



**PEOPLE ARE CONSTANTLY WRITING AS IF THEY CAN'T WAIT FOR ME TO PASS THIS MORTAL SPHERE: "THE LAST OF THE LINE," "THE LAST OF THE GREAT TRADITION." I DON'T LIKE TO THINK THAT I'M THE LAST OF ANYTHING.**

Well, exactly. In any film made about the Holocaust or anything similar, you can make it very convincing, but you know it isn't real. Now, you talk about my experiences during the war, and you align them with the macabre. What you're really talking about is death and torture, massacre. When I see young actors playing characters from wars, they naturally haven't the faintest idea, all they can do is what an expert advisor tells them to do. Because there's no feeling of horror or torture or death, of mutilation or destruction –

**They have nothing to reference. Boleaslavsky's fifth lesson of acting is observation.**

Ah. That's the most important of all.

**Who are your favorite macabre writers? I know you were friends with Robert Bloch.**

Oh, I was very fond of Robert. Marvelous writer. Lovecraft, of course. Arthur Machen. Poe virtually invented it. Bradbury has written some very scary stories. Stoker. Almost all the great writers have written a horrifying story. Oscar Wilde with *Dorian Gray*, and HG Wells. Robert Louis Stevenson; even Louis Carol was pretty scary. Algernon Blackwood, Ambrose Bierce—who disappeared. Americans. Isn't that strange? Almost all of them are American. Washington Irving. Why are most of them American? That's one for the Americans.

**Have you seen *The Blair Witch Project*?**

I felt as if I was on the deck of a ship, pitching in a storm, it almost gave you motion sickness. Clever idea, though. The most frightening film I've ever seen is *Rosemary's Baby*. You don't see anything. That's why. And, of course, *Psycho*. The only time I jumped out of my seat was the scene in *Psycho* at the top of the stairs. Usually, I can see what's coming; I can tell you what they're going to say. Not that time. He was a master of the macabre, Hitchcock.

**This acting tradition on film stretching from Conrad Veigt to Lon Chaney, Bela Lugosi, Karloff –**

Basil Rathbone, Claude Raines –

**Vincent Price, Peter Cushing, yourself. But who's taking the mantle?**

No one. People are constantly writing as if they can't wait for me to pass this mortal sphere: "the last of the line,"

"the last of the great tradition." I don't like to think that I'm the last of anything. When Vincent Price was asked what he wanted on his gravestone, he said, "I'll be back". I want written on mine: "Too soon".

**Can you speak about *Lord of the Rings*?**

No. Well what would you ask?

**Why not Gandalf?**

...One doesn't have all that many specific ambitions as an actor. One always wants to play worthwhile roles, to make a valid contribution. "Why not Gandalf?" It was my dream to play Gandalf. But I'm too old. I realize that. And I accept it. Because obviously the producers and certainly the insurance companies, looking at a man at my age...I'm not saying that's the reason that I didn't play Gandalf; I may not have been considered for Gandalf. I think the choice of Ian McKellen was a very fine one. And I worked almost all the time with him. A delightful experience. He's a very distinguished actor. So is Brad Dourif. It was a dream to play Gandalf, but I had to face reality. I have no complaints. Saruman is a wonderful part.

**It's actually the kind of role you've perfected, a character with layers. He's a turncoat.**

That's the point. There's something behind it. There's no compassion in Saruman, but he has a sense of humor. He's sarcastic and vicious.

**You've read this book literally every year –**

Every year since it was published. It's always been one of my dreams.

**Can you talk about *Star Wars*?**

I can't say anything.

**You could consider it to be your last project with Peter Cushing, considering he was in the original.**

Yes, I'm very conscious of that. I was devoted to him and I miss him terribly. I'm constantly saying things out loud as if I was talking to him, because I know they'd make him laugh. If people would've heard our telephone conversations: he would be Tweety Bird or something like that, and I would be Sylvester or Yosemite Sam. Entire conversations went on like this all the time. And I miss Vincent very much, too. Not because we did the same kind of movies. I miss Boris.

**If it were offered, would you want to do Lear?**

On film? It's often been suggested to me. I think I could, but it would take me at least a year to prepare. But I couldn't do it in the theatre. The greatest Lear I ever saw was Donald Wolfitt on whom *The Dresser* is based. Do you know the one expression that I dislike more than any other about an actor? "A towering performance." It's an utterly silly thing to say. They say it about me because of my height.

**You do hold the record of Tallest Male Star.**

I'm not. James Arness.

**There's a Jewish tradition that says every person has three names: the one you're given at birth –**  
Christopher Frank Carandini Lee.

**A name, of course filled with your family history. Then there's the name that others call you –**  
Christopher.

**As well as the hundreds of film characters by which people know you.**

Ah, yes. Peter O'Toole and Michael Bentine called me "Kit." I'm also called "Lofty," which is a very typical Cockney phrase for somebody who's very tall. Also, "Big Duke," affectionately.

**In this tradition, the third name is the one by which you refer to yourself.**

Me? Well, Peter Ustinov, one of my oldest friends—I have never come across anyone in our profession with that kind of brain—called his autobiography, *Dear Me*. Isn't that a wonderful title? Brilliant. What a lovely guy. He's got so many strings to his bow, it's almost unfair.

At the end of our talk, Mr. Lee walked me downstairs, helping to carry packages I'd promised to bring back to the States for his manager. Leaving them in the entry, we walked to find a taxi, chatting about his plans to head to Australia for *Star Wars*. We found a cab, returned to the apartment building, loaded the packages and said goodbye. Upon arriving at my hotel, the Cockney-accented cabbie turned around and asked me, "Ooo was the 'eavy 'itter?" I didn't get him at first and asked him to repeat the question. "The 'eavy 'itter, in the cab back there?"

"Oh," I said, "That was Christopher Lee." "Right, right" he said, "I kept thinking Vincent Price".

Right. Christopher Lee: "heavy hitter" indeed. ♦