

P.J. O'Rourke at the Front; Bret Easton Ellis on American Psycho

ISSUE 604 • APRIL 4TH, 1991 • \$2.50 • CAN \$2.95

Rolling Stone

The Doors

The Making
of the Myth

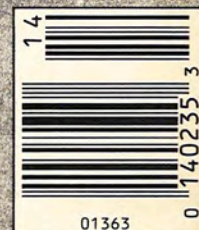
Val Kilmer

Breaks Through
as Jim Morrison

Oliver Stone

The Rolling
Stone Interview

Jim Morrison in 1967



RS 601

'ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS'

R A N D O M N O T E S

THE 1991 GRAMMY AWARDS *By Chris Mundy* 7
Top honors went to songs that will soon disappear into elevators forever; instead, the true measure of success this year was the quality of one's party. Also noted: Black Crowes; M.C. Hammer and Barbie; Crowded House.

R O C K & R O L L

ROSANNE CASH *By Steve Pond* 11
On her new album, the darkly rewarding *Interiors*, Cash confronts abject fear with utter fearlessness.

PLUS: IN THE STUDIO, 18 ... IN BRIEF, 19 ... PERFORMANCE, 20 ... NEW FACES, 22

N O T E S F R O M T H E W A R

BEHIND THE LINES, AT THE FRONT

By P.J. O'Rourke 26
The members of the press corps were, as usual, stuck behind the lines - until the war found a way to come to them.

F E A T U R E S T O R I E S

THE DOORS *By Mikal Gilmore* 30
Nearly twenty-five years ago, the Doors became the house band for an American apocalypse. What remains of Jim Morrison's legacy?

OLIVER STONE *By David Breskin* 37
The *Rolling Stone* Interview with the director of *Platoon*, *Wall Street*, *Born on the Fourth of July* - and now the powerfully romantic *Doors*.

VAL KILMER *By Jeffrey Ressler* 38
For the man chosen to portray Jim Morrison in *The Doors*, becoming the Lizard King was easier than getting into his leather pants.

BRET EASTON ELLIS *By Robert Love* 45
Even before it was published, *American Psycho* had critics screaming bloody murder. Now Ellis defends his controversial novel.

R E V I E W S

BOB DYLAN *By Anthony DeCurtis* 53
The Bootleg Series maps the back roads of Dylan's thirty-year career. Also reviewed: New releases by Boy George; Alexander O'Neal; Too Much Joy; Joe Louis Walker; Danny Gatton; the Feelies.

LAUGHTER AFTER DEATH *By Peter Travers* 59
In *Defending Your Life* - the new Albert Brooks comedy starring Brooks and Meryl Streep - the last laugh really is. Also reviewed: *Guilty by Suspicion*; *Paris Is Burning*; *New Jack City*.

PLUS: CD NEWS, 56

D E P A R T M E N T S

CORRESPONDENCE 5
CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING 64
CHARTS 68

COVER: Photograph of Jim Morrison by Joel Brodsky © 1967. Lettering by Dennis Ortiz-Lopez.

ROSANNE CASH *Illustration by Philip Burke*

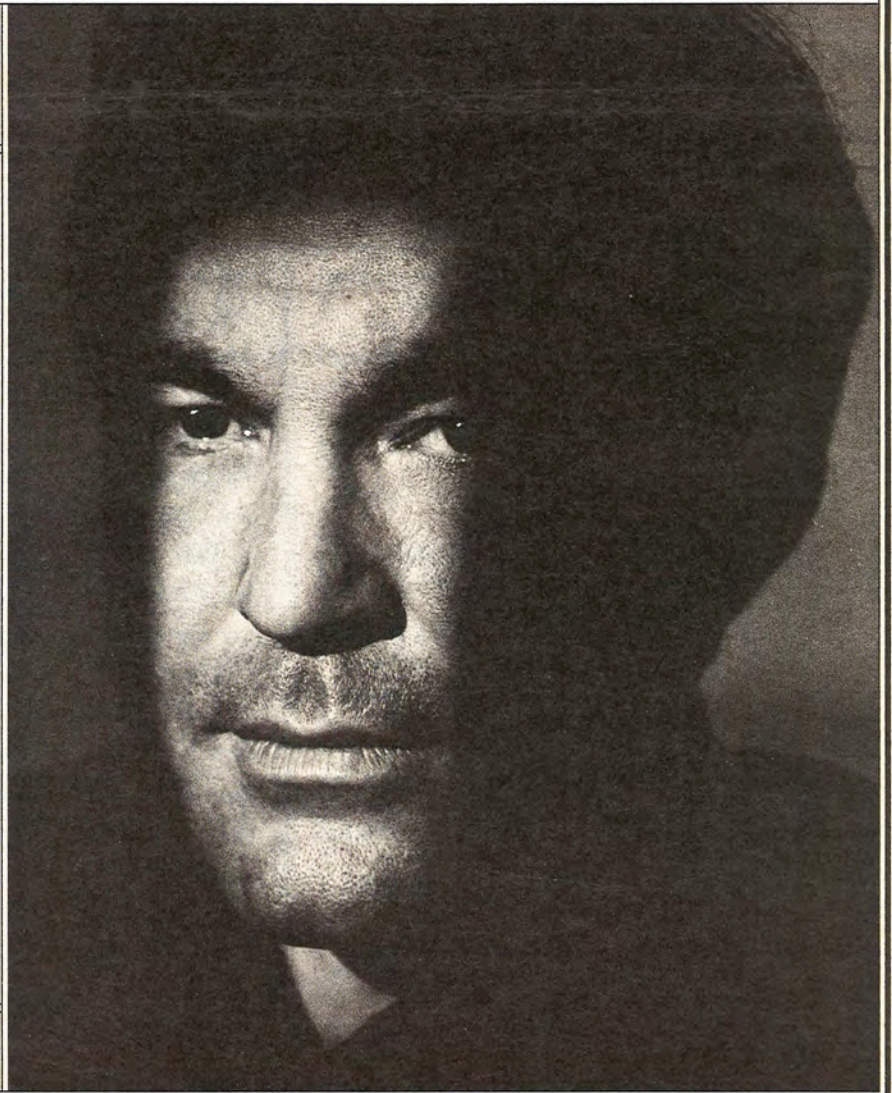


OLIVER STONE

BY *David Breskin*

BORN IN 1946, the only child of a Jewish stockbroker father and a French Catholic mother, Oliver Stone was raised in an East Coast tradition of button-down conservatism. Since then, he's spent much of his life in antagonistic conversation with that background: as teacher, seaman, soldier, freak, failed novelist, decorated director and screenwriter, gangster of Hollywood. Stone dedicated both *Salvador* and *Wall Street* to his father, who died in 1985, but his mother is very much alive and was hanging Christmas stockings and lighting his fire when we met at the Santa Monica home he shares with his second wife, Elizabeth, and their six-year-old son, Sean.

Stone's work tends to be loud and angry and fast, full of jagged politics and big emotions. Screen his movies in succession and you're left feeling you've survived a cinematic bar fight — a bit dented about the



PHOTOGRAPH BY *Albert Watson*

GROOMING BY BARBARA FARMENOUTY

VAL KILMER

head and heart by the velvet fist of his vision. From his pumped-up screenplays for *Midnight Express* and *Scarface* to the populist revisionism of *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, Stone's films again and again show the solitary man's fight for the possession of his soul in a world that seeks to steal it, corrupt it and destroy it. His current movie, *The Doors*, presents an exuberant and powerfully romantic picture of one of Stone's heroes, Jim Morrison. His next will deal with the JFK assassination.

Let's start at the beginning. What's your first memory?

[Pause; big, exaggerated laugh] Oh, boy. Beautiful women in trees in a jungle. I had erotic dreams when I was three, four. And they've always stayed with me, throughout my life. Many erotic dreams.

Were the women blond?

Yeah, primarily blondes, but there were colored women and a lot of Oriental women, some striking brunettes. Even some redheads. I would say I got liberal. My fantasy is like that Fellini film *City of Women*. I loved the idea of having a walled city [laughs] and being the only male in the whole city.

And you were a three-year-old waking up with a "woody" from these dreams?

Oh, yeah, my pecker used to get hard. It was great. I think that eros is the most underrated force in the universe. I think eros carries us through the darkest hours. Eros and its correspondent, love.

What did you do with this stuff as a kid?

Oh, man, it's secret stuff. It's like Viet Cong tunnels. I wouldn't reveal more than that, but it's certainly a thread in my life. Simone de Beauvoir said, "Sex is the sixth continent." It's the place you can go for free. Everybody can do it. I like that idea. It's a democratic impulse. I think sex is the driving force — the resistance to totalitarianism in our age.

You've described your dad as distant and negative —

Not at all. My dad was very loving. That's a partial description of him. He was sarcastic and distant at times, but he was very loving — he was so proud of me, he admired me, I was the only child. He just didn't want me to get spoiled by my mom. He wanted to enforce discipline; he wanted me to learn discipline very early. He said, "Every day you got to do something you don't want to do." [Laughs] And he made me write by giving me money. He'd encourage me to write a theme a week.

For your allowance?

Yeah, so I could buy comics. And he always would give me math problems. He was a very good writer, very intelligent. He had a warm heart, but he had difficulty — as a lot of men did of the Depression era — expressing his feelings. He thought it was unseemly.

Was he "there" for you?

He was there for me.

I'm thinking of the scene in 'Wall Street' with Bud Fox and his father where Bud says, "You've never been there for me." I wondered how much of that was autobiographical.

I felt that at times from my dad, because it would be very rare for him to give me any kind of compliment. I was a bum to him, especially after Vietnam, because I was dope smoking and talking black talk and I was in jail and I had no college education and I was writing these kooky screenplays. So he thought I was becoming like his brother Joe, who never did anything his whole life.

There's probably more of you in Gordon Gekko [Michael Douglas], isn't there?

Gekko's another character. It's not my dad. Gekko is a character out of my mom. Sort of flashy, flashy. My mom is more outward, external, physical, in the world — not as abstracted as my dad. She never made enemies, she made friends. Dad would make enemies with his tongue. Mom was a charming woman: To me, she's a bit like a piece of Auntie Mame and a piece of Evita. Just

Val Kilmer never actually met Jim Morrison, but the spirit of the Lizard King spoke to him last year in a dream. "It was a strange feeling," says the actor. "He and I were talking, just having a chat. Then all of a sudden his head turned, and I could see his brain, the water in his brain. I could see the booze, and he became a dumb, sad drunk. I got a glimpse inside his head at the moment of his transition from an erudite scholar and gentleman from the South into a lunatic, organ-chasing wacko."

The nightmare woke Kilmer, 31, at a time when he was preparing to play Morrison in *The Doors*, and he says it was a breakthrough in understanding the singer's troubled psyche. "The dream revealed to me the heart-breaking tragedy of Morrison," he says. "He was so lucid and compelling — what people loved in him was not his obnoxiousness but his ability to comprehend humanity."

The dream therapy obviously worked. Kilmer's performance in *The Doors* is a tour de force, perhaps all the more surprising because it comes from an actor who got his biggest notices as Tom Cruise's archrival, Iceman, in the lightweight flyboy saga *Top Gun*. As Morrison might say, expect the unexpected.

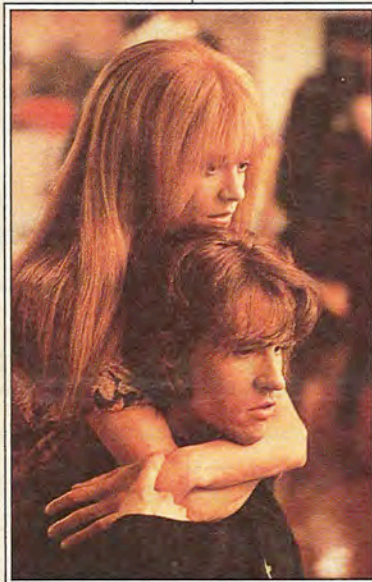
Born and raised in L.A.'s San Fernando Valley, Kilmer dove into acting at an early age, becoming one of the youngest students ever admitted to the drama department at the Juilliard School. Between an off-Broadway show, *Slab Boys*, with Sean Penn, and a Tudor-punk production of *Hamlet*, he made his film debut as a rock singer in the 1984 spy comedy *Top Secret!*

Kilmer did his own singing in the movie and later released a minialbum under the name of his campy character, Nick Rivers. "I don't want to be

labeled a rock performer," he said at the time. "I'm an actor, and I wanted the character to look and behave as authentically as possible."

Subsequent roles in *Real Genius* and *Top Gun* led to his being cast as a long-haired rogue in Ron Howard's fairy-tale epic, *Willow*. The movie fizzled, but Kilmer won costar Joanne Whalley as his bride, and his performance also drew the attention of director Oliver Stone, then involved with a *Doors* project that had been bouncing around Hollywood for nine years. John Travolta, Timothy Hutton, Kevin Costner and the INXS lead singer, Michael Hutchence, had all been considered for the Morrison part at various times, and nearly 200 other actors eventually auditioned.

Kilmer was hellbent on playing the role. He camped out on Stone's doorstep, followed him to concerts by *Doors* cover bands and even put together an audition video with four tunes and a reading of Morrison's poetry. After landing the part (Kilmer's voice is used along with Morrison's on some of the vocals), he studied every film clip he



Meg Ryan with Kilmer on the set

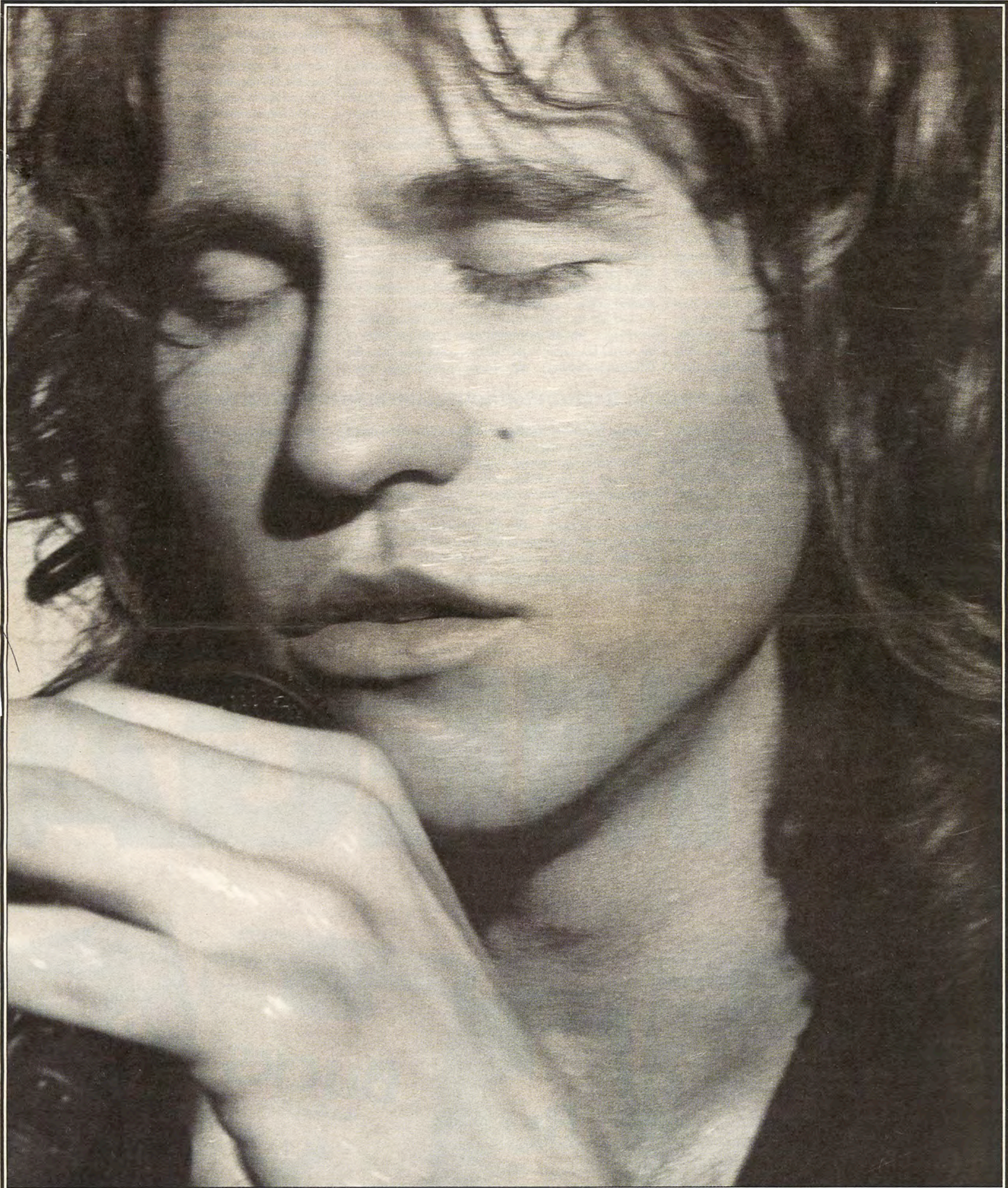
could find, took coaching from the former *Doors* producer Paul Rothchild and practiced his stage prowl with choreographer Paula Abdul.

"Paula was a little uncomfortable with the crotch part of the performance," he says. "Maybe Madonna could have helped me out there."

Kilmer also soaked up the literature, obscure music and avant-garde films that fascinated Morrison. A published poet and dramatist himself, Kilmer calls Morrison a "searing genius as a poet [whose] strongest writing exists in the music."

Getting into Morrison's mind was easy compared with getting into the leather pants. "Some guy in San Diego had them," Kilmer says. "They were used and pretty gamy. I put [Cont. on 62]

By Jeffrey Ressler



OLIVER STONE

larger than life. Big parties. Loved to travel, loved to tell tall tales. She'd invent anything. She was the best friend of anybody that would come into her mind that moment. She had a tremendous ability of fantasy.

Did you ever feel like a bum at home, before Vietnam?

Oh, I always felt like an outsider at school.

Why?

Just a quality of one's character. It's an existence, it's an anguish that you have.

Do you think that was nature or nurture?

I think it's nurture. I think it comes from being an only child. It comes from not having access to easy conversation, or easy living with a sibling makes you less important in a way, and you get more self-conscious as an only child. I was very self-conscious when I was young. I'd walk down the street and I would feel that people were condemning me, judging me, looking at me.

It just seemed that writing was a possible retreat from reality that would be acceptable. In the sense that the world of the imagination was a sanctuary from real life. As were movies. I loved being in the dark and seeing movies. It's an escape. My mom was very much into that.

You played hooky with her.

I'd play hooky with her; she'd take me to the movies a lot. A lot.

On Wednesdays they'd change the movies; they'd have double features every week. And we'd go and see double and even triple features some days. It was great. I'd go to the movies with my father, too, and we'd see Kubrick films and David Lean films, and he was always very impressive in his analysis. He'd walk out and inevitably — no matter what movie we'd seen — he'd say, "We could have done it better, Huckleberry." And then he'd tell me what was wrong. He'd analyze the plot for loopholes, and of

course, movies always have loopholes. Why didn't so-and-so do such and such? It was quite an education.

What kind of reality were you seeking to escape?

Oh, I think the reality of schools. Rigid law, orthodoxy, oppression to some degree. I think school was rough. I went to a very strict boarding school, all boys. Had to go to chapel every morning. Four to five hours of homework every day. Five classes. Discipline. The smell of locker rooms. The dank food. How can I describe the food? It was totally Dickensian.

Perfect for someone named Oliver. You had the shock of your life when you found out your parents were getting divorced.

I thought they were very contented and that I was rich and that we had it made. And basically my father said that they were unhappy and that they were betraying each other, that she was screwing around and he was screwing around, and that he was broke, in debt. He didn't have money, he owed money. And my mother, according to him, was profligate in her expenses.

And she had a lover, she took several lovers. It was shocking. It was an interesting time. It was the onset of the sexual liberation of the Sixties, and couples from the Fifties were starting to play around on each other. It was

in Europe. And you can imagine the way the headmaster tells you these things: "Buckle up, young man. This is not the end of the world." It was hard. I felt like shit, like nothing. Everything was metallic. All the surfaces were metallic. All the adults were dangerous, not to be trusted. The world was a very empty place to me.

My father moved into a hotel, where I lived with him. And my mother was moving into another kind of life, a Sixties life — drugs, parties. I felt I was an outsider. The family was over. It just disintegrated. You don't have a brother or a sister; you don't have any second person you can still be family with. The triangle splits, and we're three people in different places, and I'm sixteen, and all of a sudden I'm on my own. Dad said to me, "I owe this and this, I will put you through college, and then you're on your own." To me it was a new world.

I think that set up, basically, a period for me, from sixteen on, until thirty — I was going through a sort of adolescent thing. Especially from sixteen to twenty-two, a sort of revolution in my life. Everything was thrown topsy-turvy. Basically, I ended up in the merchant marine, in Vietnam, going through a lot of changes. All the old rules were thrown out. I really sort

"A beautiful woman without a brain in her head can still be exciting."

amazing. My father had been basically with other women since the Forties, and my mother had other lovers.

You didn't know anything about this?

No, no. It was all delivered to me on a weekend in boarding school, and by phone. Nobody even came to tell me. It was delivered to me by the headmaster, and that was really hard to take. My father had talked to him, and he thought it was his obligation to tell me. My mother didn't even want to come and see me; she was hiding

of journeyed, and I wandered. And through a process of a long time, I got my existence back together.

After your first period in Vietnam, as an English teacher, you wrote a 1400-page novel that was rejected and never published. Going back to Vietnam as a soldier seems like it was an act of self-punishment, if not actively suicidal.

Oh, yeah. I was ready to die, but I didn't want to pull my own trigger. Many a time I stood in the bathroom and looked in the mirror and had the razor out. . . . Part

© Philip Morris Inc. 1991

MEGA



OLIVER STONE

of my book was about the eighteen ways the kid tries to kill himself. I went through all the computations of death in my head. I don't know how close I came. I certainly thought about it, and I emotionally identified with it, but I stopped myself. I said: "Look, I'm not going to die this way. If I'm going to die, I'm going to die in combat." I'm either going to make it through or I'm not going to make it through.

I'm struck by how, when you failed so badly at creating your book, you turned so fiercely to destroying, going to war.

Yeah, a lot of that, that Lee Harvey Oswald thing. I saw that in this country, that's where I learned it. Going to the dark side, you really see the underside of life. Lee Harvey Oswald. I was in that world. I know that world. I *know* those people.

I got busted when I got back from the Nam [for carrying pot over the border]. And all those guys, such sad cases, going back to small towns, guys that knew weaponry hanging out in bus stations.

The worst years of our lives . . .

Yeah! I took the bus all the way down through Oregon, California, talking to guys in bus stations and cheap hotels. And trying to get laid with hookers in Oakland. I met a lot of Lee Harveys. I met a lot of guys who were really screwed up. The drifter mentality in American society is very interesting. But Oswald is a lot deeper than everybody thinks he is. He wasn't just a drifter; he was something else, too.

How much of your drug use was self-medicating? A lot of people in a great deal of pain "medicate" themselves with drugs. They don't take drugs to "expand their consciousness" so much as to numb themselves out.

That's a very good question. That's a tough one, be-

cause you cross that line, back and forth, through the years. Because half the time it's expansion of the mind and the other half it sort of creeps in to numbing yourself. And I certainly am "guilty" of both. I was doing grass on a daily basis, getting high, really high. Doing great acid in the Village. I would do acid anywhere - in the subway, in restaurants; I didn't stand on religious grounds on it at all. I never picked environments that were particularly soothing. I'd do it for a rush.

I had some heavy bad trips. Volatile trips. And I had

"I felt I was irrelevant to the human race, totally obscure and confused."

some great trips. Looking for a woman, man, I was looking for a woman. Peripatetic affairs. Wild affairs. Crazy women, crazy, nutty women loose across the city. One-night stands, here, there. I was just burned out, and no love in the world. I had a few friends that would do some drugs, but I didn't have any vets around New York. My vet friends went back to small Southern towns, and they would write me about unemployment and drug use and alcohol. It was depressing. I didn't have anybody. There was no network to fall back on. I was alone.

I lived in a shithole on Houston Street. I had a broken window, with the snow drifting in the winter. I'd wake up in the morning and there'd be a pile of snow in my room. [Laughs] I was writing, though. I wrote, it seems, for therapy: Between twenty-two and thirty, I wrote eleven screenplays. I never stopped writing. It was my only home. No matter how dissolute I got - and I took a lot of fucking drugs, booze, bad - I would get up each day, like my dad said: You do something every day you don't want to do. I felt an obligation to hold up my sanity, to write.

Were the drugs fueling your anger or muting your anger?

Both. The alternate expansion and contraction. I'd say acid to expand and grass - eventually - to numb. And music was so important. You can't underestimate that in the Sixties. Listening to Motown, hour after hour, on grass, getting into that mood. And the Doors, Jefferson Airplane, Bob Dylan, the Grateful Dead, Sly and the Family Stone. The Fillmore East.

What gives you joy?

Optimism. A good feeling around you. Family. Love. Eros. A feeling that the world is a healthy place. I think

that optimism is really necessary. I like to be surrounded by gaiety, by friends who laugh, who have a positive attitude towards life. I like to be surrounded by a lot of light bulbs, turn on a lot of lights. I like to have a TV on once in a while. I like to see movies that make me appreciate the possibilities of life, that engage the mysterious of life. I like good books, fine wine, beautiful women. Intelligent men. Daring men. I like ships that sail. I like children. I like toys. Material things. Spiritual things. What do you want, a catalog? An index? The book of joy? Joy is a mental state. You have to be healthy to have joy. The doctors are right: Life seems to me to be a cycle of pain and of pleasure. It can't all be joy.

You write from pain, quite personally, but eventually you may run out of it. Or will you have a replenishing supply?

We'll see. How can I project that?

People end up making the same movie again and again.

Nothing wrong with that. If you can make it interesting and dress it up in new clothes in a new way, what the hell. Madonna recycles herself every six months.

Are you seeking to achieve the level of Madonna with

BUCKS



SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking By Pregnant Women May Result in Fetal Injury, Premature Birth, And Low Birth Weight.

your films?

No, but if you can dress up the old story in a new way that interests you and makes it interesting to the public, what's wrong with that?

Nothing's wrong with it, but you seem to me to be a guy who wants a new story.

I think I do. I might be disillusioned, I might not be the best judge. I try to write 'em and make 'em. I admire the prolificness of Balzac and John Ford — they just kept doing it. And Hitchcock. They didn't get too much into regret or remorse, looking back. If they missed 'em, they moved on. Don't get tripped up in your self, your own psyche or in analysis. There's something to be said about getting out there and doing it.

The dominant criticism of your work is that it's too loud in some way, that you are too much in the audience's face, that you always use the sledgehammer instead of the stiletto.

Obviously, I'm aware of that criticism. Possibly, I go sometimes for the lowest common denominator, in terms of getting the message across, in terms of getting what I want to say across. I think sometimes it's better to be wrong on the side of clarification rather than of obscurity. That's the thing my father used to always beat on me for. Because with all my earlier writing, he'd say, "That's too obscure." And all my English teachers would drive me nuts: "This is too obscure. What do you mean?" Something you've broken your heart writing, that's so clear to you, and nobody understands. And I wrote a lot of obscure stuff. The novel was mostly obscure, it was symbolist poetry, it was Rimbaud-like. I just want to be clear. Maybe part of going the other way is trying to fight all of those earlier tendencies, where I felt like I was totally irrelevant to the human race and that I was totally obscure, and confused.

Let's talk about the position of women in your films. [Stone sighs.] It's like going to the dentist, Oliver. The world of your films is a boy's club. True?

No. I'd say the boys have been the protagonists, but the movies have been about ideas in which men were primarily concerned: Vietnam, the world of cocaine smuggling, a prison in Turkey, Wall Street, which is a men's club. But each time, there's been more women in these films, you know. I'm not trying to deny their existence.

No, but due to their marginality, it's interesting to see what position they have. Since your films are not exactly overrun by women, the women that do show up are going to "stand for" more, in sort of inverse proportion to their dominance in the film. Now, the women in your work tend to be prostitutes, bimbos, housewives, stick figures — and if they're developed at all, they tend to be either emotionally cold or sort of along for the ride, as appendages to the male characters.

Well, Kyra Sedgwick in *Born* is a girl who marches to her own beat. She leaves Massapequa, Long Island, goes to college and starts to think for herself. Ellen Greene in *Talk Radio* has an emotional attachment to Barry Champlain; she extends her heart once more — against all her better judgment — and he breaks it again. And No. 3, Elpidia Carrillo in *Sabador*, in some way she gives grace to Richard Boyle. And he knows it. He knows she's the best thing in his life. Those three examples are of women reaching out. And in *The Doors*, Meg Ryan, in a sense, makes Jim more human.

Okay, let's look at the way she's presented in 'The Doors.' My understanding is that Pam Courson, Morrison's girlfriend,

was a lot more independent — less traditional, less monogamous — and displayed a lot more freedom than the way she's presented in the movie, which is almost as the jealous "wife" who's horrified when she sees him with others, who only sleeps with someone else, as the "spurned woman," to get back at him.

Well, that's not what I heard. I heard that she may have had affairs before but that she really was enamored of the image of a domestic life with Jim. And wanted to make a real home. And prided herself on cooking certain things for him and giving him a warm, domestic environment to his previously solitary life. He continued to live in a motel and could not stand, ultimately, domesticity. She was not screwing everything that came along. She had a crush for certain people, often in response to the way he was screwing anything he cared to. It was more of a reaction to that than her being that way from the beginning. That's the impression I got from the witnesses.

Do you feel you've done a good job with the way you've presented women in your films?

Not in *Wall Street*.

They're really commodities in 'Wall Street.'



Director Stone with Val Kilmer as Morrison: "He had success, he was God on earth for a while, he had everything he wanted, and he got bored with it."

Yes, I think that was a failure in the writing. But I admire . . . I adore women. I've lived with many women in my life. I think women dispense grace.

I tried to make *Evita*, which would have been interesting. That would have been my first woman protagonist. The most hated and loved woman of her time. Meryl Streep would have been great. It would have been a wonderful movie, but it didn't happen for various reasons. And I have another project that I'm working on that has a woman for the main character. I would very much like to make that kind of movie, because it's nice to work with women. I had more women working on *The Doors* than on any film I've ever done, and I really enjoyed being around them.

You know, beauty is important on the screen. I don't want to belittle it. I realize that. When you see a beautiful face, you respond. We like to see models of our best-looking sides. It's as old as the world. It behooves me to use beautiful faces. I could watch Garbo for many minutes. She just fascinates me. Just her face.

When I asked you what gave you joy, at one point you said: "Beautiful women. Intelligent men." So there's a dichotomy here. And even now, when you're talking about having more women in your films, the locus is one of physical beauty, enrapturement, and not of intelligence or action.

Oh, I have the appetite of an African chief! [Laughs] No, I, of course there's the other side. But let's say, to a man, a woman who is intelligent and beautiful is very sexy, and he gets excited by her, not only physically but in all ways — talking to her, dealing with her in business, playing sports with her, every aspect of life becomes a playing field.

At the same time, you know as well as I do that a beautiful woman without a brain in her head can still be exciting to you. I don't know if Marilyn Monroe was smart or dumb; my impression is that she didn't have much of an education. But she turned many men on. And women think differently than men. All the signals that are given are different. You have to be a railroad man in this life to figure out all the signals. . . .

[Pause] I think there are some unresolved things with my mom that I always had. Because of the divorce. She was a bit of a foreign — how do you say — a foreign queen. She was like a queen to me when I was a kid. She was sort of living in a fairyland. She'd come and go. She was sometimes distant and sometimes very close. It was like ECUs [extreme close-ups] and long shots. It was consistent, or steady, my relationship with her, and it turned into a messy thing later on in my adolescence, and I think there are still as many unresolved problems with my mom, and, uh, as there were with my dad.

[Pause] I always married, I married my opposite, I mean, the opposite of my mom, which is interesting, too.

Let's talk about another major theme in your work: the dominance of death. In all of your films, save 'Wall Street,' the protagonist kills, or is killed, or barely, barely escapes death. Clearly, in some very fundamental way, it's a moving force in what you do — both obsession and wellspring.

"Death shall have no dominion." Who said that? You don't know? God, it was a great poem by Dylan Thomas. You should hear him do the audios of it, he does his own poetry. He was a man wracked with death, as was Jim Morrison. I admire both of them as giant men who lived in the shadow of death. I feel much less enamored of death than they did, or else I'm running from it and not admitting it. I think it's a strong force in my life. I've used it. It's there. I've thought of death, often. At the age of eighteen, I went to Vietnam as a form of death. I was ready to accept death. I saw much of it in Vietnam.

I think the Mexicans are so damn right. I have that thing in my office — a corpse, a skeleton — it grins at me: Keep death around as a reminder, make it part of your life. Not to mystify it or make it something horrific but to live with it on a daily basis is, I suppose, to prepare for it, to get ready for it. And probably when it comes, the ideal position is to want it: to be tired of life, to have exhausted the variations you intended to play as a human being. And then to go back to the womb. You want to be nascent again. You want to be quiet. You've had enough. You've seen enough people, you've seen enough colors, you've lived through enough lights and [sighs] . . .

Death is a framing experience of life and birth. Everything is seen in that light to me. I'm very aware of it, on a daily basis, driving around. Looking out the windshield, I see violent accidents in my head. 'Cause I saw a lot of that in Vietnam, and I see death around me — quickly, obscenely, being cut off. Every time I get on a plane, I have to deal with the concept of death — I have to re-define it for myself, for everyone, for my child, in

terms of him being hurt.

So I guess what I'm telling you is that it is a steady and mundane presence in my life, and no, I haven't come to deal with it completely. But I like Dylan Thomas's line "And death shall have no dominion." So that when it comes, it will come as a friend and not as a dominant master. It will come as my equal. My spirit will be equal to my death. I will be wanting and willing to die. That would be nice.

You finally found a protagonist who's as death obsessed as you are?

No, I think more obsessed. Jim lived it. Everything with Jim is death. A bottle of whiskey is death, a woman is death. Death is in every poem. Cinema of course has death in it. So do snakes, fires [laughs].

Tony Montana, the Al Pacino character from your screenplay for DePalma's 'Scarface,' is probably your most notorious protagonist before Morrison. I know you identify with Morrison, and I'd like to know how you identify with Montana.

Tony Montana. Well, he was an outsider to the system. He came from abroad. He jumped tracks. He was unorthodox. He was a rebel. A nonconformist who at the end of the day wanted to be a conformist. [Laughs] And bought into the dream of the wife with the blond hair and the mansion [laughs, looks around] and then started putting security cameras outside his gates to watch the cops watching him.

Tony says, "Me, I want what's coming to me, the world." Ambition, too, yes?

[Laughs] Well, there's a little bit of a gangster in me, there's no question. I like that grandiosity of style. I like the excess, the concept of excess works in a lot of these characters. In Gordon Gekko and Jim Morrison. Jim says, "I believe in excess." In the power of excess. Because through excess, I leave, I live a larger life. I inflate my life, and by inflating my life, I live more of my life; therefore, I know the world more. I have more experience of the world. I die a more experienced man.

Perhaps the "concept of excess" or "grandiosity of style" also describes your relationship with camera movement.

I never want it to be static, to watch the other. That the self and the other are moving at the same time — that's the way I see the camera moving.

As a participant and not an observer.

Yeah, I always respected the camera as another actor. I hate the type of direction that makes the camera a slave. I always respect the camera. I walk on the set — I don't know why — and I see the actor, I see the camera, and I see myself. I see a triangle. So that the camera, although inanimate, is as much a human participant as I am. It's an interesting relationship. So often the camera will speak to me on the day and say: "No, this. That." And it will become clear to me. So I might sit here and for days make notes on what I want to do, as I would with an actor. But when I have the actor and the camera there, they start to talk, and sing, a different kind of song. The camera is different in each scene. The camera has an eerie kind of power. It will often suggest to me a better way of doing it.

So you grant it a kind of autonomy?

Yes. Exactly. Thank you for understanding me. Whereas I've noticed some directors will treat their cameras like slaves, like fascists. And I think that's so wrong! The camera becomes an *object of power*, like they're wielding a gun. I've noticed that attitude on a lot of sets, it's true. But I haven't thought about it until you raised

this question today. It's interesting. Because obviously all our politics, our emotions, our sex lives are all there, aren't they, in our relationship to our cameras.

Some people feel your camera movement is pushy, like they almost need to wear a seat belt watching your films.

That's their problem. The world is spinning much faster than my camera and myself. I think movies have to break through the three dimensions, close as you can get. I think you go for every fucking thing you can to make it live. We're into new technology. Use everything you can. Make it breathe, make it coil, make it live.

In 'The Doors,' you're rightly horrified at the notion of the band selling "Light My Fire" for a car commercial — to the point of showing a TV ad that in fact was quashed by Morrison before it was ever made. But on the video of 'Platoon' there's an offensively "patriotic" Chrysler commercial before we even get to the movie, and of course, you've posed for a Gap ad.

The Gap ad I enjoyed doing in terms of just a vanity-ego thing, I suppose. I got paid \$700. I didn't do it for money. I was at a certain age, I thought those photographs are incredible, and I'd like to have a decent photo-



Stone with his platoon in Vietnam: "I was ready to die, but I didn't want to pull my own trigger. If I was going to die, I was going to die in combat."

tograph of myself at the age of forty-three in my life. Just as a marker. I like the clothes. They're cheap. They gave off an image of playfulness, an egalitarian image. What did I do wrong [laughs]?

I just wonder if you consider how you commodify yourself.

I agree. Yeah. But there's some interest in doing it. I have an Andy Warhol attitude — we're postmodernists. Look at Andy — he sold everything. He sold his toilet paper, probably.

Do you feel the same way about your work? Selling one idea today, another tomorrow? No need for consistency, integrity? Are you really interested in the Warhol ethic?

I don't want integrity to block my creative growth. If I've worked on a film, I've put my whole being into it, and hopefully there will be some kind of consistency at the end of the day.

But I know how strongly you identify with Morrison, and I can't see him posing for a Gap ad.

That was the Sixties, too, and they were very anti. The war was on, too. There was a different feeling. We've grown up with such a corporate culture that one doesn't think twice about it. Look at the way movies are made. Who makes them? What does a filmmaker do? He goes to the highest bidder and he whores out his services — he gives his privatest fantasies public being —

he prostitutes. So I don't have a very high self-esteem, maybe that's what you're saying. Maybe because I see myself as . . . an artist basically begging for a patron. I think there's a lot of that in me. I feel very lucky each time I get the money to make a picture.

In 'The Doors,' Morrison's line "I'm not mad — I'm interested in freedom" is like an epitaph for the film. He's not mad as in "crazy," but he is mad in the sense of "angry," isn't he? My question is, If you need to rebel, to shock authority, to piss on people's carpets, and it seems like Morrison had that emotional or psychological need, are you really free at all? Aren't you just a slave to something else — your own rebellion, perhaps — just as much as people who are slaves to conformity?

Contrary dependency? The role of the rebel as essentially a slave?

Maybe. I don't doubt that Morrison was interested in freedom, but he was most certainly — at least in the sense of angry — quite mad. There's all sorts of hostility radiating out of this guy — that's one of the things that makes him so interesting.

He was interested in freedom from his own madness.

Maybe that's the resolution. He was very conscious of his own will to self-destruction. After Joplin and Hendrix died, he'd tell his friends, "You're drinking with No. 3."

Yeah. Yeah. I would like to believe that he went out smiling. He liked it; he enjoyed it as it happened because he was in love with the death experience. He wanted to experience it, and he did. He had busted the limits on sex, for himself; on drugs, he'd taken every kind of drug; on the law, he busted the law, which I think hurt him the most, the trial really beat him down and tired him out, made him more aware of orthodoxy and the inevitable triumph of orthodoxy; and I think he busted through on the concept of success. He had success, he was God on earth for a while, he had everything he wanted, and he got bored with it. I think he became enamored of failure. He went on a failure trip, too, and I think he enjoyed busting through on the failure trip by making a fool of himself in public, many times. He wanted to be an asshole; he wanted to be hated.

Because maybe then other people's opinion of him would confirm his opinion of himself?

Partly. And when he was a young lion, he had a high opinion of himself.

Where did all his meanness come from, his abusiveness?

Meanness? Abusiveness? The only abusiveness I know of — from all the witnesses — was when he was drinking. The Irish-asshole side, the Dylan Thomas side, would come out, and he'd rant and rave and get into fake fights. And he got his ass busted a couple times by guys that took him seriously. He would make an asshole of himself in public to go through all forms of experience. He wasn't about reserve and dignity, like his father had represented to him.

It seems, though, that when he was sober or was on other drugs, that he would be one of the gentlest souls. Everyone would refer to how gentle he was, how sensitive, how well spoken, how shy. He certainly had two sides: He'd go from being the most sensitive, loving, caring person, who talked to everybody — he was very democratic in his approach to life, which I love — and then when he performed, he would go into a shamanistic, devil thing, and then when he was drinking, he would be a monster at times. I also heard that when he was drunk, sometimes he would behave very sweetly. So everybody attests to Jim's kindness. He gave away everything, you [Cont. on 62]

Oliver Stone

[Cont. from 43] know. There was a Jesus quality about Jim. He gave of himself: his body, his life, his possessions. Nothing was his. He was a sharing person. It's the Irish dichotomy, I suppose.

Were you trying to dramatize that dichotomy in the film?

We tried, you know. That's the hardest stuff to do. To show the holy and the fool at the same time. I tried. Probably people might say I didn't get enough holy.

Do you view your task here as more demythologizing or remythologizing him?

That's a good question. I suppose my answer to that is that we were remythologizing, keeping the myth. But to me, it includes demythologizing at the same time. I don't know why, it just does. It's not like he's any less a person for being demythologized. We show, certainly, the asshole part of Jim, but to me it only makes him more mythological. So they perform the same function for me. If you try to strip away from a person, you end up making him greater by the fact that you're trying to strip. Why? You think you're taking layers away, you may be adding layers. [Laughs] You understand what I'm saying?

"The road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom" — how can we be so sure?

Go. Go.

Maybe it leads to the palace of disintegration? Of psychic fracturing? Of death?

You need strong *cojones* to take that medicine. You risk becoming larger than life. I guess you could become grotesque. It's a road to travel warily, no question.

Are you at the palace? You've certainly lived through a lot of excess.

I don't know. I'm at my midlife journey, that's for sure. [Laughs] I'm in a dark wood, babe. I feel often like a neophyte on the road, I really do. I don't say that immodestly. I still feel very innocent, in many ways.

Do you feel like a great artist?

[Long pause] God, if I told you my true feelings about that, they'd never let go of me — I'd just be setting myself up.

You're thinking about what "they" are going to think. I want to know what you think.

My true feelings? [Pause] I never doubted it, from day one. When I was eighteen, I just felt like I had a call. Like I had a call. And living up to that call has been the hardest part. I've got a lot of work to do on myself, on what I'm doing, on my craft, but I never had a doubt. ■