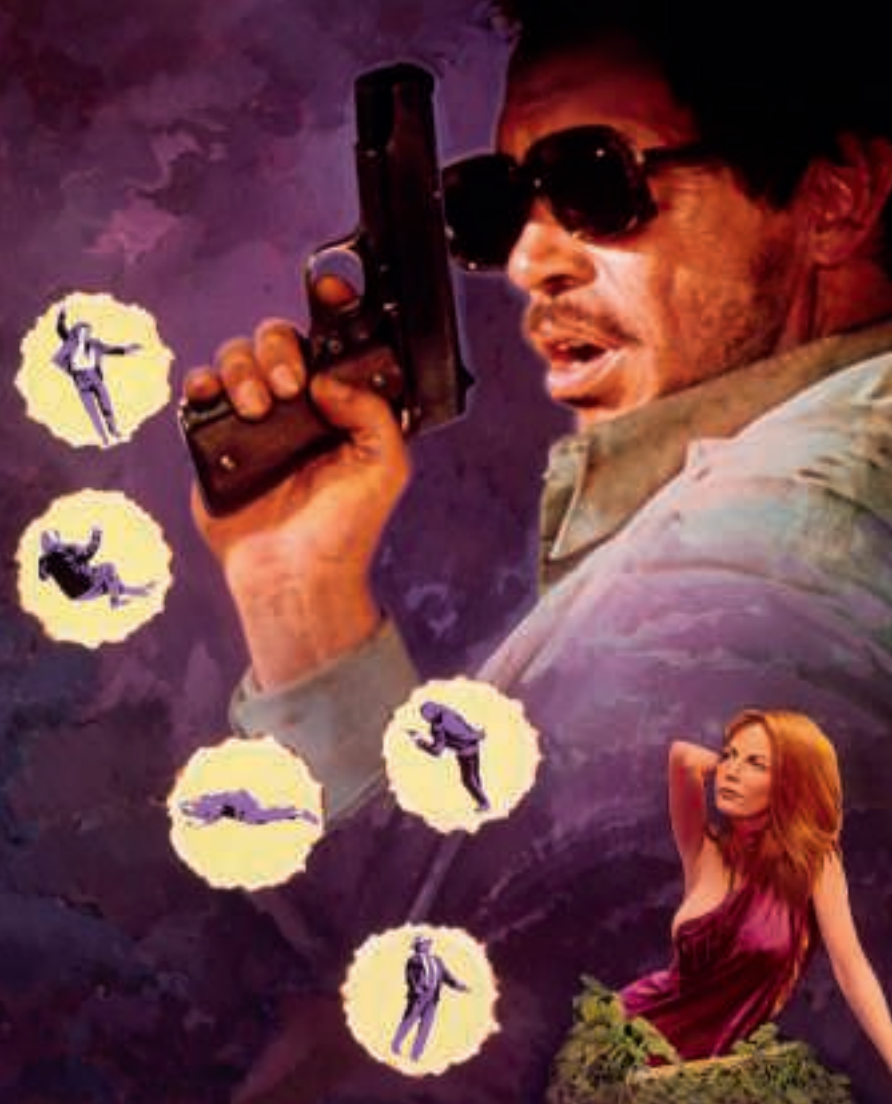

**Warren Oates**
**Isela Vega**

# BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA

Guest Starring
**Robert Webber**
**Gig Young**

**Helmut Dantine**
**Emilio Fernández**
**Kris Kristofferson**

Music by
**Jerry Fielding**

Director of Photography
**Alex Phillips Jr.**

Supervising Editor
**Garth Craven**

Editors
**Robbe Roberts**
**Sergio Ortega**
**Dennis E. Dolan**

Screenplay
**Gordon Dawson**
**Sam Peckinpah**

Story
**Frank Kowalski**
**Sam Peckinpah**

Produced by
**Martin Baum**

Directed by
**Sam Peckinpah**

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# BRING ME THE HEART OF ALFREDO GARCIA

**by Alexandra Heller-Nicholas**

The films of Sam Peckinpah are synonymous with a specific kind of testosterone-loaded male violence, where savage performances of masculinity are configured as action-packed descents into an irreversible, inescapable abyss of pessimism, despair and – more often than not – death. While undoubtedly an acquired taste, the magic of Peckinpah's craft lies in just how he pulls you into his world: he rarely promises hope as such, but instead plays with our desperate yearning to find it hidden in the shadows, just out of sight. "Peckinpah was clever and he was demonically intuitive," said renowned film critic Pauline Kael. "He liked the hopelessness of it all." Yet for Kael, upon its release in 1974, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* – simultaneously the most passionately defended and yet broadly loathed of all Peckinpah's movies – overstepped it on the machismo front. Years later, in an interview with *Cineaste*, she admitted she knew that for Peckinpah himself, machismo was always more a performance than an actual reality, but as she hastened to add, "he lived the posture."

Performance, violence and masculinity are words that riddle discourse about Peckinpah's work, and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* is no exception. As Canadian director Cynthia Roberts noted in 1993, "Peckinpah is poetic, and yet he gets to the core of things in a really violent way… Every change denotes violence, and change is a law of nature." Marking the end of arguably his strongest period as director – a period that included *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970), *Straw Dogs* (1971), *Junior Bonner*, *The Getaway* (both 1972), and *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* (1973) – *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* bookended a seven-year period of intense productivity. It is these films that earned him the sobriquet 'Bloody Sam' for his emphasis on unapologetically violent cinema.

Perhaps more than any other film he made, it was in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* that Peckinpah's visceral existential poetics came most aggressively to the fore. While very much products of their historical moment, the films made during this period in Peckinpah's career riffed on the formal logic of Classical Hollywood cinema while simultaneously foreshadowing, in spirit at least, the emerging shift towards New Hollywood. It is in terms of the latter that *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* relied upon what Ian Cooper shrewdly

identified as a “deliberate strategy of ‘anti-pleasure’”, holding in large part the answer to why it was received so poorly upon its release. Rejected as a “violent, hope-deprived neo-noir that even the Nixon era couldn’t handle”, it is, in retrospect, the film’s supposed weaknesses – its incoherence, its nihilism, its grime – that are precisely its strengths. *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* is a love story about hatred, a horror film about friendship, a ‘bromance’ about alienation and loss, and above all, a cinematic love letter to chaos and death. And it’s all built around Warren Oates’s Bennie, one of the most iconic would-be grave robbers in American film history.

*

Much has been made of the opening moments of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, where a still black-and-white shot of a duck comes to life, the screen filling with colour and revealing young Theresa (Janine Maldonado) – barefoot and pregnant, dipping her toes in the water, basking in her state of impending motherhood. The word “idyllic” is used often to describe this moment, a status quo the rest of the film seems determined to rupture. This, of course, hinges on the eponymous decree that sets the film’s action into motion, as Theresa’s father – the powerful El Jefe – offers a vast cash reward for the head of the man who impregnated his daughter. Translating from Spanish to ‘The Boss’, El Jefe was played by Emilio Fernández, himself a director of great renown (linked primarily to the Golden Age of Mexican cinema and his Palme d’Or-winning 1946 film, *Maria Candelaria*).

For Lucy Fife Donaldson, this opening moment of Theresa near the water “seems to announce a possibility that is immediately dashed, the rest of film undermining this one beautiful moment”. She continues: “the rejection of the qualities in this sequence, its composure, pacing and softness, in the rest of the film imply the impossibility of such a way of looking and feeling.” Yet despite this interpretation (and much critical discourse on the film more generally) seeing the film as a conscious rejection of the tranquillity of this opening moment, it is worth emphasising that the film does return to it later in the movie. Typically, the final shot is deemed to be the close-up freeze-frame of a smoking gun barrel, pointed directly at the audience in a fourth-wall-breaking moment punctuating Bennie’s death as the words “Directed by Sam Peckinpah” appear. Yet after this, the credits roll: names appear in a simple white typeface over still images from the film. The second-to-last of these revisits the image of Theresa by the water, looking at her locket. The film’s title appears again, linking this shot to the image of a man looking in a bloodied pillow slip at what we assume to be Garcia’s head. At the film’s conclusion, both shots find simultaneously meaningful yet emotionally opposed ways to hold the head of Alfredo Garcia.



Peckinpah is, of course, playing games. With Theresa’s tiny locket – the very one seized by El Jefe’s men when she is stripped, tortured and forced to reveal her lover’s name – El Jefe already had the head of Alfredo Garcia as the film began, symbolically at least in the shape of his photograph. This is the only time we see Garcia: otherwise he remains an invisible, mythical lothario, one whose enigma, superficially at least, drives the film’s plot.

From the outset, Garcia is deemed irresistible to women: not only by Theresa, but by Elita (Isela Vega), Bennie’s lover. At first infuriated that Elita betrayed him, Bennie’s masculine posturing leads him to declare that he will kill Garcia, but his vengeance is thwarted by Elita’s simple revelation: “I’m afraid it’s too late. When he left here he was very drunk. Near Saltillo, the car left the road and the rocks killed him.” Changing tactics, Bennie decides to exhume Garcia, claim his head and reap the financial benefits, with Elita showing him where the grave is. What happens along the way is where the film’s real core lies – less about Garcia’s head than his heart, Bennie reconciles Elita’s relationship with Garcia and comes to terms with his feelings for her. Finding her dead as he awakens after being knocked out in Garcia’s grave, Bennie’s mission changes: the search and return of Garcia’s head becomes not about a desire for money, but for both revenge and clarity. It becomes about both Elita and Garcia.

It is in the section of the film after Elita’s death, then, that *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* takes its most dramatic turn. Finally claiming Garcia’s head, in what plays out as a sophisticated, macabre and unambiguously surreal precursor to Ted Kotcheff’s *Weekend at Bernie’s* (1989), Bennie develops a relationship of sorts with “Al”, shoo-ing flies away, attempting to preserve him with ice, offering him the odd drink, and engaging in frequent one-sided conversation. While initially a symbolic quarry-come-trophy, it is this relationship that takes the film into what Cooper rightly noted is the domain of the buddy film.

There is something inescapably charming – although undeniably perverse – in Bennie’s journey, accepting Elita’s ex-lover not as an enemy but as an ally. When Bennie arrives to give Garcia’s head to El Jefe in the film’s climactic scene, Bennie is outraged to see Theresa’s father’s disinterest in the object itself, casually directing it to be given to the pigs. Turning the gun on El Jefe, Theresa tells Bennie: “Kill him.” He follows her instructions, and – passing her the locket with Garcia’s photograph – he looks at her baby and says, “You take care of the boy, I’ll take care of the father.” To the decapitated head, Bennie says fondly, “Come on, Al. We’re going home.” Moving towards death, the film’s two male protagonists – Bennie and Garcia – leave together. It’s far from a happy ending, but Bennie’s privileging

of Theresa and her son is a small but significant nod to some kind of future beyond the carnage that has surrounded the child's birth.

*

Sam Peckinpah has long been a contentious figure when it comes to depictions of women and violence in the cinema, and here – recalling *Straw Dogs*, in particular – male dramas can be seen to play out on and through women's bodies. Pregnant, dead, beaten, raped or almost-raped, these gendered states of being are offered less as subjective points for empathy with women characters than symbolic forums where the nuances of male relationships can unfold. While this is difficult to reframe as unproblematic (let alone progressive), there are nuances in how this manifests across his filmography. It would be clumsy, for example, to attempt to draw direct parallels between the rape scene in *Straw Dogs* with the attempted rape (or "near rape" as a number of critics describe it) of Elita by bikers in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*.

The action here takes place in two separate locations. As one of the bikers (Kris Kristofferson) forces Elita away to rape her, they leave Bennie behind who shouts that he will kill the man. Elita's reply is telling: "No, you won't, Bennie. I've been here before, and you don't know the way." In what Peckinpah biographer Garner Simmons has claimed is a wholly improvised scene, her choice of words here speaks volumes: authoritative and knowing, there is a clear suggestion that this kind of assault (or, at least, the threat of this kind of assault) is hardly unfamiliar. She knows how this works; she knows "the way" out of it as she struggles to transform a violent assault into a consensual sexual encounter. As Kathleen Murphy and Richard T. Jameson noted in a review of the film in 1981 [reprinted elsewhere in this booklet], the scene hinges on "a peculiar sense of complicity between rapist and victim – that, stated in those terms merely, would appear to justify the most outraged charges against the director as a male chauvinist pig." While far from ideologically sound, in practice Elita's actions speak of a desperate way of reframing a violent situation into something that she can potentially survive on her own terms (however compromised they may be).

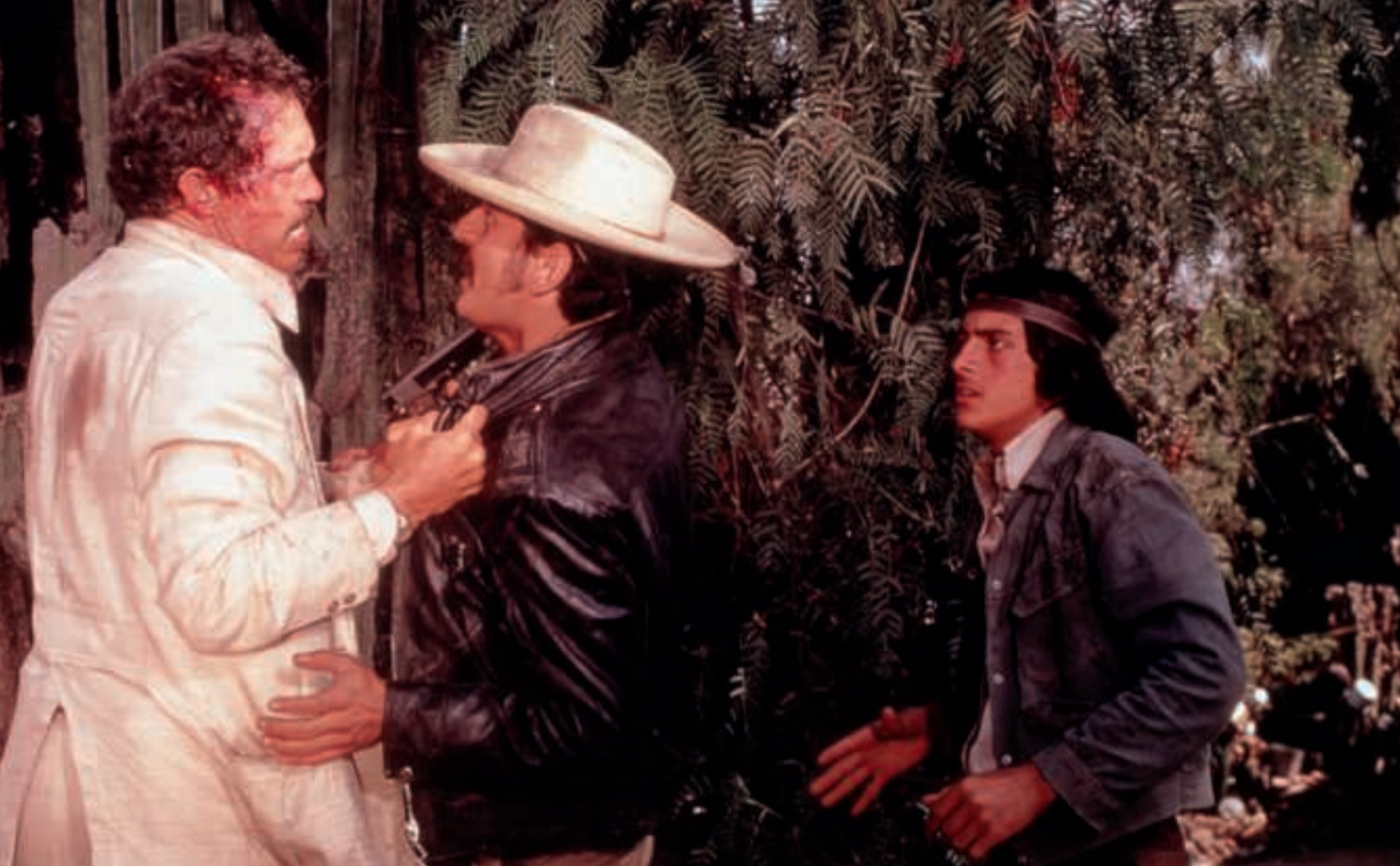
While hardly giving free reign to reconfigure the sequence as necessarily progressive, there is a logic here that speaks of both Elita and Theresa's survival instincts: thwarted in the case of the former, but successful in that of the latter. So tragic is the death of Elita, however – and so irreversible the damage it has on Bennie – that Theresa's trajectory quite reasonably gets lost in the shuffle. In a film marked by the unrelenting presence of gore and

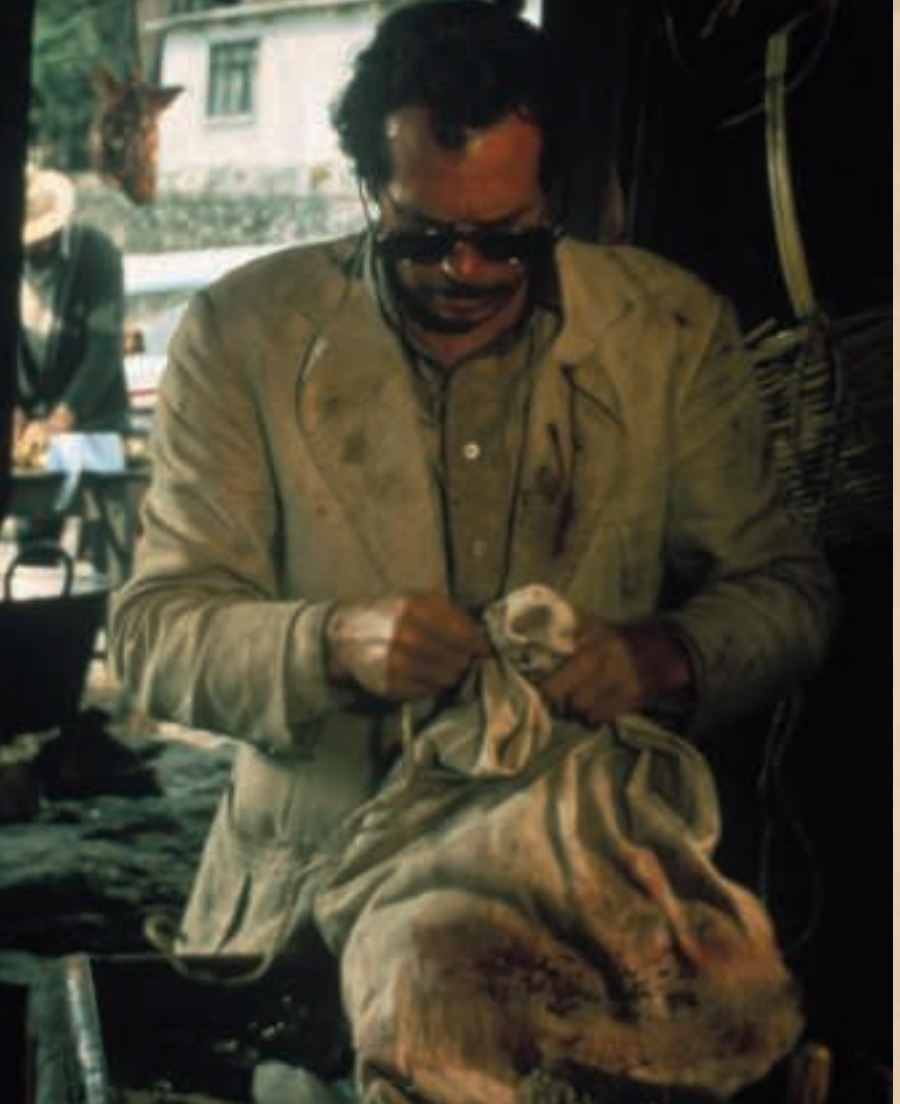


violence, there is a significant strategic reversal in Peckinpah's decision to deny the viewer the sight of Elita's death. Like Bennie, we do not realise immediately that she is even dead, so immersed are we in his own subjective plight of fighting his way out of Garcia's grave – buried alive – through the dirt and blood. As Simmons (who played an uncredited guard in the hacienda scene) noted, Bennie here "fully gives himself to Peckinpah's vision… a man now lost and beyond salvation".

The title is, therefore, a deception – it is not Garcia that drives the film, but Bennie, forever linked to the iconic, grizzled visage of Oates himself. According to Simmons, Peckinpah wrote the character of Bennie with the actor in mind, consciously intending "to take advantage of Oates's intense, offbeat screen presence". Bennie survived in the original script, but the potency of the film as a whole surely would have collapsed with that outcome. As the embodiment of unravelling masculinity, Oates's performance is testament to the tensions and anxieties within so many of Peckinpah's male protagonists – and, if much of the discourse around the director's own life is anything to go by, indeed Peckinpah himself. Soft yet hard, doomed yet determined, oblivious yet somehow tragically knowing, it is not Alfredo Garcia but Oates's Bennie who both steals and breaks our hearts. On every damned viewing, he draws us back into the film's defining spirit of hopeless hopefulness.

***Alexandra Heller-Nicholas is an award-winning Australian film critic, author, and an editor at the online journal* Senses of Cinema.**





# BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA

**By Mike Sutton**

*The following article was originally published on* The Digital Fix *website in 2013. Reprinted with kind permission.*

In 1973, Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* was released by MGM, if released is the right word; allowed to sneak out after curfew might be more accurate. The release version was heavily cut and, after receiving largely negative reviews, failed dismally with the public. Time, and the discovery of the 'Preview Version', has revealed it to be a great film, but that success came too late for Peckinpah who took the failure very hard. Already drinking heavily, he plunged into a combustible combination of anger and depression. A few years later, this would have meant a further mile down the road to self-destruction. In this case, it resulted in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*.

It would be possible to describe the film as a two-hour shaggy-dog story in which the viewer's expectations are continually confounded by events. It begins in what appears to be a 19th century Mexican idyll, suddenly cuts to the 20th century jet-age, moves on to a strangely Southern Gothic Mexico and ends up in a gunfight which harks back to *The Wild Bunch* and anticipates Brian De Palma's *Scarface*. It's also very funny, very moving, and totally unlike anything you've ever seen.

The awe-inspiring human Kilimanjaro that was Emilio Fernández plays El Jefe, a particularly foul Mexican ne'er-do-well, whose daughter has been put into the *capirotada* club by a mysterious gigolo named Alfredo Garcia. Somewhat put out, El Jefe hires two camp American henchmen to find someone who will hunt down this impudent stranger and decapitate him, and they find just the right man: Warren Oates. Now, Warren Oates is playing Bennie, an itinerant piano player, but actually he's playing the distillation of everything you ever loved about Warren Oates. Having nothing better to do, Bennie agrees to take on the task but soon discovers that there is a hitch; his prostitute girlfriend Elita (Isela Vega) informs him that while she knows who Alfredo Garcia is, there's not a lot of point in searching for him because he has just been killed in a car accident. Yet Bennie is nothing if not resourceful and, determined to prove his almost-instinct almost-true "Nobody

loses all the time", he sets out in search of the corpse in order to complete his mission, get as much money as he can and finally achieve his apotheosis as a successful man of means.

Needless to say, in Peckinpah's world, nothing is ever simple. In the Old West, even as late as 1914, it was still possible for Pike Bishop and the Wild Bunch to go down in a glorious hail of bullets and become the legendary heroes they always wanted to be. But times have changed and, more significantly, Peckinpah has changed. He's tasted defeat at the hands of the money men more than once and he's bitter but defiant. He's working for Martin Baum, one of the few producers who left his work alone, and United Artists, who knew the value of an artist's freedom. Finally, he can make a statement about how he sees his role as an artist in Hollywood and it's a powerful one. Bennie is a hired gun given an impossible task and he comes through despite everything that the bastards who make the rules can throw at him. Cheated, robbed, cuckolded, bereaved and bloodied, he refuses to lie down and play dead. Ultimately, the gesture of bold defiance is doomed to failure, but the gesture is what's important to Peckinpah. It's his two-fingers to Hollywood – particularly to Jerry Bressler, Charles Fitzsimmons and James Aubrey, the three suits who did so much to make his life difficult during the first 13 years of his career. While making the film, he was quoted as saying, "For me, Hollywood no longer exists. It's past history. I've decided to stay in Mexico because I believe I can make my pictures with greater freedom from here." This got him into all sorts of trouble, but there's a vivid sense in *Alfredo Garcia* of scores being settled and new possibilities South of the Border.

It was a beautiful dream. But that's all it was. *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* was mocked by critics and rejected by audiences and Peckinpah slunk back with his tail between his legs to make *The Killer Elite*, shooting what scenes he didn't assign to his assistant through ever-increasing mountains of cocaine. For a long time, *Alfredo Garcia* was a laughing stock and named as one of the Fifty Worst Movies of All Time in a particularly shameful book. The film, however, never quite disappeared. It had a few vocal supporters even at the time – not that anyone was listening – and it began to find an audience among those people who search out products of that most fascinating period of American cinema – the seventies. Certainly, it's a quintessential seventies film; quirky, brutal, blackly funny and cynical about the intentions of powerful men.

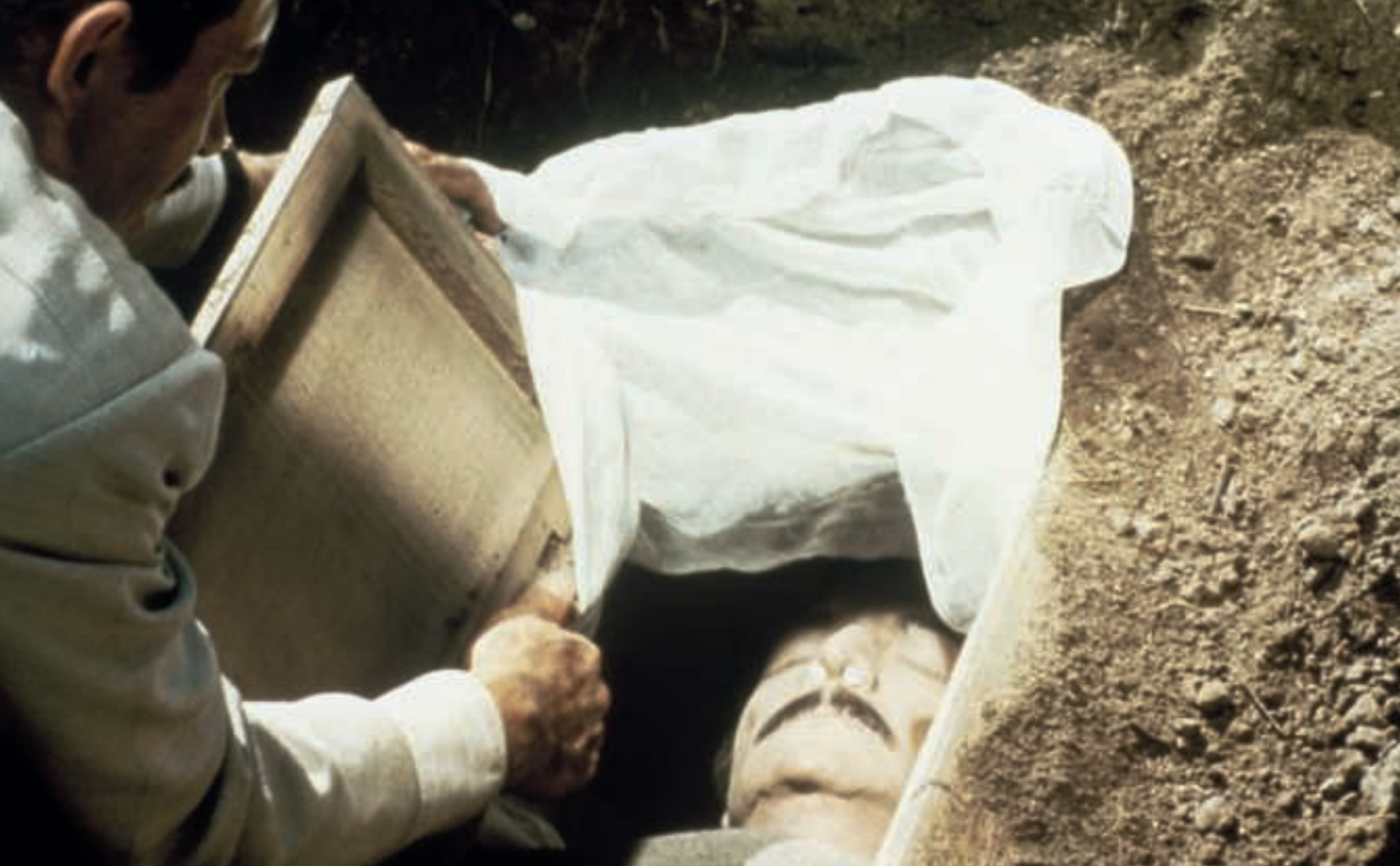
Yet it's also a complete one-off. There are deep veins of cynicism and cruelty in Peckinpah's work but there is much more. Humour, for one thing, which irresistibly bubbles up when you least expect it. There is too a heartfelt feeling for the beauty of the natural landscape and a feeling of elegy for a vanished world. Most of all, there is the mood of doomed, hopeless romanticism, of feelings never quite resolved, of love never fully requited or sufficiently



valued, and a promise of life never quite fulfilled. This comes out intensely in Oates's performance as he gazes with thwarted longing as his hopes gradually slip out of his grasp. He meets it with comic madness – chattering away to Alfredo's disembodied head which sits beside him on the passenger seat before developing a deep sentimental attachment to it – but it's impossible to miss the depths of sadness in the heart. In this, he is well matched by Gig Young as one of the henchmen; the actor's characteristic aura of alcoholic despair makes him a blood brother to Bennie – and Peckinpah used him to good effect once more in his next film.

More problematic, as usual in Peckinpah, is the treatment of women. Within the first five minutes a girl is stripped to the waist prior to having her arm broken, while the only significant female character is a prostitute who is threatened with abuse and rape. But that's a very simplistic view of the film. No one could accuse Sam of being remotely feminist, or even particularly insightful about women, but Elita's character is one of his most interesting and her awkward, tentative relationship with Bennie is conveyed with surprising depths of emotional truth. She's also given her own dream of a better life; married bliss symbolised by her desire for a simple church wedding. The dream is shattered of course because this is Peckinpah where dreamers always wake into the dawn of disillusionment. It's also the case that Elita exists in a context where macho behaviour and, by extension, misogyny is deconstructed, most memorably in a scene where a biker, played by Kris Kristofferson, attempts to rape Elita but finds himself impotent at the sight of her naked body. The two trade slaps, the biker walks away and Elita, now given the upper hand and accustomed to this kind of abuse, takes over. Equally, Bennie is far from a typical macho hero. He postures and swaggers but it's cosmetic, masking a basic gentleness which makes him an ideal man for Elita. If there's a more touching portrayal of male and female relationships in the director's work than the conversations about marriage in the meadow or the moment in the shower where Bennie, in unflinching close-up, tells Elita that he loves her, then I can't think of it.

*Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* is sometimes described as a kind of horror film and certainly there are Gothic overtones to this quest into a Mexican heart of darkness. It's also an action movie with some thrilling set-pieces and a characteristic use of slow-motion. But what comes across most strongly is the humanity and honesty of the film. The late Roger Ebert described Bennie as "heartbreakingly human" and he is one of Peckinpah's most attractive and likeable heroes. In the end, against all the odds, Bennie doesn't compromise and refuses to sell out his humanity for what the Coen Brothers once described as "a little bit of money". In this film, neither does Sam Peckinpah.



# BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA

**by Kathleen Murphy and Richard T. Jameson**

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*"Ah know you. You're the guy in the hole."*

Gold Hat to Fred C. Dobbs,
*The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*

Toward the end of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, just before his self-shattering execution of Kris Kristofferson's Billy, James Coburn as Pat Garrett stops to exchange a few words with a coffin-maker, mysteriously at work in the gathering dusk. Addressed as Will, this artisan declines the offer of a comradely drink, then leans over his handiwork and says, "So you finally figured it out?" The speaker is Sam Peckinpah, and he seems to have something more in mind than Garrett's determining that his quarry can be found within the adobe walls of Fort Sumner.

The effect of this apparition and query is disorientating, to say the least. Scarcely the artist off paring his nails in the wings, Peckinpah, investigator of this and so many other desperate quests of self-definition, materialises in the midst of mythic action as if to ascertain the degree of enlightenment his own imaginative creation has achieved. He even provides his principal player with a last rueful cue for action: "Ya better get it over with."

That's all one hears in the theatrical release prints of the film: this dark, broody, heartbreakingly beautiful movie was to become, at the hands of MGM president James Aubrey, one of the most mangled works in Peckinpah's much-mangled *oeuvre*. For whatever reason, network-TV prints of the picture include some reinstated scenes and parts of scenes (while lacking, of course, much of the R-rated material on Panavision view in theatres). On TV, the two foregoing remarks form part of a longer speech. Over the child's coffin he is working on, the grizzled framer of death-as-apotheosis announces his own projected itinerary even as his latest stellar surrogate approaches the end of his particular road: "Know what I'm gonna do? Put everything I own right here [in the coffin], bury it, and

leave the territory." And then: "When are you gonna learn you can't trust nobody – not even yourself, Garrett?"

In less constricting time and space, Huck Finn, quintessential American drifter and misfit, planned to escape the taint and corruption of "civilisation" by "lighting out for the territory". Peckinpah, resembling nothing so much as that boyish quester grown old, embittered and out of territory, metacinematically anneals the saga of Billy the Kid, a romantic anachronism whom American big business wants to send into Mexican exile, and his own troubled history as Peck's bad boy of the film industry. Peckinpah would leave the territory (the United States) with a vengeance, fetching up in Mexico, the country in which he had come to seem most at home, to make his next film, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*. Most certainly, he "put everything", or least a good deal of what he can aesthetically call his, into this film about a coffin – a coffin and its sacred-profane contents. These become the macabre catalysts for Peckinpah's most personally-styled protagonist "finding out what it's all about", so that he – and, more ringingly than ever before, his director – might cry NO! in the thunder to the system whose terms Pat Garrett has tragically ascended to.

*

It is impossible to place, immediately, just what is the period of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*. To the easeful strumming of Mexican music on a guitar, a duck unfreezes in black-and-white stasis and coasts along a lake surface, warm colour seeping into the image. The bird leads the camera to a swan, and the swan to a young girl (Janine Maldonado), just past adolescence, who lies along the bank, clad in simple, yet ceremonial white. Her body, gently swollen with pregnancy, gracefully complements the garden-like setting: she strokes her belly while the ducks coast past and the camera alternates between the landward perspective and a suffused, back-lighted view of the water. A servant girl comes to say, "Your father is waiting," and a moment later two men in Latin-American costume appear to escort her, a group of armed horsemen passing across the background. Even then, there is no telling whether this is a contemporary film or a more classical Western.

As the servant drapes a shawl about the girl, murmuring consolation, we begin to hear some sort of incantation, half-Spanish, half-Latin. Dark-toned portraits of bygone patriarchs hang behind a great desk at which a bearded man, El Jefe (Emilio Fernández), sits reading. Off to the side an audience attends, a cluster of black-clad women conspicuous among them. The ring of spurs and clatter of boot heels on cobblestones seems to become part of the litany – apparently of genealogy – as the pregnant girl is led up to the manor house. We watch from outside as the doors close heavily behind her.



The reading done, the girl standing before him, El Jefe bestows a faintly encouraging smile. "Who is the father?" The question is repeated without answer. El Jefe gestures curtly with his cigar and the escort jerks the girl's shift from her shoulders. She moves her hands instinctively to cover her breasts, then abandons the attempt and thrusts back her shoulders defiantly. Another gesture, and one of the men seizes her arm and twists it behind her, bearing her down until she is scarcely able to see her father across the desk. One of the women, magnificent, hieratic, visibly represses the desire to commiserate with the girl. *"Who is the father?"* Cut to a long-distance view of the hacienda before we hear the snap of bone, the woman's cry of "No!", and then the girl's tearful "Alfredo Garcia!"

Back in the shadowed interior, an elegant man of Nordic visage (Helmut Dantine) steps from the sidelines and goes to the girl. He reaches down to her and tips her chin up with courtly delicacy. They exchange a look, then he brusquely breaks the thin chain about her neck and collects the locket she is wearing. He registers the older woman's fierce gaze, hesitates with something suggesting embarrassment, then straightens and turns away with his prize.

The locket contains a colour snapshot of a sunny, moustachioed young male, crookedly cut off below the collar line. El Jefe studies the face and says sadly, "He was like a son to me." Then his face darkens and he speaks in a voice of absolute command: "I will give one million dollars to the man who brings me the head of Alfredo Garcia. Bring it to me!"

At his words, an army clicks into action. Rifle-toting attendants begin to troop from the hall. The Nordic gentleman and his pronouncedly Semitic-looking companion collect their attaché cases and follow. Out of the insulated mausoleum of old honours and customs roar the most modern American and European cars, mechanised bats escaping from hell, while horsemen thunder across the foreground. A jet plane lifts screaming into the sky, then sets down in Mexico City with explosions of smoke from its tyres. The search is on – though not, quite yet, the quest.

*

It must be apparent already that *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* is a highly-charged film, even by the standards of a superkinetic filmmaker like Peckinpah. The bold imagery is there, the turbulent montages (the marshalling of El Jefe's forces built to a feverish pitch). But even more, the very conceptualisation of the film is violently elemental. One has the sense of an artist loosing his personal demons in the most absolute terms he can devise. Loosing them, but not losing perspective on them.

Peckinpah describes Mexico as a country where people "don't forget to kiss each other and water the flowers". In *Alfredo Garcia*, he sees it – makes us see, feel, *smell* it – as a womb-tomb where sex and death, fecundity and decomposition, are not discrete but simultaneous processes. The film recalls Grünewald's sixteenth-century engraving *The Dead Lovers*, in which a naked man and woman are food for worms and insects even as they caress each other. (Which evokes, in turn, Peckinpah's remark about the "mediocrities, jackals, hangers-on, and just plain killers" that inhabit his version of the film industry: "I've had them eating on me while I was still walking around.") Like the engraving, the film is often profoundly medieval in its attitude toward mundane as well as moral realities, and, moreover, resonates with religious iconography and reference.

The intriguing thing about *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* is that such issues are sprung against a compellingly rough, almost funky texture of characterisation, action, and setting. To an extent, this can be attributed to production circumstances: no multimillion-dollar epic like *The Wild Bunch* or *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, with lustrous cinematography by Lucien Ballard or John Coquillon, and the stellar eminence of a William Holden or James Coburn to supply heroic analogue, *Alfredo Garcia* is, by comparison, almost a Third World enterprise, with raw visuals by Alex Phillips, Jr. (including some eerily poor day-for-night effects), and the surreal character work of Warren Oates in the catbird seat. But like the literary chronicler of burnt-out cases, Graham Greene, Peckinpah deftly makes a virtue of seediness, while Oates, in the phrase of David Thomson, "effortlessly rais[es] a scruffy little adventurer to the [level of] legend."

Oates is Bennie, a chronically down-on-his-luck gringo who's been knocking around Mexico for six years – once upon a time playing piano in the Black Cat, "a classy place" in Tijuana where Paulette Goddard walked in one night; now part-owner and chief glad-hander of a "pit stop for tourists" up a Mexico City side street. Here Paulette Goddard doesn't walk in one night – two of the Nordic gent's subcontractors do, inquiring whether anyone can put them in touch with "an old *compadre* of ours… a stud named Al Garcia".

These nattily-tailored bounty hunters (identified as Quill and Sappensly in some filmographies, but never addressed by name in the film – hence to be known here as Gig Young and Robert Webber) function as more than messenger figures connecting the various loci of the action. They are a discreet homosexual couple – modern-dress, low-keyed echoes of the LQ Jones-Strother Martin couples in *The Wild Bunch* and *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* – and as such they participate in the film's running programme of sexual gamesmanship.



Their first sequence with Bennie, which is also Bennie's introduction in the film, is densely written (by Peckinpah and Gordon Dawson) and directed to bring out a full, suggestive spectrum of ritual behaviour. Young and Webber strive to maintain a macho fellowship with the man's-man across the piano bar – Webber going as far as to endure the attentions to his thigh by a local working girl, until Young's visible distress cues him to chalk her down with one expert snap of the elbow. Bennie submerges his quiet baiting ("How do you guys like baseball?"), but the game gets changed on him. He's the whore they're there to buy – the parties' mutual contempt has found expression throughout the scene in the way tips as passed and received across the piano – and once they've told him where to find them if he has any information, they prepare to leave. "What did ya like ta hear?" Bennie snarls companionably, as if the last five minutes hadn't happened. "Guantanamera," Young replies – the song Bennie was pitching to the tourists with wonderfully insincere gusto when they entered.

Every detail of the piano-bar scene is worth quoting, but one of Peckinpah's and Oates's finest moments demands to be mentioned. Webber draws out a black-and-white copy of the locket photo and holds it up for Bennie's inspection. Peckinpah cuts to a medium close-up shot of Bennie that effectively truncates him just like Garcia in the chopped-off picture. Bennie knows the face (it has been obvious that all the staff at the bar, whom Webber and Young had first approached, also knew the man they denied knowing) but, behind the dark glasses that complete his hipster image, he gives no sign. As he stares at the picture – that is, into the camera – we hear faintly a crump of metal and the tinkling of automobile glass. "Son of a bitch!" Bennie speaks through a shit-eating grin. "You got *me*!"

That car accident on the soundtrack may or may not have been taking place on the street outside Bennie's bar. We prefer to consider that it does not. For presently Bennie discovers that Alfredo Garcia is beyond betrayal, having perished a few days earlier in an auto wreck in the countryside. And the subjective sound of his death – a death Bennie does not yet know about – not only chillingly enhances the moment but also presages the increasingly hallucinatory quality of the narrative to come, and prefigures the bizarre rapport – almost a symbiosis – Bennie will develop with a dead man.

*

Bennie learns of Garcia's demise from a singer-prostitute named Elita (Isela Vega), whose favours they had unknowingly shared. She is introduced with an insinuating indirection that hints at her kinship with the offscreen Garcia – and with the powers of life and death for which Bennie, at this point, has scant feeling. Bennie enters a high-class brothel (which appears also to serve as barber shop, shoeshine parlour, elegant dining room, and friendly

social centre) and spies Elita, her back to him and the camera, singing to a tuxedoed chamber orchestra. Her posture in the easy chair – casually sprawled, arms disposed along the back- and side-rests – recalls the fluid co-mingling of gravid body and the lines of the landscape of the lake scene. Her singing has nothing to do with her "commercials", but seems rather a free and generous interaction with the musicians as friends and colleagues – a gift of love. If Warren Oates's Bennie is necessarily the point-of-view figure for our (and Peckinpah's) journey into enlightenment, Vega's Elita is the film's heart. In his book *Crucified Heroes: The Films of Sam Peckinpah*, Terence Butler has suggested that Vega gives "a strange non-performance… [but nevertheless] seems to work for the movie". Certainly the performance (non- or otherwise) that Peckinpah draws from her is utterly singular among female characterisations in his work. And Vega's extraordinary malleability – looking one moment bruised and middle-aged, the next radiant and clear-skinned as a child – does seem the sort of phenomenon that hasn't so much been shaped and refined as it has been caught and accorded an aesthetic context that both illuminates it and is illuminated by it.

Bennie is angry with Elita because she has been "spending time together" with Garcia while he, Bennie, understood her to be recuperating from a cold. His anger is also inextricably connected with his humiliation, moments before, at the practiced hands of Webber and Young. (Besides upbraiding Elisa, Bennie bewilders their Mexican friends in the immediate vicinity by coming on like a strutting gringo – a clumsy attempt to shore up his sense of his own eminence.) He promises to kill his rival, but Elita says, "I'm afraid it's too late. When he left here he was very drunk. Near Saltillo, the car left the road and the rocks killed him." "Jesus!" Bennie answers. Her "Amen" is a response in a different key, though Bennie does not detect it.

The moral tension of the central section of the film derives largely from Bennie's and Elita's different understandings of the quest on which they embark. She knows only that she is to take him to Alfredo's grave. Bennie evades the grisly reality as long as possible: that the men in expensive suits on the top floor of the Camino Real Hotel expect him to return, not merely with news of Garcia's death, but with his head. Elita is horrified: Bennie has promised her that their big score ($10,000 is the price that has filtered down to them) will enable them to start afresh, as man and wife, "someplace new"; but she cannot accept the terms. Bennie seeks to quell her objections, though his delivery of his pragmatic arguments verges on the hysterical: "There's nothing sacred about a hole in the ground, or the man that's in it, or you or me. The Church cuts off the feet, fingers, any other goddam thing from the saints, don't they? What the hell? Well, Alfredo's our saint. He's the saint of our money. And I'm gonna borrow a piece of him."

*



The impetus for this confession is one of the most harrowing scenes in the movie and also its most infamous: an off-the-road encounter with two gringo motorcyclists (Kris Kristofferson, Donnie Fritts) who pull guns on Bennie and separate him from Elita. Peckinpah conveys the building menace of the situation superbly, of course: the insidious transfer of a guitar from Bennie, who does not play well, to Elita, who has asked to sing 'Cielito Lindo', and finally to Fritts, who taunts Bennie with a song about sexual frenzy driving a man insane, while Kristofferson leads Elita off into the long grass. But Peckinpah also imparts something else to the scene – a peculiar sense of complicity between rapist and victim – that, stated in those terms merely, would appear to justify the outraged charges against the director as a male chauvinist pig.

It isn't that simplified in great movies. Whatever Peckinpah's overall notion of men, women, and sexuality may be, this is a particular event with specific participants and a specific dramatic meaning within the film (as with the much-fumed-over double rape of Amy Sumner in *Straw Dogs*, a multivalenced transaction that cannot be accommodated by generalisations about violence against women). Rape may be a political act but *this* rape is eerily transmuted into an act of love – "love" being understood as the distillation of human relatedness, of corporeal and spiritual connection.

This is one of the main themes of Peckinpah's film – indeed of his film work *in toto*. Earlier, he had been at pains to communicate the rapport between Bennie and Elita as they make their way through the Mexican countryside in a top-down convertible; the editing elided time and space as the car passed through various locales. Elita moved from half-embracing Bennie to embracing him with a song about "Bennie-bang-bang", and Bennie implicitly apologised for his macho behaviour the previous evening by firing some random pistol shots at a cluster of roadside fowl, missing the lot by a mile, and then drawling, "Hell, I wasn't tryin' to hit 'em, ya know." Moreover, the bumptiously comic connection was extended to the occupants of another car: two low-on-the-totem-pole agents of the criminal organisation (Jorge Russek, Chalo Gonzalez) who had been assigned to tail Bennie.

Hunters and hunted perform rhyming actions. As Elita takes a swig from their shared bottle of tequila, Peckinpah cuts to Gonzalez doing the same, then breaking into a song of his own while the exasperated Russek urges him to watch his driving. These semi-comic observers at the periphery of Bennie's experience will eventually prove lethal, but for the moment they are part of the same spectrum of life and exuberance with Bennie and Elita. As Bennie, leaning over to kiss Elita, had nearly run his car into an approaching bus, so Gonzalez and Russek narrowly escape catastrophe in a lyric, slow-motion swing around another bus, that results in their running off the road. Such a movement killed Al Garcia; here it produces a comic slide up a dirt bank, with Gonzalez using the recoil to tip an extra swallow of liquor down his throat.

So, in its own good time, a blown-out tyre forces Elita and Bennie off the road at twilight, and now a stranger is leading Elita away. “Someday I’m gonna kill you, you gringo son-of-a-bitch!” Bennie shouts; but Elita quickly looks back at him and says, “No you won’t, Bennie. I’ve been here before and you don’t know the way.”

The way, in this case, is oddly ceremonial. Kristofferson pauses just out of sight of the campfire and uses a switchblade to cut Elita’s sweater at the neck; he then strips it from her (a movement recalling the torture of El Jefe’s daughter). She looks at him, delivers a hard slap to his face, then another. Kristofferson stands still for both, then returns one slap as deliberately as it was given. They walk on – and Kristofferson goes to sit at the base of a dark rock and study a blade of grass. There is no further violence. Elita asks softly, “Please don’t”; he says nothing, waits, suddenly seeming the more vulnerable of the two; he reaches for a strand of her hair and she goes to him in an embrace that is almost maternal. A high-angle camera observes from afar – far enough that the two figures bending together are assimilated into the curving texture of grasses and terrain.

Peckinpah has been cutting back and forth between these two and Bennie at the campfire. At his first opportunity, Bennie slugs his own captor, seizes his gun, and runs to find Elita. When he comes upon the pair in the grass, he breathes “Hey – you’re *dead*!” and then shoots Kristofferson as he tries to sit up. Elita leaps up and rushes to Bennie’s side. She is tearful with shock, relief, not shame. As she is led away, she looks back at the man, now stilled in an attitude of boyish surprise, with whom she’d been about to make love. To her, if the rape had been carried through, it *would* have been making love: two people coming together on the earth has that meaning for Elita, inescapably.

*

If coming together on the earth has a near-sacred meaning for Elita, then coming together *in* the earth carries the film deep into mysticism. After delaying Bennie with pleas and false leads, Elita at last brings him to the rural cemetery where the body of Alfredo Garcia lies. A child’s funeral is in progress as they arrive; and at Alfredo’s grave, some half-dozen members of his family are gathered. Bennie and Elita withdraw to wait for nightfall in an abysmal rented room that, viewed from another high angle looking down through the rupture in the adobe, seems like an underground chamber.

Bennie makes one last effort to justify his intended actions to Elita: “Alfred’s been trying to beat this rap all his life. So have I. So have you. He loved you – but I love you *now*. Think he’d give a damn if his head could buy you what you’ve always been looking for – a way out?” Elita remains unpersuaded; and when they go to the cemetery, not only her movements but



also the editing and the directional logic of the compositions segregate her from Bennie. By the time he has uncovered Alfredo’s coffin and broken through the lid, Bennie is alone. Peckinpah once challenged an admirer to answer, with regard to *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, “Where does the film turn around?” That moment comes with the slow-motion swing of a shovel out of the grey night – a disembodied movement accompanied by a sound like the protracted screeching of a rusty hinge, that ends by thudding against Bennie’s skull and spilling him into the grave he has just excavated.

He carries the film into darkness with him. After a dismaying pause, the black screen is broken by a ghost of grey: a hand forcing its way out of the earth, dirt crumbling away from the flesh. Suddenly we can clearly perceive the grave, separated from us by the blade-like leaves of the agave plant which had earlier stood between Bennie and Elita; among those blades an entire arm now thrusts itself upward. Bennie sits up into the air with a cry of sweet and painful life renewed. Realising that Elita has been lying on the ground beside him, he exhorts her to get up: “Hey, we’re *alive*!” But the glorious woman who has spent time with him through many days and nights is not alive; and as she settles slowing back into the earth, Bennie scrabbles away from her in horror.

They have been lying atop Alfredo’s coffin, which still contains his corpse but now sports a black vacancy where the head should be. In his anguish Bennie returns to extricate Elita’s body; his movements grotesquely suggest a sexual dalliance. He abandons the attempt and his grief gives way to anger: he will turn Elita over so that she will be in the proper position to keep her “primer amor” company. Bennie abandons this effort too, weeping as he crumples over her. His head disappears behind a mound of earth. He has become a shuddering, decapitated form.

*

All the events of the movie up to this point have been stirred, as it were, by the shockwave emanating from El Jefe’s stronghold somewhere in the South. Henceforward, Bennie, who had been content to scramble for whatever share of the game stakes he could get, will be an obsessive seeker after other goals. Revenge, certainly; but also knowledge. “I coulda died in Mexico City or TJ [Tijuana] and never known what it was all about,” he told Elita. Now he has died in the back country, and postponed his rest as part of that unholy trinity in the grave long enough to find out.

The closing third of *Alfredo Garcia* is a ferocious dying fall during which Bennie retraces the journey he (and the film) has made. Two locals are able to put him on the track of a battered green station wagon – Russek and Gonzalez’s car – which he catches up

to shortly. By the ironic logic of the film, they have been detained by a flat tyre; and in accordance with the black humour that grins out of the movie with increasing frequency, Russek steps into the roadway to flag down a fellow motorist – the man who will kill him.

From the moment he becomes a lone quester, Bennie's adventures turn more and more subjective: he talks to Elita whose singing he again hears, talks to the shrouded head of Alfredo Garcia once it is resting in her place of privilege upon the car seat beside him. There is a sense, too, of the film itself abandoning conventional aesthetically decorous limits of third-person fiction. Warren Oates's playing of Bennie's encounter with the two local men at the cemetery gate escalates in emotional frenzy until he seems to have carried beyond the dialogue; the suddenly dried-up voice in which he orders the men to "just goddam move and don't look at me with your fuckin' eyes" suggests (whether or not this was the case) an actor veering into improvisation in a desperate effort to sustain an ecstatic moment.

That Bennie signally stands in for his creator has been evident throughout the film, in those emblematic, impenetrable glasses, in many mannerisms of behaviour and delivery, and even in the tipping of such autobiographical incunabula as Bennie's remark about the quality of his and Elita's last hotel room: "You oughta be drunk in Fresno, California – this place is a palace!" Now Peckinpah launches himself in overt assault upon the audience – that portion of the audience at least that by now he knows has come to loathe him.

Bennie fires several gratuitous shots into the dead body of Russek, and then looks at us out of those dark glasses: "Why, because it feels so goddam good!" Then he turns and chucks the reclaimed head of Alfredo Garcia onto the car seat – right into the camera. It's as though the director were saying, "This is what you think I am; this is what you came for. Well, here it is!"

This is, at any rate, what Bennie is. He forms an absolute partnership with the head, his alternate slapping around and cosseting of the bundle in its soiled grave clothes a lunatic evocation of his torturous relationship with the late Elita; he even pours tequila over the ruin ("Have a drink, Al!") in parody of both personal and sacramental rites of communion. Gradually, Bennie is delivered of all the animosity toward his rival that has dogged him: "Hell, it wasn't your fault. I know that. But we're gonna find out. You and me."

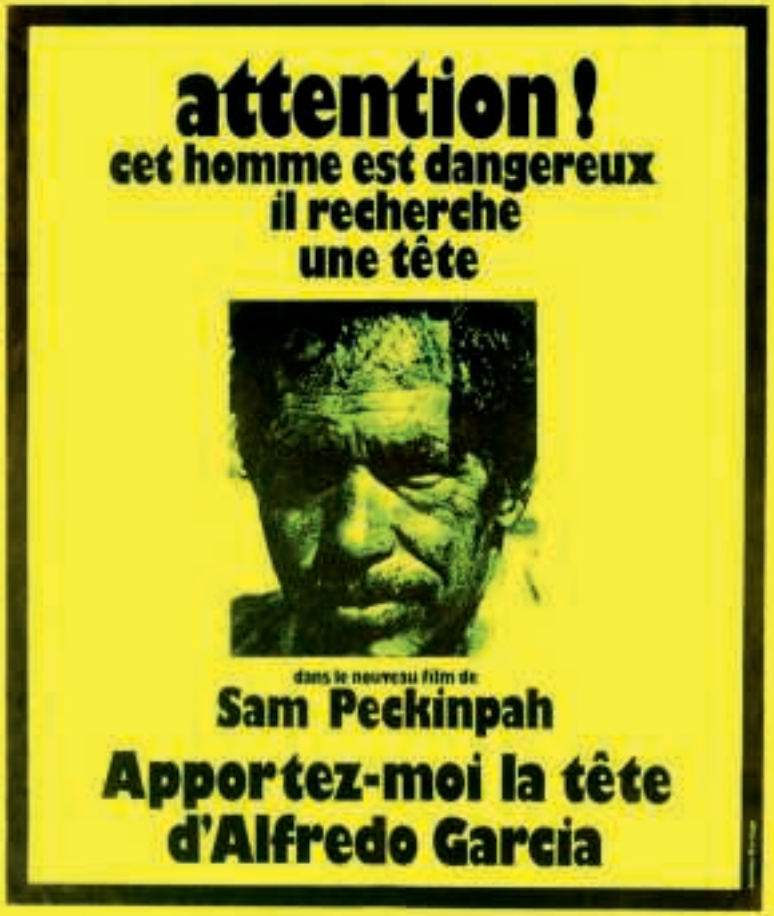
Find out he does – they do. Bennie's hard road carries him back to the Camino Real penthouse where the Nordic gentleman sits reading the Nixon-impeachment issue of *Time* and having his feet bathed, in a mock-*Pietà*, by two Magdalenes. Bennie, bearing both Al's head and a concealed gun in Elita's picnic basket, refuses to be bought off for the ten thousand. He looses a barrage against the executive-suite men (Helmut Dantine doubled



as executive producer of the film – what wish-fantasies are indulged here!) and their attendant gunmen, and escapes unscathed.

The business card in Dantine's hand leads him where we know he must go, where the atrocity began: El Jefe's. The steaming head of Alfredo, packed round with dry ice, is juxtaposed against the damp pate of El Jefe's newly baptised grandson. "The merchandise you've bought," Bennie explains – and then rejects Godfather's millions, drawing a bead on the ultimate target with a triumphant "NO!" "Kill him," the mother of Garcia's child orders, and it is done. Bennie returns to her the locket, like the holiest of medals: "You take care of the boy – I'll take care of the father." And to the honourable burden: "Come on, Al. We're going home."

Home will be the coffin – the well-earned house that Peckinpah's unlikely elect enter justified. Bennie's two-man wild bunch comes to a dead halt just past El Jefe's main gate, in a rental car slammed by hundreds of bullets from that army of guards. The last image of the film proper is the smoking bore of a machine gun: one final hole – in the ground, in a woman, in the end of a gun. The defiant credit falls here: "Directed by Sam Peckinpah."




# WARREN OATES: A FILM COMMENT INTERVIEW

**By F. Albert Bomar and Alan J. Warren**

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*I was wondering how you got started in show business. Was your first film* Ride the High Country?

It should have been the first one. The first one was *Up Periscope*.

*I didn't know you were in that.*

I hardly knew I was in it, either. I had just come back from New York, and the casting director at Warner Brothers had seen the *Studio One* I did, and put me on a call – it was really kind of a cattle call – for that picture. And Gordon Douglas walked down the line and stopped in front of me and said, "You look like John Huston out of work. What's your name?" I told him and he said, "Well, you'll do." That's how I got my first film out here – because I looked like John Huston out of work.

Ride the High Country *was your first film working with Sam Peckinpah.*

Sam, yeah. I'd done a television show for him – *The Westerner*, and *The Rifleman*. The television show was the first thing I did with Sam. He was directing *The Rifleman*, which he'd created. He'd set up the pilot film, and I guess owned part of it. So he introduced another character in the story, and he came in to direct that episode. And that's really the first time I worked with him. My agent had swiped a script off someone's desk so I could read it, and when I went out to see him he said, "I've already seen what you've done; you don't have to read." And that was it.

Sam's a remarkable man. You know, making *The Wild Bunch* was not just what was going on back here, or even the results of it; it's what was going on down there. That was what it was about. He was very – he had a bad case of the piles. Bloody. And he was working in a lot of dust. He wouldn't quit; he wouldn't take the time off to get it done, because I felt that

they would fire him. So he stuck there. And he'd climb up on the camera, and you could see all the way down the side of his leg, this red, brown, dusty, bloody, stinkin', smellin' mess would drain out of him. But he wouldn't fuckin' quit. They wanted to have him go to the hospital and take it out, but he said uhn uh.

Finally, they persuaded him to see a specialist, because he wouldn't let anybody there to do it. So the guy came down on a Sunday, and Sam would get up, and the *mariachis* and all of us would go over to his house about ten o'clock that morning, and they'd start playing, nicely, softly, outside his window. The house would be a hive of activity; kids and chickens and ducks and pets and some of his family. And so every Sunday around two, we'd all go over there and have a barbecue, because he likes to barbecue. So the doctor's there, and Phil Feldman, the producer, who was a sympathetic man. And so Sam said to the doctor: "If you can take them out in the kitchen by a kerosene lamp, which is the way my granddad had his taken out, and you promise me I can be back at work on Monday, I'll do it." The guy shook his head and said, "We couldn't do that, Mr Peckinpah. We'd have to take you to the hospital." He said, "Well, nothing doing."

He went through the whole fuckin' movie like that. He'd get a shot in the ass for pain, or whatever, and that son of a bitch stuck up there every day. Finally, it began to clear up toward the end of the picture – I guess he got back here and got it taken care of – but the incredible fight that man has, the sense of creativity… you know, there are shots in that film that are astounding to me. We'd rehearse it for three days, dealing with 400, 500 members of the Mexican army, and I'd say at least maybe 1,000 people in that town.

*How long did it take to shoot the final gun battle?*

Three weeks. From the time we started walking out from the little building with the girls on the set…

*I guess you've worked with Peckinpah as much as anyone has.*

Yeah, I've done four: [*Major*] *Dundee*, *Ride the High Country*, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* and *The Wild Bunch*.

*Which was your most satisfying performance for Peckinpah?*

I think *Alfredo Garcia*, for my role. I'm not going to comment on the picture, but my role was it. It was a very unusual character to play. There were some things that didn't jibe, maybe, in there, but as far as my personal gratification, I got more out of *Alfredo Garcia*. But as a



human being, I got more out of *The Wild Bunch*.

*Of course, your part in* Alfredo Garcia *was bigger.*

Yes, well, it had a beginning, a middle, and an end; it started at the beginning of the picture and ended at the end of the picture. A lot of my roles start somewhere else. But it was the emotional life of the character, really, because I tried to say it all; what I know about Sam and his love for Mexico. I really tried to *do* Sam Peckinpah: as much as I knew him, his mannerisms, and everything he did. I've had infinite opportunities to study him, so… usually, when you work for a director, if he's a very impressive person, you kind of steal from him anyhow, if he's an animated fellow with a passion, like Sam has. Billy Friedkin is the same way: he has this intensity, and thoughtfulness, and demands perfections, yet he's very gentle. Both were very gentle with me as an actor.

But Sam's had a big influence on my life. God knows, everywhere I go, he's praised and condemned. I get a lot of questions about that. I don't think he's a horrible maniac; it's just that he injures your innocence, and you get pissed off about it. That's the way Sam is. We'd need LQ Jones, and Strother Martin, and Ben Johnson, and a whole long table of people to make comments about Sam, because we've worked for him and liked him. We know he's wild as a bat sometimes, and we love him, and we're all willing to do well.

Hey, man, I'm sitting here rattling, and I should be giving you some astute insights into things, and I'm really kind of skirting a lot of surface. We're talking about a man's life – he's made an enormous contribution and been a very controversial filmmaker. He's done maybe *the* great Western. He changed the way people think about Westerns. He changed the way people think about films, with *Straw Dogs* and *The Wild Bunch*. He shocked and educated and presented realities about the Mexican Revolution without any of this romantic bullshit.

You haven't seen his poetry until you've seen [*The Ballad of*] *Cable Hogue*. *Cable Hogue* was done as if you and I were in Denver, Colorado in 1863, and we went into the opera house to see an opera. And this happens to be an opera about the West. That's the concept he had. It's as if you were going to an opera. It's almost an intimate stage play, but it's bigger than that, pictorially, and you've got to see that. That's an element of Sam that I think is genius. It followed right behind *The Wild Bunch*, and if you haven't seen *Cable Hogue* you've missed maybe… maybe his pure soft being.

*The blackballing, I guess you'd call it, of Sam Peckinpah lasted from the making of* Major Dundee *to the making of* The Wild Bunch. *I was wondering what you might know about that.*

Well, *Major Dundee* was a rather conventional movie; I mean there was nothing in it that was as shocking or dramatic as *The Wild Bunch*. But that was Sam's first movie – his first *big* movie. He made *Ride the High Country* for $850,000, I believe it was, and he stepped on a few toes, and kicked a few people out. And *Major Dundee* was his first big picture; it cost a lot of money, and I suppose it had something to do with the budget – $5 million dollars at that time was a lot of money. It's a lot of money now, but you couldn't make *Major Dundee* now for twelve million, or *The Wild Bunch* for seventeen.

I really don't know that much about all this; what I know would be hearsay, and I'd rather not even comment, except that I would defend Sam. He was a serious man, and he was trying to make a serious movie. The subject matter wasn't the greatest in the world: you know, the chase and all that. But a lot of it came to fulfilment in *The Wild Bunch*; his ideas about the Western movie. I don't think he set out to demonstrate a bucket of red paint; he set out to do something else. But on the set he'd say, "I want *more*," and the prop man, or the makeup man, would throw him more: more blood, more guts. Some of the scenes were ghastly.

*I understand that there were scenes that were cut out.*

One scene where he cut the guy's throat: the special-effects department rigged a knife that would cut the guy's throat. Fuckin' blood spurted from here to the fuckin' street. And for a joke, Sam printed it. Scared the shit out of everybody who saw the dailies. But it was just a malfunction of the pumping apparatus.

Sam turned the face of the Western around when he made *The Wild Bunch*. It shocked the hell out of a lot of [*with a wide grin*] moralistic weirdo pinko liberals. I remember we were down in Nassau, where Warner Brothers had a festival. *The Wild Bunch* was being shown. The ladies – all these critics and people who'd flown in there for this event – half of them booed and stormed and screeched and shouted when *The Wild Bunch* was on. It pissed Sam off something fierce; he got up and yelled at them, or whatever he did. Essentially, his innocence, his perfection, his attitude toward films and what makes them exciting, got a negative vote that day from all these people. And I think that hurt him deeply. It pissed him off, and it frustrated him. But the high quality of the film stands out today.

*It's gained a cult following.*

All over the world. Every place I've been. In France, the film is shown in one theatre every Saturday night at twelve o'clock, and it's been playing there I don't know how many years – five, six, seven, eight years. It's been playing there for fuckin' eight years. And the French

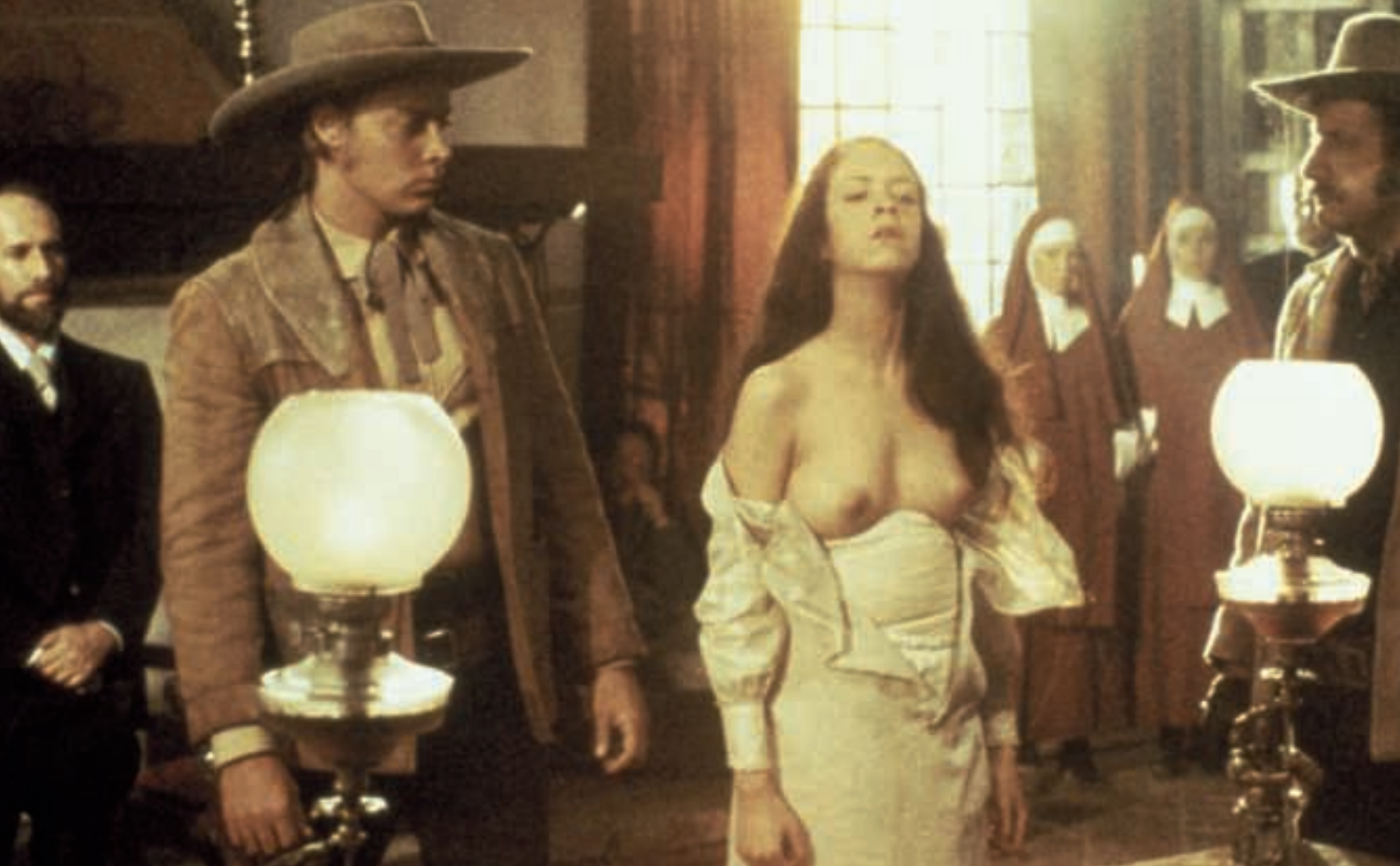


– I'm not talking about the working man; I'm talking about the intellectual – are very fond of that film. They see things in it about loyalty, and the dignity of man, and togetherness, and government; they see things in it that I don't really know if I understand, because I'm not that acquainted with French culture. But the French love it, and the English, and the Germans, the Italians – everywhere I've been. Except Sweden. But they're a bunch of weirdo pinko liberals, too.

*Do you feel more comfortable in a Western role than in a modern day one?*

Well, no, actually not. I feel maybe most *un*comfortable in a Western role, because my image of the Western man is John Wayne, and I'm just a little shit. When I think of the Western role I think that the man has to be bigger than life, bigger than the screen. And I feel less comfortable working in those, because I feel most inhibited.

Right now Sam's up in Montana. We share a place – it's our heaven. I ran into it four or five years ago; we'd always dreamed of this little ranch somewhere, and now, this year, he came in on it with me. He's built himself a beautiful house, lovely old log place, waaay in back – it's four-and-a-half miles from the front of my property to the back. He's in heaven. And he's going to find solace there, and he's going to start writing, and putting down all of his fury. Something incredible is going to come out of it. I know. Something incredible.



# ABOUT THE RESTORATION

*Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* has been exclusively restored for this release by Arrow Films. The film is presented in its original 1.85:1 aspect ratio with mono sound.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K resolution on a pin-registered 4K Lasergraphics Director Scanner at Deluxe Media, Burbank. Sections of a 35mm interpositive element were also scanned for a small number of shots.

Film grading and restoration was completed at Deluxe Restoration, London. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and light scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools. Some instances of density fluctuation and photochemical damage remain, in keeping with the condition of the original elements.

The mono mix soundtrack was transferred from the original 35mm single stripe mag and supplied by Deluxe Audio Services.

All materials used for this restoration were made available by MGM.

**Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films**

Deluxe Burbank/E-Film film scanning services
Cheryl Frohlich, Jeff Gaetano, Larry McQuaide

Restoration and grading services by Deluxe Restoration, London
**Colour Grading** Stephen Bearman
**Restoration Department Managers** Mark Bonnici, Graham Jones
**Restoration Supervisors** Tom Barrett, Clayton Baker
**Restoration Technicians** Debi Bataller, Dave Burt, Lisa Copson, Tom Wiltshire

Special thanks to Scott Grossman/MGM



# PRODUCTION CREDITS

**Discs and Booklet Produced by** Anthony Nield
**Executive Producers** Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
**Production Assistant** Liane Cunje
**Technical Producer** James White
**QC Manager** Nora Mehenni
**Blu-ray and DVD Mastering** David Mackenzie
**Artist** Peter Strain
**Design** Obviously Creative

# SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Claire Best, Michael Brooke, Rufus Burnham, Elijah Drenner, Tony Dykes, Scott Grossman, Katherine Haber, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, Paul Joyce, Colin Polonowski, Stephen Prince, Jon Robertson, Vicki Robinson, Tim Robey, Jennifer Rome, Melanie Tebb, David Warner, Grahame Wood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