."

WR: *I hate bullshit like that.*

MP: Well I'm gonna tell you something, pal. This other one comes out in [a very famous publication]. That little prick. In it, it's called "Bronson." This is before the "Bronson" pilot. And they called. And I said, "Well I haven't been working in a couple of years, what the hell do they want to talk to me for?" "Well, they think you're interesting." "Oh, I see." So he does the interview and the guy says to me, "Who's your candidate for 68?" And—let's see, there was George Wallace, Nixon and Hubert Humphrey. So, Humphrey, "Well he's controlled by the left-handed liberals and Chrysler and all these people controlling his agenda. And Nixon," and I quoted an Italian correspondent, "Nixon reminds me of the other guy's lawyer."

WR: *(Laughs)*

MP: "And Wallace, he's the only honest son-of-a-bitch running, but he's much too ignorant to vote for."

WR: *(Laughs)*

MP: He puts in the interview, "His candidate for 1968: George Wallace."

WR: *What horseshit!*

MP: That's enough to make you wanna kill somebody.

WR: *Yes, it is...*

"I quoted an Italian correspondent, 'Nixon reminds me of the other guy's lawyer.'"

MP: And I'm sitting in a restaurant out here with Terri McLuhan, Marshall McLuhan's daughter, whom I knew from New Orleans. Long story. And he comes by the table and says, "Hi Michael!" Puts his hand out. And I said, "Take your hand and stick it straight up your ass. If you're not away from here in about 5 seconds, I'm gonna take all your fucking teeth out." He leaves and she says, "I've never seen you like that!" I told her the story and she says, "Go get him and knock his fucking teeth out!"

WR: *That goes in the article. I can't believe that! It's ridiculous.*

MP: Well, I don't know if we should put that in the article, because you just give this guy, you find his name and you give him credit.

WR: *I'm not gonna give him credit. Why should I?*

MP: Well, that's—you could say an interview with this...

WR: *(Laughs) A journalist.*

MP: Yeah! Now I live in Monterey and I hear he moved into the neighborhood. [name deleted] is his name.

WR: *He wrote for [the same very famous publication] for years. I know that name.*

MP: So, I ran into a guy on the street one time and he says, "You wanna come over

and play some cards sometime? I want to try to get you to play some poker." And I said, "No, I'm trying to make some money." He says, "Well, you make a little bit of money." I said, "Ah. I'm not interested." He says, "A guy, another celeb, moved into town recently." I said, "Who?" He says, [name deleted] I said, "Really?" I said, "You tell him I'm living here—and I'm gonna see him on the street one day." He says, "I will. I'll tell him that." And he moved.

WR: *(Roars) You needn't worry. I'm not in this business to fuck with people.*

MP: I think it's good enough. You can quote anything I say here about the race card being played, or bigotry, or anything I've said. Just keep it straight.

WR: *Well, yeah.*

MP: I don't care. You don't have to like me. You don't have to like a performance. People don't have to love me. I know when I do something good or I do something bad. I know when I'm average. I don't know that I've ever been below average, but I have been average. And I've been very good sometimes. But you don't have to like everything I did! That doesn't mean—you could say, "Well, you know, he talks about art but Jesus Christ! Has anybody ever seen..."

WR: *I've never seen you give a discreditable performance.*

MP: One time—*The Werewolf of Woodstock*. (75)

WR: *(Laughs)*

MP: Man! That film! I wasn't *bad*...

WR: *You weren't bad. We'll get to that one later.*

MP: I quoted Renoir one day because we were having a conversation when I said we should support the war in Vietnam, early, early on. My mind changed as the war progressed because we lied! The French were honest and said, "We're gonna colonize." The US said, "We're gonna free you." And I knew it was a bunch of bullshit and we shouldn't have been there! And then, later on when those poor people were falling off wings in the compound, trying to leave, it was the most chicken-shit way we could have left the war. It was just so offensive to me, as an American. And they let it go by because we had Jane Fonda sitting on a God-damned tank in North Vietnam. The movie star's heart might have been in the right place, but her ass was in enemy territory.

WR: *Well she did that with a bunch of other people on a tour.*

MP: Well, I was sitting with a boy who lost both legs in Vietnam, watching it on television. That's not pleasant.

WR: *I would think not.*

MP: Oh yeah, the question about Communism, the guy in London—they called me, in a newspaper in England, a Communist!

WR: *They called you a Communist?*

MP: Oh yeah, because I didn't want the United States to intervene. And I quoted Renoir and I said, "Well, I'm too God-damned lazy to be a Communist."

WR: *(Laughs)*

MP: He didn't say God-damned, I did. This is waltzing through 98% of your life. I'm not a leader of men, not out to protest anything. Live by the side of the road and be a friend of man. Brendan [Behan] put it well, he said (Irish brogue), "They can do anything they like," he was drunk.

WR: *(Laughs)*

MP: Not only one night was he drunk.

WR: *An eminent lifter of spirits.*

MP: Oh, wonderful. I used to—when he'd come in, he lived right below me in the Montecito over there on Franklin, I didn't want to flush the toilet because I knew that he'd hear it in the pipes and if he'd hear that he knew I'd be up. Up he'd come with a bottle and it could be five in the morning. Which most of the time I enjoyed, but sometimes...anyway, he says, "They can do anything they like, as long as they don't scare the horses up on the sidewalk and hurt somebody."

WR: *(Laughs) You like to hang around with writers.*

MP: Maybe they like to hang around with me. I don't know about writers ... but there are specific ones.

WR: *Would you do another TV series now?*

MP: Yeah!

WR: *(Laughs) You didn't work for a long time after "Bronson" folded. Why?*

MP: [Long pause] Well, the concept was, he's trying to control everything, like the article said. It had nothing to do with it. It had to do with I didn't want any violence, we don't need violence, we don't need sex to make the series work. Well, if you don't want to do it that way, why—you'll never work again. And I didn't for four years.

WR: *So they held the axe over you. "You'll never work in this town again." And then they dropped it.*

MP: That was one time. There was a time before that for four years and a time after that for three years. Altogether it was 13 or 14 years that went by. Anyway, I eventually went to Canada to work. A film called *Between Friends*. [aka *Get Back* (73)]

WR: *It played the festival circuit I understand.*

MP: Well received.

WR: *I couldn't track it down.*

MP: I couldn't either! I was up there doing *Death Wish V* and I said to Don Shebib, "Can I see that?" He said, "I can't get a copy." Quentin calls me, "I got a copy of that picture you did, *Between Friends*."

WR: *He got a copy?*

MP: I said, "How the fuck did you get that?" He said, "I called Don Shebib and he got me one." Next time I see him, I'm gonna remind him. *Wild Seed!* He calls me, says, "I got a copy of *Wild Seed!*" "How'd you do that?" Very famous director, I won't men-

"But the point is you can never be right when you contest Caligula."

tion his name, Quentin was talking to him one day out there, he's having lunch, ya' know, meeting—meeting of the minds—and he mentioned it. The guys says, "Oh, that's Michael Parks." He says, "Yeah. I can't get a copy." He says, "I'll get you one."

WR: I wish I had that kind of leverage, it would make my job easier.

MP: It's a sodality play, Hollywood. You know what that means?

WR: It's a group, vaguely incestuous. It's musical chairs with an ever-declining number of chairs.

MP: There you are. Well, but they still have a chair. Secretary, Vice President, Interim Vice President, Associate Director.

WR: Creative Producer.

MP: Producer of Creative Development..

WR: (Laughs)

MP: There's always a chair. Just next week you may be in another one, but you're there. Sodality play. [pause] I have nothing against nepotism.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: If it's talented. You know, if a cameraman has a son, and the cameraman's son is very impressed with his father's work, and he loves the medium and he wants to do it himself, or a dentist, or make pottery—I have nothing against that. It's natural. You see your father do something and you like what your father does. It's fine if you have the talent! If Michelangelo's son has three fingers—it's not a good idea.

WR: Have you noticed a lot of that? The old idiot brother-in-law stories.

MP: (Laughs)

WR: From the studio era.

MP: Yeah! Sure. I mean, after they fired Dore Schary it took them three or four years to get his relatives out of the studio! (MGM). He had 'em in every department. But at the same time, I'll never forget a quote of Dore Schary's. He was asked, "What is a movie star to you?" [pause] He was referring to Monty [Clift]—at the time he was doing *Lonelyhearts* (58). And he said, "Well a good actor makes you believe, but a star makes you care." And he didn't mean box office. He meant in his eyes what a movie star was, and he thought Monty was. Now that's completely reversed today. I went to a screening the other night and somebody was in the picture who was a singer with a band, in a very small, little insignificant part. And the credits came on and when his name came up there was big applause from the audience, just for being there. Renoir said it most clearly, "The downfall of art in film in Hollywood is the star system." And it's true. You don't look for the best actor. You're looking to book the film in the theatre. So, we'll do *Hamlet* if [pause] Kevin Costner is available.

WR: (Laughs) Yeah.

MP: And nothing against Costner. But—"We'll do it if" that—so to begin with you've destroyed your capability. Crippled yourself.

WR: Or it becomes some monolith based on the star's personality that everything seems to orbit.

MP: It used to be that you would never even consider casting James Stewart in *Othello*.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: But today, if Kevin Costner thinks he can play it, well, there's your money. When they did *Moby Dick*, the press had a field day with Huston! They said, "Mr. Huston, how could you possibly cast Gregory Peck [pause and suddenly as Peck] 'Gregory Peck'... as Ahab?" He said, [as Huston] "Oh, we'll goose him through it."

WR: Well, he's certainly rigid enough to play a puritan fanatic.

MP: Well in the last scene



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in the picture where he's caught in the whale, *Moby Dick* had him—they had a mechanical whale that they lashed him to and the cameraman said, "John, what if when the whale turns, the mechanism jams and—he's under water?" And Huston said [as Huston], "Oh, it's alright. It's alright. It's the last shot."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: That doesn't tell you enough. There are other stories.

WR: It seems to me, looking at the history of film at that point, in the late 60s, early 70s, European producers would be banging on your door demanding your services.

MP: Uh, Truffaut wanted me to do *Fahrenheit 451* (66). But Universal, when I turned down a remake of *Beau Geste*..

WR: Another remake of *Beau Geste*!

MP: Yeah.

WR: *Fahrenheit 451*. Damn.

MP: Just before *The Idol* (66). While I was shooting *The Idol* in London, they sent me the script. At first, a guy name of Milliard Kaufman was writing it. And I saw him, he was completely distraught, and even to save money they cut out one of the brothers in

the original story—anyway—it was supposed to be Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay and myself.

WR: Oh, wow!

MP: And I said, "Great!" to Lew Wasserman. And the next thing I knew, Lew had turned it over to a picture board and they decided that they would shoot it with all Universal contractees in Saugus in 19 days. So, you can't shoot *Beau Geste* in Saugus in 19 days. So, I said "No." And so, for saying 'no' to it, they wouldn't let me do *Fahrenheit 451*. We had dinner three or four times in London and Truffaut really wanted me to do the part. Now I don't feel bad about it because Oskar Werner did it. And he'd worked with Oskar Werner before. But he had met me and said, "This is the guy."

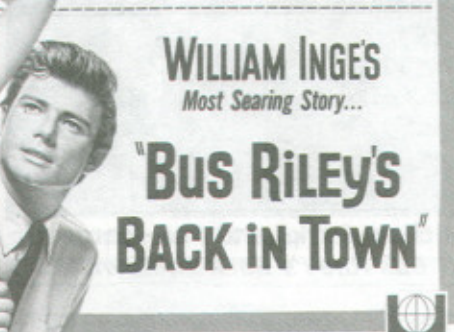
WR: That would have been great.

MP: Yeah. But because I'd been a bad boy, and didn't want to do the remake of *Beau Geste* in 19 days, they said, "Well, you're a problem. You're not gonna work anywhere else."

WR: That's amazing. I didn't know that. What was your first US job after this particular blacklist?

MP: I must say to you, Lew Wasserman never did any blacklisting. The thing is, if you say

SHE STRIKES FIRE IN A NEW KIND OF MAN!



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to the General, "You're wrong." And the General says to you, "You're right." And all of the General's yes men, who never have the balls to say, "You're wrong."

WR: They hate you for it.

MP: Not the General! When I got out of the contract at Universal, and did the "Bronson" pilot—it showed that night. Next morning at seven, at my door in Ojai, there's a guy in a chauffeur's uniform with a limousine and a telegram—I open it up and it said, "You've always been a wonderful talent. I know this show will be an enormous success. All the success in the world to you. Lew Wasserman." He never was vindictive. It was the lieutenants that worked under him that never had the balls. And there were times when I was wrong and he was right. It has nothing to do with anything. It has to do with just saying what you feel and what you think. And a lot of times it went in my favor. A lot of times he'd say, [as Wasserman] "You're just a pain in the ass!"

WR: (Laughs)

MP: And it worked that way too. And he was right. And that was all right. But the

point is you can never be right when you contest Caligula. There was *never* in this business, ever, a more powerful man than Lew Wasserman. I don't give a fuck, put 'em all together. Cohn, Warner, any of 'em. Lew Wasserman.

WR: Unlike *Caligula*, I don't know that he was a self-aware god. (Laughs)

MP: I'm not equating him to that. I'm saying they equate him to that.

WR: You were one of the last of the old contract people at Universal.

MP: [makes "old" noises]

WR: (Laughs)

MP: So the old cowboy dies in this little Texas town. The graveyard is about twenty



Michael Parks and Ann-Margret in *Bus Riley's Back In Town*.

miles from town. So they send a young kid from *Time* magazine down to cover the funeral. And he looks over here and leaning against this cottonwood is this gnarled, Remington looking cowboy. He says, "Hi. Did you know the deceased?" He says, "As a matter of fact sir, I did." So he says, "Well, how did you know him? Were you in school together?" "Yep." "Well, were you in the same grade?" Says, "Nope. Three years ahead." (Laughs) So he says, "How old would that make you?" He says, "One hundred and sixteen." He says, "One hundred and sixteen?" He says, (laughs) "Geez. It doesn't make too much sense for you to go back to town."

WR: (Laughs) You started working a lot of TV movies about this point. After you came back. You did *The Story of Pretty Boy Floyd (74)* with Kim Darby, and *The Werewolf of Woodstock*.

MP: The agent said to me, "Listen. You've got a terrible reputation in the business. Don't get into why, we don't know really." No one ever understood why. "So, you have to start all over." I said, "Okay. Don't tell me what it is, just get me the job." That was the beginning of it. So, for about six years, he would say, "Here, why don't you do this TV show?" I'd say, "Okay. Just don't

send me the script. If you send me the script then I won't do it." So for six years I didn't read anything and I would just show up in Heber, Utah—or Santa Monica, California, and I'd read the script that morning in a coffee shop.

WR: Have you ever seen *The Werewolf of Woodstock*?

MP: Why? [pause] You know I laughed all the way through it, it was so God-damned funny. It had Neville Brand, and Neville was the fourth most decorated G.I. in the second world war. And he was a tough customer, and a beautiful cat. We got along perfect. Old friends. Used to drink together. But he's cast as the werewolf! So—on the way to the stage (laughs) I see a guy in props, and he says, "Michael! Michael!" I said, "Yeah!" He says, "Are you doing this werewolf thing?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "C'mere, I wanna show you something." So I go to the prop shop and he points on the wall and he points to the mask and the head of the werewolf. I said, "Really." So now I go to the read through and Neville's there. [as gruff Neville Brand] "Hi Michael."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: So, we finish the read through and I say, "Neville. Wanna have a beer?" He said, "Yeah. I do." I said, "I wanna show you something first." (Laughs) So I get him in the prop shop. (Laughs) And there's the werewolf (laughs) and he looks up at this mask of the werewolf (laughs) which looks like an angry Pluto! (Laughs)

WR: (Laughs) It was an odd looking beast.

MP: It was so embarrassing—it wasn't frightening—it wasn't anything! He says, "What!?" So he never showed up again. (Laughs)

WR: (Laughs)

MP: I ran into him later and he said, "God-damn! I'm so glad you warned me!" I mean, Neville took one look at that fuckin' mask and it was like this. [Pluto the Pup face] (Laughs)

WR: (Laughs)

MP: (Laughs) The next morning we all come to the second read through and there's no Neville. And they *cannot* find him. Checked out. And I run into him a couple of weeks later and he says, "I got drunk for six fuckin' days!" Well, he didn't know how to overcome the mask. He got drunk for six days and they had to recast him! (Laughs) I couldn't resist it. And I *tried!* Well, Neville was on that western he did, a family western show [*Laredo*, 65-67], and he was drinking like he was going to the electric chair. He's outside his dressing room, (laughs) and he's 250 pounds and shitting himself, so they call Paul Donnelly, the old man of production at Universal, lovely guy! Really lovely guy. So Neville's there—and Princess Margaret's coming through on tour and he's standing there taking a piss—and it's just...ah...not good.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: So, now he's sitting on the steps of his trailer, you know, farting, and puking, and what not.

WR: (Laughs) Oh, lord....

MP: Oh yeah. So Paul comes down and he says, "Ya' know what?" He says, "I've had it with ya'! I'm gonna tell every God-damned man and woman in this country that you're a drunk!" [*blind-drunk and ferocious*] "Fuck 'em! Fuck 'em. Fuck 'em."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: "Fuck 'em. Women! Fuck 'em." He says, "I'm gonna tell every producer in this business that you're a God-damned lush!" "Fu-u-u-ck 'em!" He says, "I'm gonna tell every kid in this country that you're a drunk!" [pause, nearly sobbing] "Aw, don't tell the kids!"

WR: (Laughs) You did three features with the same director which is a record for you. Andrew V. McLaglen, the action film director and son of Victor McLaglen.

MP: There's a book called *Express To Hollywood*. You should read it. Very charming. I was over at Twentieth Century Fox—being rejected for something—and I had the meeting for *The Last Hard Men (76)*. I love Andy as much as I've loved any man in my life. And I meet him. And nobody likes me and nobody thinks I can do this part. Goofy. I don't know if you saw it.

WR: Last Hard Men? You played the deputy. I saw it when it came out 'way back when.

MP: Well, my character—I had fun doin' it. He's goofy. He's not very bright. He's fun. So I'm walking away from the meeting. I go the phone and I call the agent. But, I have coffee. You know the agency, "Call us right away, We'll let you know right away if you're goin' with this thing. Well, they don't like you. They don't think you're right for it." I say, "That's okay." So I'm leaving, and I'm walking and there's Alan Ladd, Jr. and Jay Kantor. Jay used to be Wasserman's hatchet man. Every time Jay would call me to say, "Let's have dinner," I knew I was being suspended.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: Well I walked by and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I don't know. I just got rejected." "From what?" I said, "Some western." He says, "Well, you look good Michael." I said, "Well, so do you. Good to see ya'." I knew Laddy when he was a sub-agent. Then all of a sudden he's the head of Twentieth, the head of, ya' know. I'm not gonna say they never called but—but this one time, I get back to the house and the agents call. They said, "Well, it seems that the producer changed his mind. They got a call from the powers that be that said, hire ya'. And Andy McLaglen really wants ya'."

WR: You worked with Heston on that.

MP: Yep.

WR: Any stories about Heston?

MP: I asked Chuck one time, I said, "How do you account for such a successful career as an actor?" He said, "Well, I've always made sure that when I was doing a picture that the agent made a deal for another one." God-damn, I wish I could do that! Well, from that day on, for six years, Andy McLaglen was responsible for making it possible for me to pay my rent. Any supporting role, anything. "Got a part for

"I'm not a leader of men, not out to protest anything. Live by the side of the road and be a friend of man."

you kid." "Where're you shooting?" "Berlin." "I'll be there."

WR: That part in Sergeant Steiner [aka *Breakthrough* (78)] was almost as if it were written for you.

MP: Well, it wasn't.

WR: I saw that recently.

MP: Is this yours or mine? [Eyeing the remaining beers on the table.]

WR: Uh, go to. It was a late 70s anti-war war movie.

MP: [Richard] Burton started on the wagon the first day of shooting. He did not have a drink the entire movie. But the first day, he was shakin' like a dog shittin' peach seeds. And I look over, I say to Bob [Mitchum], "Jesus Christ." I went over and put my jacket over Richard's shoulders, I went back and said, "Jesus Christ. He looks like he's dyin'!" Bob says, "Don't worry about those fuckin' Welsh dwarves. They never fuckin' die. Welsh dwarves. Never fuckin' die."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: They'd been friends for years.

WR: You got to do scenes with Mitchum and Burton. All sorts of interesting people in that film.

MP: I don't believe I had any scenes with Richard Burton at all.

WR: They may not have shot it at the same time, but there's a scene in which you both appear.

MP: Oh yeah! That's true. I remember that. I remember that day, 'cause Andy leaned forward and he said to Richard—Bob and I are sitting off camera—he says, "Ah...Richard." "Yeah?" He says, "A little less Oxfordian."

WR: (Laughs) What was working with Mitchum like?

MP: One of the great pleasures—I knew Bob since 63 ...? And I don't know if I've ever had as much fun. He was very special. There've been a couple, a few. But Bob was an extraordinary cat. Bob was another thing entirely. I could do a two-hour interview with you on Bob.

WR: He was a veteran hell-raiser.

MP: Well, he'd cover your back. You hadda cover his back too. And he'd get shit—watch out.

WR: People wanting to kick his ass or test him out?

MP: Oh! Always! He was extraordinary. One night, we're sitting in a bar and there's eight Germans at the bar waiting for a table. The manager says, "I'm sorry but you have to leave." Bob says, "Suck what?" (Laughs)

WR: (Laughs) Oh, God!

MP: And Burton says, "He'll say anything. Robert will say anything." He would! "I think the dog's taking a leak on the bar." Burton would hide under the table. He was not a fighter. (Laughs)

WR: (Laughs)

MP: The guy says, "You're using vulgarity and such. The rest of our clientele do not appreciate the sound that you make, you know?" And uh, Bob said, "Are you ready to leave?" I said, "No." He says, "Two scotches and water." And he says, "No, I'm saying that you must leave." Bob says, [louder] "Two scotches and water or we'll set fire to the fuckin' curtains."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: He was Bob. He was *not* lyin'.

WR: He had an undertone of menace to him?

MP: And he could back it up. Not just the menace. Fuck the menace. He could really fight. So, you had to be there. There were eight of them, but it didn't matter to Bob.

WR: Then again, it might have intensified it.

MP: It might. And he liked it. The crazier it got the more he liked it. (Laughs) We were sittin' in a bar one time, (laughs) again, it's always a bar. But it was the Grand Hotel in Vienna. Here's this Nazi, and he's drying glasses. Can't wait to get rid of us. We're the only two left. We're keeping him up, it's four o'clock in the fuckin' morning. And he hated it. Hated it. So, in come Eva Braun and Himmler. And they're dressed to the nines, ya' know. Bob and I are in windbreakers. We'd just come back from work and decided to forget eating. They come by and they look at us like we have shit on our lips. Bob says, "Well, well, well!" I said, "Never mind Bob." He says, "No. No, no, no, no." So they go and they sit down. She's facing him. Bob goes, "Psst! Psst!" She looks and he goes, [makes universally-known two-handed obscene gesture; elaborately mouthing and pointing] "I wanna fuck... you."

WR: (Laughs) Good God!

MP: And I can see his face right now. I can see his face. Clear as a bell.

WR: What did you do?

MP: Nothin'! Just watchin'. And she starts to tell her husband and Bob says, "Psst! Psst, psst!" [gestures again, pointing] No! No, no. I wanna fuck you." (Laughs) So she's whispering, and the husband—

WR: Uh oh! (Laughs)

MP: The husband turns and gives us a look and Bob says, "Don't get upset. I'll fuck you, too."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: He was something. Bob did *not*—give a fat rat's ass. He's always off the cuff. Didn't give a shit about anything. And I caught him one time. I said, "Who'd you like working for best? Who's the best director you worked for?" He says, "Oh. Charles Laughton." I said, "Why?" He said, " 'Cause if you did something good, he'd cream."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: Not what you're used to in the business, Ron.

WR: You were also in a delightful movie of Andrew McLaglen's called *folkes* (80), with Roger Moore. You did the mad bomber. The soft-spoken guy with the high-pitched giggle.

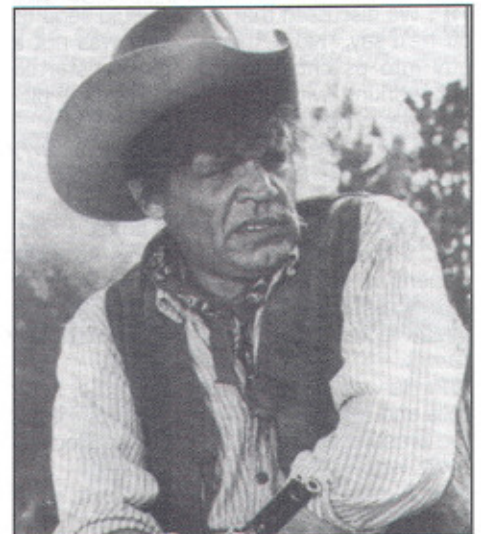
MP: Oh! Funny story. I'm in Monterey, where I live, before I leave and I go to Carmel. I know I need glasses for this guy, otherwise...there I am! So, I see these glasses and I can't see a thing. (Laughs) So I say to the optometrist, "Put these on." And I see his eyes and I say, [snaps his fingers] "Yeah. That's it." And it'll just be brief and it'll be goofy and gone! 'Cause he's goofy! But I don't say anything to anyone and I get this one pair of glasses. And we rehearsed the opening drive-up shot, Perkins and I in the car and the two Japs behind us, the Irish guy, the Italian lookin' cat.

WR: All the hijackers.

MP: Yeah, so, we get out of the car, we walk up and we rehearse walking up the ramp. Boom. It's a long shot, all the way up the ramp and past the cameras. We're ready to shoot. So. But on the way down from rehearsal I put these glasses on. Tony's looking out the window. And he looks, he turns around and looks and says, "Oh. My God!" That's how he felt about it.

WR: I know! It was perfect! The guy is a lunatic bomb expert, he probably wore out his eyes working.

MP: Wore out his eyes. Yeah. So, now I get, "Show 'em to Andy." Andy laughs. And he's, "Aw haw haw haw, my God kid!" He's 6'9" ya' know. A 17 size shoe. "Ya gotta watch it, when he meets ya," a guy told me. "The first thing," he said, "he loves to step on your foot." I said, "Really?" So I



Neville Brand as Reese on "Laredo".

meet him and he says, "Hi!" And I go like this and I pull my foot back and I put it on his and I said, "Nice to meet you." And he's, "Aw haw haw!" Ya' know.

WR: (Laughs) Good.

MP: He's a great cat.

WR: You guys worked out an interesting duet in *folkes*. There was a lot of unspoken sexuality between the two. They were standing close, touching each other.

MP: Oh, there's one thing where I asked him if he's having trouble taking a shit and I'm treating him like he's having his period.

WR: (Laughs) Yes! Is that something you two worked out together?

MP: Oh, Andy said, "Oh God kid. That's good."

WR: It's not in the script or anything?

MP: No. Oh, Perkins, I loved him. When he died he said, "Nobody gives a hill of beans about an old actor who's about to die." When he found out he had AIDS, he called me. And, you know I never liked cats who flaunt it. I've had friends that were gay. And are still. But to flaunt it, I never liked. And Tony was as hip as you could be. Was cool about that. So was Rock Hudson.

WR: Somebody wrote a book which tore Perkins apart for being closeted.

MP: Well you know, he really was not closeted, because he liked women too. He absolutely adored many aspects of women. Both sexually and passionately drawn to a certain aspect. At the same time, he was never weaned away. [pause] I loved that guy. [pause] e.e.cummings: "little boygirls—may only little girlboys need—"

WR: (Chuckle)

MP: It didn't work out the way I like. Hasn't worked out quite the way I—little subtle thing there. I don't wanna be in the chair. But it's just so subtle.

WR: Yeah. You're sitting in the chair and he comes in the room and you jump up quickly. You let him sit down. You touch him once he's seated.

MP: And he doesn't like it either.

WR: No he doesn't. He doesn't want people to see it. You can tell that. It's telegraphed well.

MP: We discussed that. Andy would send us off he'd say, "Kid. C'mere." Andy was not a guy into psychological things. He started out working with John Ford. His first picture was *The Quiet Man* (52).

WR: You were Robert F. Kennedy in Larry Cohen's *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (77).

MP: He called me four or five times. I said, "No." I knew Bobby when he was Attorney General. I got along with him. He was very nice to me, but he was a tough little monkey.

WR: He was the cutthroat of the Kennedy family.

MP: He was a tough little monkey. So, Larry calls and I said, "No. I'll play Hoover. I'll put the prosthetics on." I wanted to do Hoover.

WR: Wow!

MP: I knew I could look like him. He says, "Well, no, no, no. Gotta do Bobby!" "No! Hoover! Have you got a Hoover?" "Yes." "Who?" "Broderick Crawford." I said, "Okay. I'll do Bobby. I'm not gonna do prosthetics for Bobby 'cause it would be silly. I'll just play his attitude."

WR: Well that's what interested me about your performance. You played him the way Norman Mailer described brother Jack, as a hipster. Hands in his pockets, Sinatra-like, swaggering.

MP: Well he was. He was that way. Very relaxed. If you see any picture taken of Bobby

off the campaign trail, it was feet up on the couch. He was spoiled. Little rich kid. It's mahogany? He didn't care. It's Tiffany lamps? He'll break it.

WR: There was one film you did, later. I didn't think it was much of a film but you gave a wonderful performance. It was called *Arizona Heat* (88).

MP: Oh!



The Last Hard Men: Michael Parks and Charlton Heston.

WR: (Laughs) A cop movie set in Arizona. You were the lead as a hard, cynical, misogynist asshole of a cop. But by the time the film is over, the viewer is very sympathetic to him. He seems drawn from life. How do you manage such a thing? One thinks you might be entitled to a lack of incentive based on the budget and the project and the usual "Oh, nobody's gonna see this anyway." Still, in this little B movie you obviously gave your character a great deal of attention.

MP: Landlord.

WR: Landlord? They'd pay you anyway!

MP: When you're on location, you've always gotta pay for a place you're not in. (Laughs) Doesn't make sense does it?—"we are all the sums we have not yet counted"—and reality is only the surface of life—it's what's underneath that's really important. And if somebody says that your mother was just a hellraiser, you would be offended. Even if she had raised some hell. 'Cause it doesn't describe her. Does it? A film gives you very little opportunity to describe anything. We've had a much more interesting conversation today than you see in film. You've asked more pertinent questions.

WR: Thank you. You did another TV movie with William A. Graham, Gore Vidal's *Billy The Kid* (89). Was your part bigger in that film?

MP: Mighta been. I don't know. I didn't see the picture.

WR: You started doing villains around this time, a lot of them. We just last night screened *The China Lake Murders* (90), which is a really impressive piece of work. *Hitman* (91) with Chuck Norris, *Storyville* (92) with that (laughs) wonderful ending. Blam, blam, blam! And you're shot by the judge.

MP: Mark Frost was the director and he was a wonderful guy. He was one of the producers of "Twin Peaks" [ABC 90-91]. That's the

reason I did the picture. I was in New Orleans at the time with my ex. Wondering what I would do for the rest of my life. I got a call from Johanna Ray, who cast "Twin Peaks" where I played a French Canadian. Yeah, that was fun. [French Canadian accent] Jean Renault. He was really funny.

WR: (Laughs) I was watching. All of a sudden Michael Parks rears up from nowhere!

MP: I had fun doing that. He runs a whorehouse. Well, anyway, I'm down in New Orleans, picking lint from between my toes, and I get a call and she says, "Well they're doing a picture and they're shooting it down there and they want to know if there's anybody that can do an original New Orleans dialect." I said, "He lives there!" And then of course the guy was one of the producers of "Twin Peaks" and he liked me. So that's how that came about.

WR: And he's another pivotal character. Your parts in all these films, like *Death Wish V*, are pivotal characters. Even though you're not in *Storyville* very much, he's the guy that sets the plot in motion.

MP: True.

WR: And you had some wonderful lines in that film! "Oh, you like that tattoo? I'll put one just like it on your ass." I wanted to ask you this—lines like, "If I want any shit out of you, I'll squeeze your head." Or, "Your mother should have hit you on the head and sold the milk." Which I've used since ...

MP: (Laughs) Yeah.

WR: Those are yours?

MP: Yeah. Those are lines I remember from life.

WR: They crop up again and again.

MP: (Laughs) But they're not original!

WR: Well no. They're just sayings.

MP: Once in a while I'll do an original, but I can't remember when.

WR: I love your villains because they have this air of superciliousness, as if they know they're smarter than everyone else. It's irritating, but relentlessly fascinating when you watch them. What's the secret to playing such bad-asses anyway?

“When you watch yourself in a film you want to crawl through a carpet and fight the termites for the best wood.”

MP: Well, that may be it. These guys really never truly get sleep, 'cause they're hardly ever, ever at peace. If a guy's a bullshitter, he's a bullshitter. He can't be ever really at peace, if he knows himself. To tell the truth, he can rarely sleep at night. That's probably the key. There's always oneupsmanship always, with these cats.

WR: You play opposite people like Bronson and Norris, and Tom Skerrit in *China Lake Murders*.

MP: Well, you play differently with all three.

WR: Back to "Twin Peaks," what was working that show like? Working with David Lynch...



Robert Mitchum

MP: I didn't work with David at all. I never saw him but one day. It was the last episode I'd done and I was walking down the hall to do some looping. Two lines of looping. And he's walking this way. And he stops me and he says, "Oh! I sure like your work!" I said, "Thank you." He says, "Yeah. Wonderful. Thank you. Thank you." Johanna Ray cast me. She told him I was the actor that could do it. I come into Hollywood to do it and I get out of the cab at the Chateau and I drive out to the studio. Get out and there's these two tortilla trucks and fixings they have for breakfast—tortillas and eggs—I start to order one and the director comes out. Gal about 40, she says, "Mr. Parks, I'm glad you're here. I didn't know you were here." I said, "I'm early. I'm always early." "What was your call?" I said, "Where's the call sheet? My call said eight o'clock call, and I'm here, what is it? Seven-fifteen?" She says, "Oh God! I'm so sorry! Is everything alright?" I said, "Yeah." She says, "Do you like the part?" I said, "Yeah. I'm going to very much enjoy doing this dialect." She says, "Dialect!?"

WR: (Laughs)

MP: I said, "Yeah. He's French-Canadian. (Laughs) That's why I'm here." She says, "Oh! There were two other brothers in the story, they didn't have any." I said, "Well that's those actors' problems." (Laughs) "This guy's got one." (Laughs) So she says, "I'll be right back!" She runs in the office and she calls Lynch at home. And you can hear her. "He wants to do a dialect!" Lynch says, "Let him do it." And the assistant camera operator was French-Canadian. Born & raised there. He said, "It's real! The sound! I was born there!" (Laughs)

WR: My partner wants to know, who killed Laura Palmer?

MP: I ain't tellin' 'cause [pause] there might be a sequel! (Laughs)

WR: Your performance as Walter, the crotchety old junk man in Niagara, Niagara (97) was, I think, probably your best work to date.

MP: I don't know.

WR: It's a very good film, but very sad. I kind of pictured him as what Jim Bronson eventually became.

MP: (Laughs) I was doing a picture with Robin Tunney who was the girl in that. She was very good in that. She got the best actress award in Venice.

WR: For Niagara, Niagara?

MP: Yeah. And Henry Thomas is a nice kid. Good. I liked him in that. We were doing a movie before that, *Julian Po*, with Christian Slater. And she said, "I want you to do the part of father in this picture I'm doing next." So I read it and the father's part is one day. And it's not even that it's one day it's just—so he eats his cereal without his teeth. I said, "Is that supposed to make it interesting? I don't like it. I don't like it." I didn't even like the script! *Shit!* She says, "Well. I get to...I get to..." "Yeah, yeah. You're an actress. You get to drop your pants and pee in front of millions of people."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: "Ya' know, so, you're happy. But, I don't care." And she says, "Well, do something in the picture, will ya?" We got Billy Bob Thornton to do Walter." I said, "Good. Now you're set. You don't need me for *anything*." So I'm leaving. I'm driving away in the car and she's, "Won't you do something in the picture?" So I said, "Yeah. I'll do Walter." And I get home and it's what? Three days later? And I get a call and she says, "Hello Walter." (Laughs) I say, "What are you talking about. This is Michael." She says, "This is Robin. You said you'd do Walter. We can't get Billy Bob to do it. He has to drop out. He's editing *Sling Blade* (96) and he can't do the part. So, you said you'd do it." [pause]

WR: Well, they had you. How much of that did you write? There was some wonderfully weird stuff about being hit by a fish and a chicken who was named after his wife, Esther.

MP: Oh, that was all written.

WR: It was?

MP: Yeah. For the most part. You know, it's how you change—call it syntax. Say, "I will be going over there." Don't say that. Say, "I'll be going over there." No, not like that. Take 'will' out. Say, "I be goin' over there." No. "I be goin' over there *directly*." That way it means, "In my own good time." Things change. If you add a word here, it can add a lot of dimension to a character—but you'll find, if you research the character throughout, that the writer didn't even intend—he'll say thank you if he's smart. A writer writes it, an actor starts to live it. When an actor starts to live it he starts eating and drinking, sleeping, shitting. Thinking about "How am I gonna do it."

[Michael's wife, Oriana enters. An elegant woman in her twenties, with clever eyes.]

WR: In *Julian Po* (97) you played Vern. He was an alcoholic gun nut.

MP: They offered me three different parts in that picture and they asked me if I

wanted to play three [pause—to Oriana] didn't they?

WR: They wanted you to play three roles? God. Peter Sellers.

MP: And she said, "Why don't you do it?"

WR: Why didn't you do it?

MP: Well, because one was too grandiose for a small part. And it's too much time in make up. Too much time in changes. Too much. I told them that and they said, "Oh God. What a point. You're so smart not to do it." And I'm so glad—I'll tell you what boy—you know, when you make the right decision—that was the right decision to make in *Po*—but some of the results of things you do have nothing to do with the intent of why you're working. And as a result of that, I became friends with Harve Presnell. And I wouldn't trade anything for that.

WR: Oh, he kicked ass in *Fargo* (96). He was good in *Julian Po* too, playing much the same sort of huffing and puffing old white guy.

MP: Well! They happen, don't they?

WR: Yeah. They certainly do.

MP: I mean, look at poor Cary Grant. Look at poor Jimmy Stewart. [morphs into Stewart] "Get off my land." He did 20 of those fuckin' pictures.

WR: Yeah! That sounded like Shenandoah (65).

MP: Which Andy directed.

WR: That's right.

MP: And it's not your fault if they call and say, "You can't do that." It's not your fault. It's their fault. They don't have any knowledge of your history. They don't have any knowledge of your films. You know I can do a few things.

WR: Yeah.

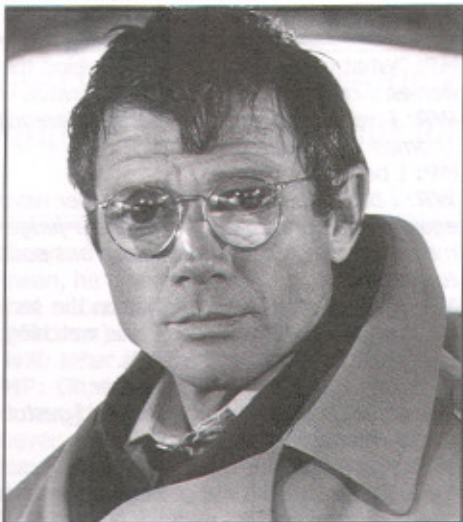
MP: They don't.

[At this point the tape recorder mysteriously shuts itself off. More beer was ingested and the discussion resumes, this time on politics.]

WR: Oh! You know our people to the core. Virginia is the land of petty snobbery.

MP: Oh, I tell you I love Robert Byrd.

WR: The Senator? Oh, he's a Virginian, alright. Even though he's from West Virginia. He's a lot of fun.



ffolkes

MP: I like the eloquence of Robert Byrd and the philosophical temerity of Patrick Moynihan.

WR: (Laughs)

[Oriana says: "And you better vote for Warren Beatty!"]

MP: I didn't understand what the hell he was talking about.

WR: Warren Beatty! (Laughs)

MP: Something about the loss of pilgrimage.

WR: (Roars) I thought it was loss of mutilage. Well, why not vote for Beatty?

MP: Did you read that piece?

WR: Yes. It was dense.

MP: Oh it's awful. It was awful.

WR: It was like some stream of half-consciousness. I bet they'll have a lot of fun asking him about his drug use.

MP: Ya' know, I always thought Clinton should have inhaled.

WR: (Laughs) When I found out that he had smoked pot was when I decided to vote for him. Once anyway.

MP: I'm sure he inhaled. It's a great change from, "ask what you can do for your country?"—and it's come down to, "What can you do for me?" That's become the call.

WR: Or worse, "Show me the money."



Michael Parks and Anthony Perkins in *ffolkes*.

MP: "What can you do for me?" Behind the women's cause—it's so obvious it's awful.

WR: I was at university when the Clarence Thomas thing was going on.

MP: I believed her.

WR: I believed her too but it was her word against his. You really can't make a judgement that way, as all the Clinton fans soon told us.

MP: In fact I saw Byrd say that on the senate floor when it happened, I was watching. I watched it. You know, C-SPAN.

WR: Oh, you're a C-SPAN watcher.

MP: Yeah. It's just—unfortunately [gesturing to Oriana] she doesn't knit.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: It bores the shit out of her. But I watch it. And he said, "I'm sorry, I believe that girl." And I did too. And he said it with such

truth and eloquence, and there's no bigger pork barrel than that son of a bitch in the US Senate.

WR: Byrd?

MP: Oh, yeah.

WR: Well, yeah, highways going to nowhere. I know! West Virginia.

MP: But that's the idea. You get your constituents what they want, work, or whatever. That's the idea of this democracy. You know, it's a piss poor system but like Churchill said, "It beats the rest of them." But he [Byrd] has eloquence. Anyone with wit, charm, eloquence, I'll forgive 'em their philosophy. Just don't bore me. You can be what you want, liberal, conservative, whatever you want. God almighty! Life's too short to be serious. What's that? The hand has written and moves on?

WR: "The Moving Finger writes and having writ, Moves on/ nor all your Piety nor Wit / Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line/ Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it." Edmund Fitzgerald. *The Rubayait of Omar Khayyam*.

MP: Beautiful, isn't it?

WR: I love that.

MP: I said to somebody the other night, when you watch yourself in a film you want to crawl though a carpet and fight the termites for the best wood.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: And see who dies first. And that's how far you sink watching yourself. And that says it all in a nutshell. That from *The Rubayait*.

WR: How did you meet Tarantino?

MP: A woman who had once wanted to represent me called and said, "Listen! There's a writer named Quentin Tarantino. You don't know him, he's never done anything, no movies have been made," and he liked my work.

WR: I can see why.

MP: So I said, "Is that right?" "Yeah." I always like people who have enthusiasm. You have it, that's why you're here. So, anybody new or starting out, like my boy, he's a wonderful actor. Any time they put a stage play up on the boards in Los Angeles, he's got first call. Shakespeare, anything. Extraordinary actor. Anyway, new, young, beginning like you are, with this magazine? Sure. You bet. So, I call him, and he's thrilled to death. Just thrilled to death. So he says, "Will you meet me?" I said, "Sure." He says, "Well, will you have a beer?" I said, "Yeah! We'll have a beer and we'll shoot pool. How common can you get?"

WR: (Laughs)

MP: So, we meet out in Van Nuys, pool room. He gives me some scripts, I read 'em, I say, "Keep it up pal. You're funny. You have a good ear for dialogue. You have a good ear. Keep it up. Don't stop, don't let nobody stop you." I read his stuff. So, he tries to get me in it. Oh God. I don't know this guy. I'm living on a boat, little house boat. So, it's April, and I go down town, and I see a newspaper and I pick it up. I don't realize—Oscars™!—"Oh God. Fuckin'

Oscars™." And I see his picture! (Laughs) "Quentin Tarantino! Accepting his award!" And I think, "Jesus! I know this guy!"

WR: Reservoir Dogs (92) just passed you.

MP: Well, he called me about it.

WR: Ah, there's an exclusive. I didn't know that.

MP: But that doesn't mean the other actor was second choice! You have to realize what you're saying.

WR: I know, but I've heard all sorts of interesting casting stories coming out of Reservoir Dogs. Like Lawrence Tierney wasn't the first choice for the part of Joe.

MP: First time I saw Lawrence Tierney, I was going to the bar on Santa Monica Boulevard. Rain Check. Writer's bar. Opened the door, and he came out swingin'.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: And I ducked to the right and shoved him and he bounced off the wall, hit the street and landed flat on his back. He says, "Hey, was that really necessary?" I said, "What the hell's wrong with you pal?" "Uuhhh, I uh, I'm just drunk." So, he didn't mean it. He didn't know me. I don't call him. I don't call Quentin, I don't call anybody. So, out of the blue, he calls. Says, "I wrote a script for you called *Kill Bill*. And I'm gonna do it, just not right now." Then one day, living down in Venice, I get a call. "Quentin Tarantino wants to see you!" So I went and he said, "Robert Rodriguez said, 'Why don't you take Earl McGraw, this character, this Texas Ranger, put him in the beginning of this picture?' [From *Dusk Till Dawn* (96)]" So will I do it? Of course. Yeah, a day's work.

WR: Yeah. Probably didn't take you more than a day to do that.

MP: No. I was there three days, but it was one day, 2 hours. I had to wait a day to shoot the exterior. So I did three days in the desert, sucking on lemons...

WR: (Laughs)

MP: So that's how our romance got started. And I love him to death.

WR: People remembered you. You got a lot of visibility as Earl McGraw. I want to ask you about your amazing dialect work. Do you have a natural ear for that, or do you study it?

MP: Well, probably more natural because my mother was—my mother could repeat, like a parrot. My father couldn't do it at all and he just fell down laughing hysterically. My mother just had a fantastic ear.

WR: And that's how you made your mother laugh.

MP: Yeah.

WR: You did two other films that haven't been released yet. *Bullfighter* and *From Dusk 'Til Dawn III: The Hangman's Daughter*.

MP: You'll see that.

WR: I look forward to it.

MP: I should have called you about the other. The next showing we have of it Ron, I'll let ya' know because, this time you can't say "no."

WR: I'm not about to. In *The Hangman's Daughter* you play one of my favorite people

in American history, Ambrose Bierce. You're an admirer of Bierce, right?

MP: Oh yeah.

WR: How did you prepare for that?

MP: With great intimidation.

WR: (Laughs) He's one of my favorite writers. This is the story of his disappearance?

MP: Well it's... they used that. Of course nobody knows what happened to him...

WR: To shift gears a bit, were you influenced by Stanislavsky, when he was first fashionable here?

MP: Sure, yeah. I spent many, many days in my room alone—about two months, being a flower pot and whatever else. Worked at it real hard and enjoyed it. Jean Renoir said, and he knew him, he knew Gorky—that the problem Stanislavsky had was with the language. The language of the theatre. What language of the theatre? Chekov. The language of the theatre was so different than the language of the ordinary people of Russia who even came to the theatre—how can you write and expose all those people and still not be suppressed by the State? No definitive outcry was made. Chekov was brilliant at getting around that censorship in writing in that period. But the language of the people coming, the ordinary people coming to the theatre. The actors had to over-pronounce, over-adjust to try and relate to the audience. That they weren't above the audience.

WR: Did you ever study at The Actor's Studio with Lee Strasberg, as many of your contemporaries did?

MP: No. In fact, Lee asked me if I'd be interested in teaching out here when he opened up the studio here on the West Coast. He'd seen some work that I'd done. He had me come by and audit when I came back from England. John Springer who was a big PR guy. He wanted to do something, he said, "Monty Clift and you are the only actors he asked. The rest came to him." Burton and Taylor and all the rest. Anyway we had lunch with Robert Preston, who I loved, he was one of his clients. He was wonderful. And we went to the studio, and I see Lee conducting a class. It goes on for three or four hours! And we go out and

MP: But I think it's good for the spirit of the actor. It gives you—it's therapy. And you learn, you pick up some things and so if you're an actor, it's helpful.

WR: The whole idea of Moscow Art Theatre. You see that in performances of your contemporaries, Brando, and Dean and Rod Steiger, who were all influenced by the method, who tend to—not all the time—but there was some shouting and—

MP: I forgive Brando a lot. I forgive him a lot.

WR: And Steiger who declaims in that rich voice...

MP: Well, Steiger.

WR: Which can be fascinating to watch...

MP: [does a Rod Steiger howl and grimace]

WR: (Laughs)

MP: We did that picture. (Breakthrough) Mitchum—we come home from the first day's shooting and Dorothy's waiting in a bar, she's waiting for Bob. We come in, "Well Robert." (Laughs) "How did it go today?" Bob looks at me he says, "He's doing this fucking cracker and he's stealing the fuckin' scene." (Laughs) He looks at me. (Laughs) Dorothy laughs and he says, "It's fuckin' true." She says, "But what about Rod? How is Rod?" He says, "Rod?" (Laughs) It's perfect for Rod Steiger. He says, "Rod? Improv'd off the edge of the fuckin' screen." (Laughs)

WR: (Laughs) I thought I'd ingested too many drugs when I was watching that film. I could not penetrate his accent. What do you think of the practice of giving Oscars™, anyway?

MP: It's a very delicate thing. That's how the public knows actors. Most people cannot discern between a performance and a story. Now Bob Mitchum, I'll give you a quote, one of my favorite quotes in the world! He was doing an interview over in Berlin where we were doing *Breakthrough*. I loved Bob. And the guy says, "Now tell me something Mr. Mitchum. Did you ever feel that you were neglected because you never received the Academy Award™?" Bob



Michael Parks as Texas Ranger Earl McGraw in *From Dusk 'Till Dawn*.

ing town that comes close to that. You get, "I deserved it!" Or, "Well, finally. Whoopee." Or Warren Beatty's sister.

WR: Shirley MacLaine.

MP: "I deserved it." What the fuck do you deserve? There's probably a fucking actress in Wannamucka, stripping for a living that could kick your ass.

WR: I hate the word *deserve* anyway.

MP: Yeah!

WR: Most people don't deserve much.

MP: You know, they should just have the guts to say, "Listen. Not a God-damned thing happened here. Let's just shut it down." No really, I mean it.

WR: I agree. The Academy should say, "We're not having the Oscars™ this year 'cause everything sucked." I'd like to see that.

MP: Everything was average.

WR: You get a lot of cameos and supporting roles these days. And you get remembered for them. Do you like supporting roles or would you prefer some leads?

MP: Well, I don't wanna—"It's a fourth-flight walk-up ma'am. You sure you don't wanna take the elevator?" I don't wanna do that leading man! (Laughs)

WR: (Laughs) What's your next project? That you can tell me about?

MP: Well, I can't. Maybe I'll be a German officer. I would like that. Here's the thing, some people have been spoiled, and they've used it to death and they've applauded it because it was just, different.

On Shirley MacLaine's Academy Award™ speech: "I deserved it." What the fuck do you deserve? There's probably a fucking actress in Wannamucka, stripping for a living that could kick your ass."

have some coffee afterwards—well actually I had a stiff drink, but he had coffee. He asked me what I thought. I said, "I think it'd take half an hour to drink a glass of water!" He laughed. He really enjoyed that. But he asked me about teaching actors and I told him I thought teaching actors was learning how to be taller.

WR: (Laughs)

MP: I quoted Olivier saying, "You can't give brain operations to actors."

WR: (Laughs)

said, "Academy Award™?" [Pause] My mother always told me, you couldn't get diamonds at Macy's."

WR: (Laughs)

MP: Renior told me a story one time about an old French actor who was receiving an award from the music academy in Paris. It was the only award they ever give to an actor, he was 70-something years old and he said, "How sad, that just when I am beginning to learn my craft, I am too old to practice it." There's *nothing* in this fuck-

Brando—he never leaves Marlon home. I mean, he does good accents, good dialects and accents. Wonderful. Love him. Bob [Mitchum] was a brilliant dialectician.

WR: What did you think of Cape Fear (62)?

MP: Oh, he could do anything. He could do anything. He really could. They just never gave him much. But Brando never leaves Marlon home. And his thought process, deliberation, is much the same when he's Zapata as when he's being an intellectual Christian Dietz—it can't happen that

way. You know, all you're waiting for is the dialect. And that's Marlon. He brings Marlon to the part. He's supposed to forget Marlon. But you can't say he's ever boring.

WR: Well that's probably what someone told him a star performance was supposed to be.

MP: I think he bought it! People don't know what the fuck they're talking about. You know, people still don't know the difference between Mississippi and Arkansas.

WR: That's for damned sure. What do you spend most of your time doing these days?

MP: Worrying.

WR: About what?



As Ambrose Bierce in *From Dusk 'Till Dawn III: The Hangman's Daughter*

MP: That's none of your business.

WR: Well I guess he told me.

MP: (Laughs)

WR: Do you feel trapped in history in the good ol' USA in your time and place?

MP: No. You know—cell block one—get away up there—you can think, read, anything. Walk.

WR: Ah, you like the old 'man is a prisoner in his own skull.' That's a good thing.

MP: Oh, sure. Yeah. You don't wanna share that guy with somebody.

WR: (Laughs) I don't know. You meet all kinds of people, particularly in Southern California, who come up and say, "Hey! Let me share my feelings with you."

MP: Yeah! Then they'll kill ya'.

WR: Finally. What is the whole point of being a good actor, anyway?

MP: Well, you would think that—you would pray that it was a noble profession. Particularly since—talking about the actors—to quote The Bard—"a brief and abstract, chronicle of the time. Better to have a bad epitaph than their ill report whilst you live."

WR: Thank you. Anything else you'd like to add?

MP: Well, yeah, the album. Don't forget. (Laughs) The album! \$14.95.

Kit Carson on Michael Parks: "...Michael is definitely a master, as an actor who would just go where no one would dare go and also make it real for everybody else."

WR: (Laughs) Yep. I listened to Coolin' Soup and you have great taste in the things you cover. A lot of bluesy stuff and a lot of standards.

MP: Yeah, I enjoyed the hell out of doing it. I don't know how good it is. I mean I had fun, the musicians—an actor

and two musicians in the same room is a misdemeanor. We like it but what do we know? We had fun.

WR: You have a very pleasant voice.

MP: Oh, thanks. Tell the guys, "Buy it for your girl friend." I don't sing for guys.

WR: That explains the sort of weary romanticism.

MP: (Laughs) Well, yeah. Can you imagine me singin' to Roy? Wouldn't work. But it would be funny, wouldn't it? In a western, Roy has a sidekick he's singin' to? Nah. I liked it the way it was.

WR: Well, he sang to the horse.

MP: Yeah. You know that story about Gene Autry?

WR: Which one?

MP: Guy rides up he says, "Gene, while you was gone them boys from the South Valley come by and cut the wire and took your two best steers, four milk cows, run over them ducks and hurt your dog real bad and ol' lady Johnson fell down 'n hurt her hip she said one of them said they was gonna set fire to the barn. What are you gonna do about it?" He says, "Well, we gotta hunt them hombres down, but first, I'm gonna sing a little song for ya..."

WR: Who needs drugs when you're looking at something like that?

MP: Old actresses never die, they just look that way.

WR: (Laughs) I'm NOT gonna touch that! My partner Jessie is an actress.

MP: Well! That covers actors too. One time John Carradine is talking about the 27 different productions he did of *Hamlet*! And how you have to interrelate to the different Ophelia's etc. And it was fascinating. How he loved to carry on. I loved John. In comes this actor from a San Francisco theatre company. Sort of a cloned hippie with a crack in it. Actor. And he comes up and interrupts. He says, "Well yeah. I played Hamlet

man, and ya' know, uh, man, uh, and like, uh—"

WR: (Laughs)

MP: (Laughs) And Carradine says [full, florid Carradine bellow], "You got in this conversation God-damned cheap!"

(Riotous laughter)

MP: And he still doesn't get it! He says, "Yeah man, well, the only thing is man, Hamlet's fuckin' crazy man. What the fuck else is it man? I mean, he's fuckin' crazy." (Laughs) Carradine says, "Oh. You can play him crazy until the soliloquies and then what the fuck do you do?" And then the story of Barrymore. They're on the sound stage next to Shirley Temple and they wanted to get a picture of the two of them together. So they set it up and somebody comes to take the picture. They're getting ready to take the picture and Barrymore at this point can't even remember his mother's name so he has cue cards. And a guy comes up with the changes and says, "Mr. Barrymore, there are changes." He puts the cards up, the kid doesn't make the door, and he says, [as Barrymore] "This—is mere—fuckery!"

WR: (Laughs)

MP: That has always been one of my favorite stories about Hollywood.

WR: I can see why. One of the great quotable lines of all time. I'm glad you told me. I love that. I'm gonna use it.

MP: Shakespeare would have been glad.

WR: As Gore Vidal once said, "I wish I'd said that. But then again, I shall."

MP: (Laughs) Yeah. And I will.

WR: Thank you very much.

MP: My pleasure. Hello Virginia (my buddy). My apologies—vaccinated with a phonograph needle. ■



Michael Parks in *Bullfighter*