



CHRISTIAN

Esquire

When a rage for authenticity meets a passionate fakery meets a workingman's attitude, you get this guy. An actor of great dimension—just don't call him that. And he'll probably win some big award for his role in *The Fighter*, but don't dare tell him that. A funny and sometimes testy encounter with Mr. Bale.

BY JOHN H. RICHARDSON

BALE

MAY

KILL

SOMEONE

YET

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NIGEL PARRY

CHRISTIAN BALE



COMES INTO THE BAR dressed in a regular-guy windbreaker and looking much more scruffy and handsome—charming, rakish, ne'er-do-well, with a piratical mustache and goatee—than he ever lets himself look in movies. His English accent hits a sweet spot on the higher edge of working class, with a hint of the warm burr of his native Wales. He orders a Stella and expresses polite concern about the noise level and the tape recorder. But within minutes it becomes blindingly clear that he'd be much happier asking the questions than answering them.

BALE: Everybody talks about the process too much. The interesting thing about a movie is the movie.

Um, yeah, but we're here to do an interview.

BALE: I don't get it when you get so much openness about the way movies are made, and the special effects and the behind-the-scenes stuff and all of that. I can't help but feel like this reduces it a little bit. It's something that shouldn't just be handed out as an extra on a DVD. It should be sought out by serious potential filmmakers who wanna learn how to do it.

Yes, but...

BALE: Somebody tells me I "should read Dickens," I'll be fucked if I'm ever gonna pick up Dickens. That word *should* just kills it. I'll never feel a personal connection to it.

Like many artists, Bale says he also dislikes examining his choices.

BALE: I find that with particular projects, I kinda know in the back of my head why I'm doing it and what I find interesting, but I never wanna bring it to the front and verbalize it. Because the minute I do that, I'm done. I've stuck a fork in that one! I'm bored! So you have to treat yourself like a mushroom to some degree, in order to keep on discovering things.

And he really doesn't like discussing the career arcs of other filmmakers.

BALE: Why are you questioning those things?

ESQUIRE: Just curious.

BALE: Why are you putting all that muddle in your brain that's not needed to be there?

ESQUIRE: I guess you just look at the choices people make and wonder, What's up with that?

BALE: But why are you worrying so much about everybody else? Let's start looking at you for a minute, all right?

A STANDOFF ENSUES *not unlike the scene in Antonioni's The Passenger when Jack Nicholson is interviewing a witch doctor who clearly thinks he's an obnoxious idiot. "Your questions are much more revealing about yourself than my answers will be about me," the witch doctor says, turning the camera around so it's pointing at Nicholson. Major existential moment as Nicholson stares into the abyss between sign and signifier. But we have seen this movie, and it does not turn out well—the spell must be reversed.*

BALE: It should just happen. It should just happen. If something's true and sincere, it happens regardless of marketing. The more I talk about it, the more I'm telling people how they should react. And that is an asshole.

ESQUIRE: Not to argue, but that's not really true.

BALE: Are you calling me a liar? Am I lying?

ESQUIRE: Sometimes the ground needs to be prepared. And you've laid down these onerous rules on me—all I can do is a Q&A.

Actually, these are forbidden words that you are reading right now. Bale is in the habit of requesting that his media interviews be printed in a Q&A format. He also prefers to conduct them at the same five-star luxury hotel in Los Angeles, and makes it known that he dislikes personal questions.

BALE: You don't like that?

ESQUIRE: No! I don't like being told what to do.

BALE: I'll tell you why. Basically, it's some-

body who got stuck having to interview me who really wants to be a novelist, so they're writing these novellas and I was like, "It's not true, that didn't happen, they just made all that up! Why don't they just go ahead and be a novelist instead of bothering with interviewing me?"

ESQUIRE: So you want to be perceived accurately, but you also don't want to give any details. You realize that those two things contradict each other.

BALE: No, it's simpler than that. I want to be able to just act and never do any interview, but I don't have the balls to stand up to the studio and say, "I'm never doing another interview in my life!" So I tip my hat and go, "Okay mister! All right mister! I'll go do the salesman job!"

ESQUIRE: And you don't want to talk about your personal life or family background either.

BALE: Look, I've got incredible pride for my family. I've absolutely fallen into that cliché of a dad who could just happily talk about my daughter endlessly. But it's not what I'm about in terms of being an actor. I don't want people to know about that.

ESQUIRE: Why not?

BALE: I don't want people to know me.

ESQUIRE: Why not?

BALE: Because that buggers up my job.

ESQUIRE: How does it do that?

BALE: Because if you know something about somebody, it gets in the way of just watching the guy as the character.

ESQUIRE: But that's not really true. If you really disappeared into your role, people wouldn't realize it was the same guy from movie to movie.

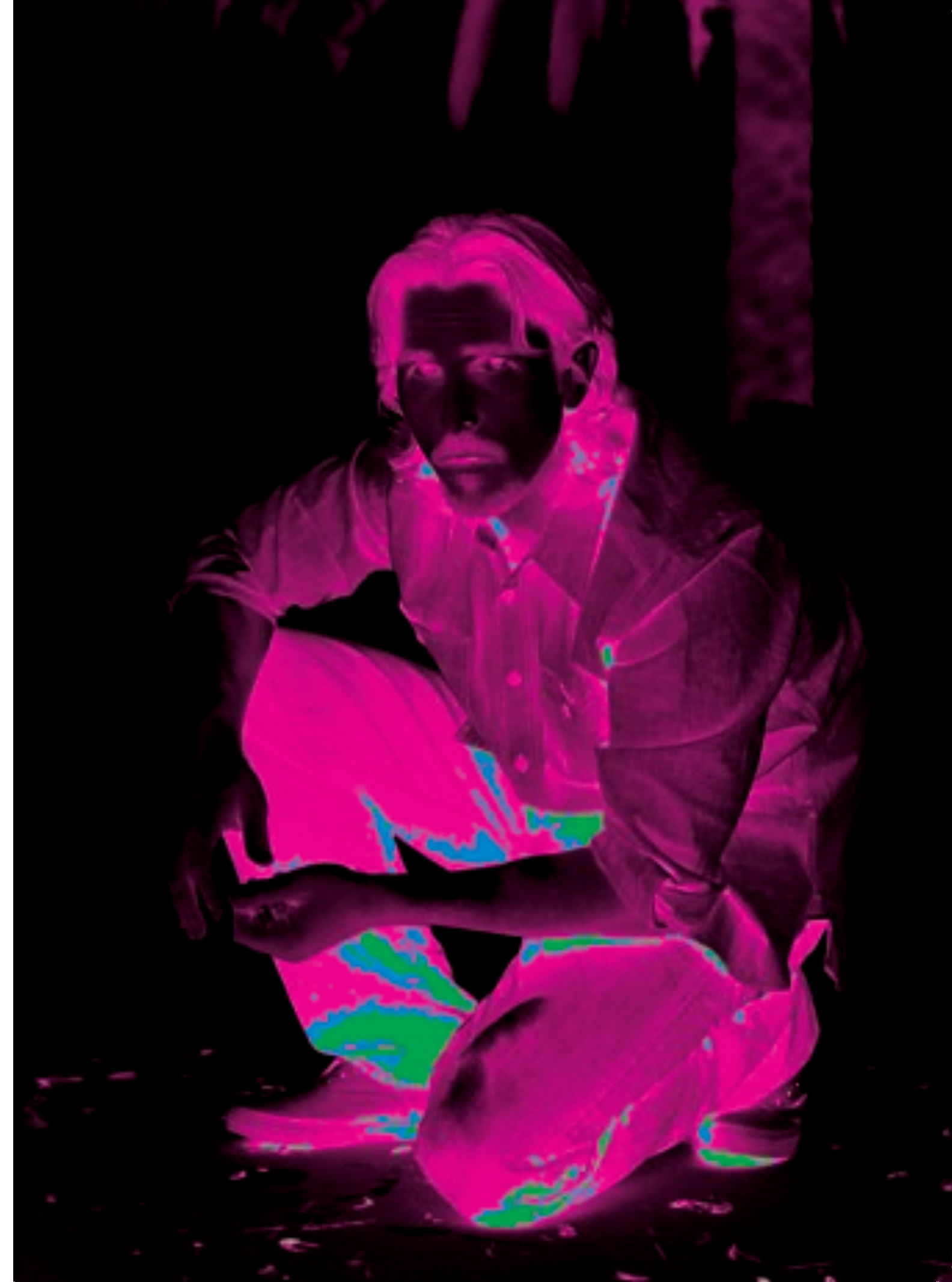
BALE: No! It's like painting behind the radiator—I'd know about it even if nobody else does.

ESQUIRE: But for the audience, that's part of the pleasure. "Wow! He's a great actor! He's so different than he was in *Julius Caesar*."

BALE: Well, it's also just I'm bored shitless with myself.

When he was a child actor, Bale did fantasy movies and even sang and danced in a Disney musical called Newsies. Now he cringes at the words "child actor."

BALE: I spent many years trying to pretend





I wasn't.

ESQUIRE: Why?

BALE: Because it's embarrassing.

ESQUIRE: Why?

BALE: Well, it's embarrassing to be a star. Most people look at you like, "That's not a fucking job, is it?" And then on top of that, you learn very quickly that you're just a tool—other people are manipulating everything you do, you're at the mercy of editors, and there's nothing you can do. But I learned that there's a certain character that can be built from embarrassing yourself endlessly. If you can sit happy with embarrassment, there's not much else that can really get to ya.

FINALLY, THE SITUATION *calls for extreme measures.*

ESQUIRE: You don't want to be a vain movie star, I totally get it, I respect it. But there's nothing that's more of a dick movie-star move than to say, "It has to be printed as a Q&A." That's movie star. You and Tom Cruise back in the day are the only people who do that shit.

BALE: That's not true! [*laughing*] We're not the only ones. And it was like I said yesterday, it came from a couple of interviews where they just made up a whole bunch of crap in their effort to practice writing their novel.

ESQUIRE: That's very patronizing and insulting, you realize that?

BALE: What, that?

ESQUIRE: Yeah.

BALE: But these guys lied.

ESQUIRE: Has anybody in the movie business ever lied to you?

BALE: Oh man, listen, that's not restricted to any one line of work, is it?

ESQUIRE: But you're still in the movie business, right?

BALE: You really wanna be freed up from just doing the Q&A, don't ya?

ESQUIRE: I went back to my hotel last night thinking, This guy's very cool and he doesn't wanna act like a poncy movie star, he wants to be a regular bloke, but he's got instructions on what *format* the fucking story should take. He's delusional!

Bale is laughing...

ESQUIRE: Poor guy! He actually thinks he's normal!

BALE: I do love people ripping the shit out of me. I don't know what that's about, but I love it. The more crap you give me, the happier I get.

But Bale takes control again, a hint of British irony in his voice.

BALE: Have you seen the movie that we're here to discuss?

ESQUIRE: *The Fighter*? You're so great in it, and it's a really good movie.

BALE: Would you tell me if you thought it was crap?

ESQUIRE: I'm not sure.

BALE: Because I've enjoyed interviews so much when the writer has said to me, "You

know what? Not my thing. Didn't like it too much." I find that endlessly entertaining.

It's actually a terrific movie. Directed by the wildly unpredictable David O. Russell, it's a naturalistic tour de force with Mark Wahlberg playing a mean-streets Massachusetts boxer named Micky Ward and Bale as his older brother Dickie, a professional boxer turned crackhead.

ESQUIRE: There was something really sweet about Dickie, even though he's a crackhead.

BALE: He's a sweet crackhead, isn't he? I'm so fond of Dickie. I was just talking with him today. He just loves people so much, and then he messes up.

ESQUIRE: I love the way he jumps out the window every time his mom comes over.

BALE: All true! Dickie and me went walking around the town and every single bar, there's some incident that they can talk about that happened with Dickie there. A few of the bars, he's not allowed in. He's like the mayor. He walks down the street, everybody shouting out, "Dickie! Dickie!"

ESQUIRE: The sisters were awesome.

BALE: They're an endlessly entertaining family. One of them got upset with the portrayal that was being done, and there was a few suggestions of physical actions that might happen if the actress continued to represent her in that way. But then that was all solved in the bar.

His phone rings and he leans away with a hand over one ear.

BALE: Oh darling, I told you, I've got to do a blah-blah meeting, you'd be really bored here... we're just sitting at a table talking stupid stuff... But I can't, darling, there's a man who's flown all the way out here. I promise when I come back, I'll give you a big kiss and a hug.

He hangs up.

What were we talking about?

ESQUIRE: Dickie.

BALE: Yeah. If it wasn't for the crack he could have been a champion. But if there was a title for staying up all week partying, never sleeping, and then having a fight, he'd win that hands down. He'd be out drinking until eight hours before he stepped in the ring.

ESQUIRE: I love the scene where he walks down the street with the birthday cake forgotten under his arm. It's just such a goofy scene.

BALE: Endless goofy shit happens around Dickie.

THE WAITRESS ASKS *if he wants another Stella. He does.*

ESQUIRE: You're famous for losing sixty-three pounds on *The Machinist*. You looked scary. What's up with that?

BALE: That was just a kind of an asshole seeing if he could have the discipline to mentally control himself for an amount of time. *Squirming, he returns to his sore spot.*

BALE: I have a very sissy job, where I go to work and get my hair done, and people do my makeup, and I go and say lines and people spoil me rotten. And everyone has that kind of curiosity of how far can you go, how far can you take it. I think it's always good testing yourself. With various things that could be incredibly unimpressive to other people, but there's some meaning to it within yourself—and also stupid, which many people called me during that time [laughs].

But The Machinist prepared Bale for his next part, his star-making turn as the darkest of all superheroes.

ESQUIRE: Batman's a perfect role for you. He's the only action hero who really captures you. [In fact, now that we think of it, Batman is the inconceivable middle point between the roles Bale played in Little Women and American Psycho.] Did you know that going in?

BALE: No. All I knew was that there was a whole lot more there that I'd never seen and there was some extreme in the interpretation that should be taken. So I just said, "I just gotta hope that they're gonna go with that, and if they don't, that's not the version I'd like to be involved with anyway." And it's that per-

verse thing in life, where when you're able to achieve a certain recklessness, you actually end up getting good results. You have to throw everything aside and say, "What the hell, I'm gonna do it this way, and if they don't like it, I wanna do it anyway." It avoids that anxiety of "How do I manipulate this and fake it so that people believe me?" That's never gonna work. So that's the kind of abandonment you gotta have.

TUGGED BETWEEN THESE polarities of control and recklessness, Bale is emerging as a paradoxical and driven person of a piece with many of his darker movies, which can feel less like entertainment than forensic research. (This probably accounts for his place on Entertainment Weekly's list of the top eight "most powerful cult heroes of the decade past.")

ESQUIRE: So what's with all the darkness and the miserable characters and the guilt?

BALE: What do you mean "the darkness"? What do you mean? Give me examples.

ESQUIRE: *The Machinist*.

BALE: All right, that's an extreme example.

ESQUIRE: I'll say.

BALE: I don't like to kinda look at any patterns in my movies. But I guess *Harsh Times* is kind of harsh. *The New World*. And the Batman movies. *The Prestige*. *Rescue Dawn*. *3:10 to Yuma*. *I'm Not There*. *Velvet Goldmine*. I'm sure I've got some non-dark-guilt-ridden pieces.

ESQUIRE: *Newsies*.

BALE: *Newsies*.

ESQUIRE: But you were this singing, dancing, happy kid. What happened to you?

BALE: I'm still singing and dancing and happy.



ESQUIRE: NOT TO ARGUE, BUT THAT'S NOT REALLY TRUE. BALE: ARE YOU CALLING ME A LIAR? AM I LYING?

I just don't like musicals, that's all.

ESQUIRE: Or romantic comedies, I hear.

BALE: I just don't find them very romantic or funny much of the time.

ESQUIRE: What about *Bringing Up Baby*?

BALE: Is that a movie?

ESQUIRE: It's Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn.

BALE: I don't know it.

ESQUIRE: *The Philadelphia Story*?

BALE: Never seen it.

ESQUIRE: *Breakfast at Tiffany's*?

BALE: Never seen it.

ESQUIRE: Get the fuck outta here.

BALE: You're not talking to a cinemaphile.

ESQUIRE: But I bet you've seen *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*.

BALE: Yes.

ESQUIRE: *Blue Velvet*?

BALE: Yes.

ESQUIRE: What else?

BALE: I saw *The Wild Bunch* recently. I remember being rocked by *Naked* when that came out—and I hate the pretentiousness of that, referencing a Mike Leigh movie, but it really did fascinate me for some reason.

ESQUIRE: It's a very grungy movie.

BALE: And Chris Farley was just phenomenal. *Beverly Hills Ninja* will always remain one of my tops.

ESQUIRE: Now you're lying.

BALE: I have watched that movie. One time I sat down and watched it two nights in a row, and cried with laughter both times. The guy just was a phenomenon, and is missed dearly in my household.

NOW IT'S TIME TO DIG *a little deeper.*

ESQUIRE: You have these very strongly held beliefs, some of them a bit peculiar. Were you troubled by some growing egotism or vanity or something?

BALE: No. I primarily felt embarrassment through most of my performances.

ESQUIRE: Because of the quality or the doing?

BALE: I'm not sure. I never put my finger on it. But there was a love for it at the same time—and I don't think it's amazing to have those contradictions. None of us are sound bites, you know.

ESQUIRE: You seem to have a puritanical streak.

BALE: Puritanical? Really?

ESQUIRE: The embarrassment. The rigor.

BALE: The flagellations?

ESQUIRE: Yes, exactly.

BALE: I have a hair shirt on right now, you know.

ESQUIRE: Instead of reveling in the fact that you're a rich and famous movie star, you're

embarrassed.

BALE: Believe me, I have things I revel in without any hesitation. This is just not something to be quite as proud of as many people would have you believe.

ESQUIRE: What do you mean?

BALE: Art is something to be proud of. Art is no compromise. As an actor, you're giving it up, you're at the mercy of so many other people. So are you truly reaching the lofty goals? No, of course you're not. And there are some movies where that was never the aim anyway.

After a brief pause, he continues. You know, I've been doing this quite a long time. It doesn't make me feel special. But I actually love it more for the reality of how it is done, the sinew and the bone of how it's really put together.

ESQUIRE: Can you be more specific?

BALE: One word: *immersion*. It doesn't matter whether I would be acting or doing anything else. It's about taking things a little too far. It's about you don't know the edge until you've gone over it. That fascinates me.

Later, explaining why he refuses to use the "Method acting" technique of remembering the past to stimulate emotion, he returns to the theme.

BALE: I'm not on a couch having therapy. And it's very limiting if I have to be able to relate every damn thing in somebody else's life to something that's happened in mine. At the end of the day, I'm faking it. Pure imagination, and it's only phony if you don't go far enough with it. You can become obsessive and it can get to the point where you're almost losing yourself. You've become a vessel. And holy shit, things start happening. And I'm hating the way I'm sounding right now, because I sound like a tosser, but that's my secret ambition.

ESQUIRE: To become a vessel.

BALE: Yes, but I don't believe in revealing that.

ESQUIRE: Why?

BALE: Just do it! Don't talk about it, get on with it.

ESQUIRE: But you're a fucking actor! You're in the self business!

BALE: It's the opposite of self! It's actually saying, "I don't stand a chance being myself. I've gotta create somebody else in order to communicate. If I remove myself from all of

my own memories and inhibitions and create another character—holy shit! I can reach out and communicate in *that way*." So to me, it's actually about trying to fucking destroy the self, and then you might be able to hit something. There's some quote, I think it's Oscar Wilde, "An artist puts nothing of himself into his art."

ESQUIRE: You know that's total bullshit, right?



BALE: Explain that! Explain that! Why is that bullshit?

ESQUIRE: Look at Scorsese, he's all over his movies—

BALE: He's the director!

ESQUIRE: Dostoyevsky's all over his novels!

BALE: He's the writer!

ESQUIRE: Jack Nicholson is all over his parts!

BALE: Great movie stars, that's what they do provide. Steve McQueen, you wanna fucking *be* Steve McQueen. What cooler fucking guy in the world than that? I can't do that. I don't believe in myself enough to do that. I've always thought, if I was in a band, I'd never want to be the lead singer.

ESQUIRE: Bassist? Drummer?

BALE: Well, I've got to admit to a bit of ego. I'd have to be lead guitarist [*laughing*].

CLEARLY, THIS WAS *the site of a major—as Sig Freud used to say—“cathexis.” The obvious course was to push harder.*

ESQUIRE: I totally get it except for one thing.

BALE: What?

ESQUIRE: You were this way when you were thirteen, so it must be an instinctive reaction that goes deeper than any of your explanations.

BALE: All right! We're not gonna delve into this greatly, but it comes from moving around a lot and the necessity for re-creation. There you go. That's what it stems from. I was doing it in my own life well before I was doing it as a job.

Quickly, he changes the subject back to Dickie.

BALE: Do you want to speak with Dickie?

ESQUIRE: No.

BALE: You don't wanna have a conversation with Dickie?

ESQUIRE: Not for this.

BALE: He's a character, man.

ESQUIRE: If I were allowed to write a real piece, then I would wanna talk to him.

BALE: Well, you can go off the Q&A if you're talking to Dickie. I'd love this piece to be about Dickie.

BUT GRADUALLY, *if only because he's too committed to being a normal guy to waste this much energy avoiding it, Bale begins to open up.*

ESQUIRE: What would you do if you weren't an actor?

BALE: I think I probably would have tried to experience my own

stories in the way my father did—the sort of travel, the randomness of life, educating himself through experiences. [*Bale's father was a swashbuckling figure who flew planes, sold jeans and skateboards, worked as an animal-rights activist, and married three women—including, late in life, Gloria Steinem.*] I think I get that partially through acting, but you have to make an effort to be in an unprotected environment because everyone thinks you're a completely incapable idiot who couldn't possibly brush his teeth without an assistant. You have to make an effort in order to be able to actually experience the country that you're in.

BALE: I would have been very happy just cruising around and enjoying the unexpected. I've never been ambitious. I didn't go to college. I

came from a family who didn't. My dad was a fucking brilliant man who pretended he went to college and got a long way with that.

ESQUIRE: Really?

BALE: Yeah! And kudos for him, man. He had the brains. He was a very, very capable man.

ESQUIRE: When did he die?

BALE: Seven years ago.

ESQUIRE: So he got to see you succeed.

BALE: Yeah, if you call it success. But I don't think his notion of success was ever, "Hey, do some nice big movies, son."

Bale returns to this another time.

BALE: Ain't none of 'em gonna be what I'm thinking about when I'm about to go off the clock. Not a single one of 'em. Holy shit, I'm gonna be sad if that's what's on my mind at that point.

ESQUIRE: "I was in *Batman* once."

BALE: Dementia would have to set in to a severe degree for me to be happy with that. *But this contradicts the intensity Bale brings to his work, another check to sound-bite simplifications. He pauses, then makes one last point about the college education he never got.*

BALE: It's just not something I could do. Maybe I would do it now. I probably would. I don't mean literally. No way in hell I'm doing it now. But if I could go back then and do it, yes, maybe I would have done. I do remember, at the time, looking at my friends who were in college and kinda thinking, "That looks like a laugh."

ESQUIRE: But you were working.

BALE: Yeah, I was working. It was when I was first getting employed out here.

ESQUIRE: And you were supporting your family. There was pressure on you.

BALE: You don't recognize it until later. But I don't like being a little whiner. So I don't wanna follow down that pathway.

ESQUIRE: But you could whine if you let it loose.

BALE: Who couldn't? But hopefully you choose not to.

LATER, another glimpse emerged:

ESQUIRE: How often did you move?

BALE: Pretty regularly. One place, the longest I was in, was for five years. At times two months, six months. No knowledge in advance. Two days' notice—"We're going somewhere else." That kinda thing.

ESQUIRE: That's tough.

BALE: All fantastic. All fantastic, I loved it.

ESQUIRE: But you lose your friends.

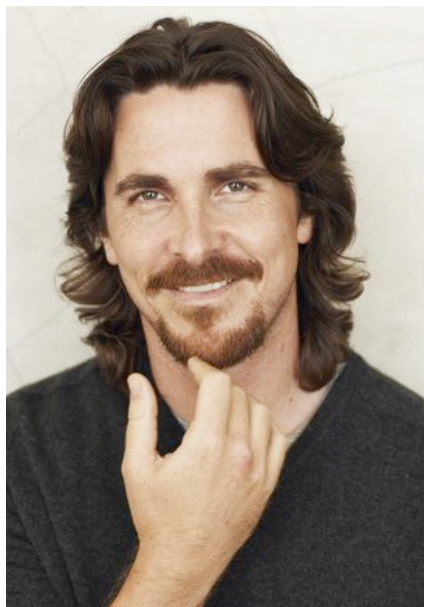
BALE [*low horror-movie-style voice, pointing to his head*]: Yeah—a lot of 'em in here.

Was he joking? Other comments show the permanent imprint of those early experiences:

BALE: I never, in any city I've ever been in, never remember the names of streets. The longest



IT'S THE OPPOSITE OF SELF! IT'S ACTUALLY SAYING, "I DON'T STAND A CHANCE BEING MYSELF. I'VE GOTTA CREATE SOMEBODY ELSE IN ORDER TO COMMUNICATE."



place I ever lived in was for five years and I didn't know the name of the next street over.

ESQUIRE: Why bother?

BALE: Why bother! I think there's such enjoyment in just getting lost in a city. Having no idea where you are, how you're gonna get out of it. Getting to be the middle of the night, you're still lost, walking around. That's the best way to discover a city. That's how you're born into life. You got no freaking idea which way's up or down.

ESQUIRE: It's interesting. You have this trauma of moving around a lot, so you either try to control it or embrace chaos. Or both.

BALE: Embracing it and going, "What's the worst that could happen?"

Later, equally unprompted, another remark bubbles up from the place where not wanting to do something brushes the naked perfumed shoulder of wanting to do it even more:

BALE: I have to admit that yeah, it's absolutely perverse, it's contradictory, it sounds hypocritical, I like being invisible. "A fucking actor? Who says he wants to be invisible? Oh yeah, good choice, mate." But the point is, you do get to become invisible as an actor. And I know that much of that also comes from [*his pitch keens high as he breaks into a mock lament*] growing up, moving around, different towns, and all that kind of stuff, and then getting attention at a very young age when you're not ready for it and you have responsibilities, financial responsibilities, stuff which other people don't get until much later in life. So you go, "Man, wasn't it great before all this happened? Back when I was eight years old and I could go shoplift and nobody knew who I was and I was invisible." You know? And what glory days those were, and how I lost 'em too early. You know?

ESQUIRE: That was good, a two-part answer—first the rationalization, and then you anticipated where I was gonna go and gave me the real reason. Now I don't have to ask any more questions.

BALE: We're done?

ESQUIRE: No.

As Bale relaxes, he reveals a gentler side.

BALE: I spent most of the morning being the audience for my daughter's singing and dancing today.

His daughter is five, almost ready for first grade.

ESQUIRE: Is she in a preschool show or something?

BALE: No, she just does her own thing. She just makes up her own stuff and performs for us.

ESQUIRE: That's the most fun, right?

BALE: Yeah, it's a whole different party circuit that you find yourself in. I love the bouncy-castle party circuit right now.

ESQUIRE: Bouncy castle?

BALE: You know those things.

ESQUIRE: Oh yeah, those things.

Watch out, Werner Herzog.

BALE: The last few years of my life have been spent just watching animation—for my daughter—and getting a kick out of that.

ESQUIRE: Thank God for Pixar.

BALE: Exactly.

ESQUIRE: Which is your favorite?

BALE: I love anything that she likes. If she's getting a kick out of it, I love it. I find myself tearing up at the most [*continued on page 174*]

Christian Bale

[continued from page 121] ridiculous things now, sitting next to my daughter while she's watching a movie. Me and my wife look across at each other like, "Oh my God! Are we really doing this? Yes we are!"

ESQUIRE: Give me an example.

BALE: Up.

But he seems most relaxed on the topic he calls "my extreme low level of motorcycling that I'm very, very into currently."

BALE: I have this motorcycle that is a gorgeous motorcycle. It ain't crazy expensive, but it's up there. And people who know motorcycles like this motorcycle a great deal, and people who don't like motorcycles, they could still look at this motorcycle and go, "That's somethin' special. That's really lovely."

The bike is an MV Agusta F4, \$25,000 list price. The manufacturer gave it to him because he suggested using it for the Bat-bike in The Dark Knight.

BALE: I have yet to ride it, but I'm not keepin' it like a piece of art. I don't want to use it until I really know what goes on inside of it. In order to get there, I purchased a fantastic 600 bike that's just incredible. I love it, but I'm kinda—I've had a lot of falls. So I'm just kinda workin' my way up until I'll be good enough to take that one on the track.

ESQUIRE: Do you race?

BALE: I race myself.

He returns to the subject later:

BALE: It's hypnotizing. It looks simple, but you try it and you learn the nuances and you come to appreciate it incredibly. I wish to God I discovered that years back, you know? It's just it's a beautiful thing, it really is. You get those occasional moments when you're absolutely calm, and you've just done something that would have scared you shitless earlier that day, and you've just done it like it was nothing. I find that very relaxing.

And again:

It ain't therapy for me. But is it something that I obsess about? Yes. Is it something that I'd like to do every single day of my life? No. But at least once a week.

And again:

What I like about it is that I'm not somebody who's in movies. I'm a guy who's not very good going around the track with a bunch of guys who are a hell of a lot better.

Another time, he compares it to acting.

BALE: The technical stuff you get through fairly quickly. Then it really does become sort of therapy—it's all about the relationships, reading between the lines, seeing through the veneer. Acting's not about anything if it's not about the ability to read people. And one thing I've been so surprised at—I'm finding that through talking with better riders, so much of it comes down to therapy. After going around the track, we sit down and talk about what happened, and it actually all comes down to: What are you thinking about

as you're going through this? Can you relax as you're doing this? Are you understanding what's fully happening? Are you looking far enough ahead so you're not panicked and you're not surprised by anything?

As the bar fills up and the chatter gets louder, he glances at the digital recorder and notices the subtle signs of discomfort few celebrities pick up on.

BALE: Is it getting too loud for you?

He leads the way out to a balcony overlooking the Pacific where there are rich men in blazers with icy cocktails and frosted wives.

ESQUIRE: Much better. So what were you saying?

BALE: Some shit. Trying to wing my way to sound like I know what I'm talking about. These are some nice greasy chips, aren't they?

Once more into the breach—into the wall, actually. But whining doesn't help.

BALE: You don't feel like I'm allowing you to do a good story? I'm inhibiting your process? I'm inhibiting your talents?

ESQUIRE: Yeah. You should say, "What do you need?"

BALE: I'll tell my story. I ain't gonna let you tell it.

ESQUIRE: But I can do it better than you.

BALE: You know whose story I want you to tell? Dickie's! I want you to get on the phone with Dickie, and he'll chat with you about making the movie and everything.

ESQUIRE: Okay, to hell with it, give me his number.

BALE: You wanna call him right now?

ESQUIRE: No.

Now night is coming on. The ocean is shimmering, the sun is smearing huge washes of orange and red above the Santa Monica Pier, the rich are finishing their cocktails.

BALE: I'm gonna have to get cracking in ten minutes.

He says he's going to read a story to his daughter. What can you say to that?

ESQUIRE: I release you, you can go.

But you can't resist a last assault on his cloak of invisibility.

So how would you like people to think of you?

BALE: I don't care.

ESQUIRE: Really?

BALE: I don't care. Being misunderstood is not a bad thing as an actor. I know the truth. *He stands up and flicks his eyes across the scene before us, the balcony overlooking the Pacific with the rich men and their wives, and flashes a last charming smile—this time with a measure of mischief.*

BALE: You know the reason I picked this place?

ESQUIRE: Why?

BALE: 'Cause it has nothing to do with my life. I never come here, ever. It's as far removed from any place that I would ever go to. And that's exactly why I chose it. 'Cause it has *nothing* to do with me. 🍌