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# The Genre Film as Booby Trap: 1970s Genre Bending and *The French Connection*

by Todd Berliner

*Genre-bending films rely on viewers' habitual responses to generic codes, misleading audiences into expecting conventional outcomes. The French Connection (1971) exploits spectators' expectations of police-detective-film formulas and thereby catches viewers offguard, creating a more unsettling experience than the genre traditionally provides.*

In *Patton* (1970, George Schaefer), the hero delivers a line one does not expect to hear from a Hollywood war hero. Surveying the battlefield after a horrific slaughter of troops, General Patton says, "God help me, I do love it so." The line is not surprising, given what the audience knows about Patton, but it contradicts our expectations of Hollywood war heroes, who traditionally go to battle not gleefully but out of reluctant bravery and a sense of duty.

*Patton* is hardly a traditional war picture, but it is indeed characteristic of 1970s genre films, which regularly resisted classical Hollywood scenarios. Film-makers in this era normally treated generic conventions as if they were outmoded film techniques from an older, more innocent generation of filmmakers. The period did produce some pictures that made no effort to reconceive the conventional tropes of the genre: the whodunit *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974, Sidney Lumet), the caper movie *The Sting* (1974, George Roy Hill), and the musical *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (1971, Robert Stevenson), for instance, would not have looked much different had they appeared a decade or two earlier. More typically, however, movies of the 1970s played against convention.

In considering how 1970s filmmakers revised Hollywood genres, we can divide many of the films into two categories: genre breakers and genre benders. A genre breaker loudly broadcasts its violation of tradition, inviting audiences to join in the film's efforts to expose, and often mock, genre conventions. In contrast, a genre bender violates conventions without advertising the fact. A genre bender relies on viewers' habitual responses to generic codes, thereby misleading them to expect a conventional outcome. The film seems true to form at first, then, like a booby trap, it catches the spectator off guard. William Friedkin's *The French Connection* (1971) perfectly illustrates 1970s genre bending. Capitalizing on audiences' expectations of Hollywood formulas, the film uses the familiar conventions of the police-detective genre to elicit viewer responses that it later undermines. However, unlike genre breakers, the film does not defy convention in order to comment on its genre or to

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give audiences mastery over the genre. On the contrary, by employing and then subverting conventional Hollywood scenarios, *The French Connection* makes audiences feel uneasy and uncertain about the meaning of the film.

**Genre Breakers and Genre Benders.** Proclaiming their freedom from the strictures of film tradition, many 1970s filmmakers defied the conventions of genre with conspicuous audacity. They called glaring attention to generic constraints and, in the process, critiqued Hollywood contrivances. Filmmakers, like film scholars, have frequently turned to the western to comment on Hollywood, largely because westerns tend to mythologize America's past. Filmmakers in the 1970s exploited the western's ideological vulnerability by exposing the myth-making strategies that earlier generations of filmmakers normally attempted to conceal. John Cawelti, for example, has demonstrated the ways in which *Little Big Man* (1970, Arthur Penn) reverses Hollywood myths about cowboys and Indians in order to debunk them: "In [Penn's] film it is the Indians who are humane and civilized, while the pioneers are violent, corrupt, sexually repressed, and madly ambitious."<sup>1</sup> Richard Maltby has suggested that the "self-consciousness" of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973, Sam Peckinpah) "indicates the extent to which it, and other similar movies made in the same period, exposed the conventions by which the genre had operated."<sup>2</sup>

These films, along with numerous others, helped establish what amounted to a new Hollywood genre—a genre-breaking genre. Fueled by their differences from previous films of the same genres, genre breakers comment on earlier movies, promoting the notion that Hollywood's standard tropes are now passé. It should not be surprising, then, that scholarship about such films largely points out what the movies themselves end up pointing out: Hollywood genre films are deceptive and contrived. William G. Simon and Louise Spence, for example, argue that Robert Altman's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976) "employs irony as a self-critical discursive trope to debunk and demystify the central motifs and icons of the genre."<sup>3</sup> Glenn Mann holds that Altman's *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971) "demythologizes" the western hero and represents the "demise" of the western myth.<sup>4</sup> Altman himself said essentially the same thing about *McCabe*: "I just wanted to take a very standard Western story with a classic line and do it real or what I felt was real, and destroy all the myths of heroism."<sup>5</sup>

Genre breakers are analogous to a kind of film scholarship that Rick Altman calls an "ideological approach" to genre, which "characterizes each individual genre as a specific type of lie, an untruth whose most characteristic feature is its ability to masquerade as truth."<sup>6</sup> Hence, the reason genre breakers have attracted such exhaustive scholarly treatment and tend to be critical favorites is that they do what film scholars and critics do: they comment on films.

In other words, genre breakers are "in movies," inside jokes about Hollywood. By inviting spectators to note the difference between the film predicted by the genre and the film they are watching, a genre breaker makes its viewers feel movie literate. So, for example, when viewers watch a genre-breaking Hollywood whodunit, such as *The Last of Sheila* (1973, Herbert Ross) or *Murder by Death* (1976, Robert Moore), they get to feel they know something about Hollywood and about

whodunits. They get to recognize the irony; they get to “get it.” Indeed, the distinguishing pleasure of genre breakers as a group is that they make us feel superior to the genre films they debunk.

The tendency of genre-breaking films to give audiences a feeling of mastery over a genre is evident in such musicals as *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974, Brian De Palma), *Bugsy Malone* (1976, Alan Parker), and *All That Jazz* (1979, Bob Fosse), which highlight the technique of breaking into song—rather than trying to conceal it, as earlier musicals had done—in order to make fun of Hollywood artifice.<sup>7</sup> At least one nonmusical film of the 1970s also uses songs to ridicule Hollywood. When the theme song to Altman’s *The Long Goodbye* (1973) resurfaces within the diegesis—on car stereos, as supermarket Muzak, on characters’ doorbells, and in almost a dozen other unlikely places—the film is asking us to deride the artifice of film scoring. Not surprisingly, *The Long Goodbye* also mocks the conventions of its principal genre—the private-detective film. The role of Philip Marlowe (previously played by such rugged actors as Humphrey Bogart and Robert Mitchum) is played by Elliott Gould, known for his uptight roles in intellectual comedies. Like earlier Marlowes, this one makes wisecracks, but he mumbles them under his breath, behaving more like a snotty private dick than a witty one. At one point, Marlowe, parodying the stock dialogue of old private-eye movies, says to a policeman interrogating him, “Is this where I’m supposed to say, ‘What is all this about?’ and he says, uh, ‘Shut up. I ask the questions’?” When the film closes with the song *Hooray for Hollywood* (which also opens the movie), audiences no doubt appreciate the ironic commentary on the story and on movies themselves. By that point, Hollywood has been emptied of its power to deceive us.

During the 1970s, at the same time genre-breaking movies emerged, another category of genre variation started to become popular. Genre-bending films also rework genre conventions but without cracking them open. Like genre breakers, they play with our generic expectations, but genre benders do not expose their genres’ ideological weaknesses. Nor do they make audiences feel superior to the genre. In fact, genre benders deny viewers the ideological mastery that genre breakers frequently congratulate us for having gained. Instead, genre benders exploit our habitual responses to generic conventions in order to set us up for their unconventional outcomes.

*Chinatown* (1974, Roman Polanski) is a perfect example of a genre bender. Traditionally, private-eye films portray the detective as smarter and savvier than anyone else in the movie. In keeping with that tradition, *Chinatown*’s Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) behaves with the brash confidence characteristic of a conventional private eye; however, the movie recurrently exposes how little he really understands. He says at one point, “I’m not supposed to be the one who’s caught with his pants down.” Thus, like *The Long Goodbye*, *Chinatown* violates the conventions of the private-detective film. However, whereas Altman’s film calls attention to viewers’ expectations of the genre, *Chinatown* uses those expectations against them so that, by failing to satisfy them, the film catches spectators off guard. Viewers are usually as surprised by Gittes’s ignorance as he is, suckered into trusting his hunches, which, by the rules of the genre, an audience is supposed to be able to

trust. While *The Long Goodbye* pokes fun at the private-detective genre by highlighting the artificiality of its conventions, *Chinatown* gives the conventions new significance by surreptitiously changing their function in the narrative.

John Cawelti also points to the way the film perverts traditional private-detective formulas, but his argument differs from mine in an essential way. Whereas I am suggesting that *Chinatown* combines genre conventionality with genre deviation in order to make audiences falsely predict the outcome of several scenes, Cawelti argues that the film does so as a means of “ironically commenting upon the generic experience itself.”<sup>8</sup> *Chinatown*, he writes, brings “its audience to see [the private-eye] genre as the embodiment of an inadequate and destructive myth.”<sup>9</sup> For Cawelti, because the film is genre literate—portraying the insufficiency of the private eye’s traditional character traits—the film must also be critiquing its genre and, in the process, educating viewers about the myths surrounding private detectives. In other words, Cawelti sees *Chinatown* as a genre breaker, one that encourages viewers to adopt its derisive attitude toward private-eye conventions and that offers its audience mastery over the ideologies that manipulated previous filmgoers.

But, far from teaching audiences about private-eye conventions, *Chinatown* instead keeps them largely in the dark. Indeed, if viewers were learning to see through the genre, they would not trust Gittes for very long. However, whereas viewers of *The Long Goodbye* never anticipate conventional results from their private detective (a more obvious loser than Gittes), viewers of *Chinatown* generally expect their detective to succeed. Indeed, viewers are so reliant on *Chinatown*’s generic promises and so optimistic that there will be a generically suitable outcome that, despite Gittes’s shortcomings, our faith in him is never completely shaken. When he sets out to “find the girl,” we expect he will. We no doubt also suspect he will catch Hollis Mulwray’s murderer, even though we have witnessed Gittes’s misunderstandings, his puerile wit, and his occasional lack of poise, principles, and judgment. Gittes shows enough traditional private-eye ingenuity (impersonating a government official by swiping the man’s business card, determining the time a suspect moves his car by putting a watch under his tire, breaking the rear light of Mrs. Mulwray’s car so he can more easily tail her) and exhibits enough of the private eye’s other traditional characteristics (self-assurance, self-reliance, a cool toughness, and a useful capacity to move through all levels of society) that audiences are likely to trust he will be able to solve the larger problems, despite the character’s frequent violations of that trust. Gittes’s ignorance and ineptitude surprise us again and again, up to and including the times he fails to expose corruption, bring his suspect to justice, and restore order to the city.

Hence, we can learn much more about the private-detective genre from Cawelti’s essay on *Chinatown* than from the film itself, since the essay contains a far more overt critique of the genre than can be found anywhere in the movie. It is doubtful that, even by the end of the film, audiences have learned any lesson about private-detective movies. If Cawelti were right, then, once viewers recognized the irony of the ending, they would have experienced a sense of genre expertise. But the ending of *Chinatown* is too ambiguous and unnerving for the audience to feel such complacency. More likely, *Chinatown* causes viewers to distrust their *own* ability to

grasp events rather than to distrust the traditional private-eye hero or, as Cawelti says, to view the genre "as the embodiment of an inadequate and destructive myth."

**Genre Bending as a Distinct Form of Genre Variation.** Reworking generic conventions is, in itself, nothing special. As Stephen Neale points out, all genre films exhibit genre variation because the films try both to fit within their genres and to differentiate themselves from earlier films in their genres: "If each text within a genre were, literally, the same, there would simply not be enough difference to generate either meaning or pleasure. Hence there would be no audience. Difference is absolutely essential to the economy of genre."<sup>10</sup> A film like *Chinatown*, however, does not simply stretch the limits of generic novelty; it exploits our familiarity with its genre to make us uncertain about the meaning of the film, in effect using generic conventions for the purpose of deception. Audiences cannot trust the genre cues because the ones we are accustomed to relying on are, in this movie, not always stable. So, while all genre films deviate from tradition, as Neale says, only genre benders use genre to set booby traps for viewers, who unwittingly allow themselves to be manipulated by conventions familiar to them. Hence, audiences tend to feel more uncomfortable with genre benders than with other genre variations, because their conventional responses prove insufficient for making sense of the present scenario. Genre-bending films therefore have the opposite effect of genre-breaking films, which give one a sense of mastery by making one feel overly familiar with a genre. Genre benders end up making one feel inadequate because, as Noah Cross (John Huston) says to Jake Gittes, "You may *think* you know what you're dealing with, but, believe me, you don't."

Although few movies are as generically ingenious as *Chinatown*, several of the period bend genre in similarly inventive ways. Consider, for instance, two seventies caper movies: *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (1974, Michael Cimino) and *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975, Sidney Lumet). Although *Dog Day Afternoon* was marketed as a "true crime" film, it employs several caper-movie conventions: an urban setting, an emphasis on speed and timing, a bank as the target of the crime, an individualistic protagonist set against impersonal societal institutions, and a noble motive on the part of a sympathetic criminal hero.<sup>11</sup> The film, however, frequently injects ordinary concerns into its extraordinary central event, concerns that have no business in a caper movie. What if the hostages have to go to the bathroom? What if the criminal protagonist is bisexual? The deviations from type add an air of "realism" not because the film is more authentic with a bisexual bank robber (although Sonny Wortzik's real-life prototype was indeed bisexual) but because of the departure from convention. For instance, just as the heist has begun, one of the robbers decides he cannot go through with it, and when Sonny asks him for the keys to the getaway car, the robber replies, "Well, how will I get home?" Whereas conventional genre cues help us to predict narrative outcomes, such unexpected and unconventional intrusions of everyday life keep us from getting ahead of the movie, which, at such moments, seems to reflect the "randomness of reality."<sup>12</sup>

*Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* is a more typical caper movie and was marketed as one (the poster for the film read "He has exactly seven minutes to get rich quick!").

The film nonetheless surprises us by inserting elements that do not fit the genre. At the end of the movie, for instance, one of the robbers dies unexpectedly, not from a gun wound but from a brain hemorrhage. During the last fifteen minutes of the film—as the character grows slowly more paralyzed, first stumbling, then lisping, then passing out and dying—the rules of the universe appear to have changed. Can something like this happen in a caper movie? Like *Chinatown*, *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* have unnerving effects on audiences because these movies make use of standard conventions and then disrupt them with inventive variations.

Leo Braudy briefly alludes to something like genre bending in *The World in a Frame*. Braudy sees it as an occasional practice, rather than as describing a group of films, but his discussion helps explain how genre benders (which he simply calls “genre films”) catch their audiences unaware. He argues that “the genre film lures its audience into a seemingly familiar world, filled with reassuring stereotypes of character, action, and plot.”<sup>13</sup> According to Braudy, genre films lull us with an appearance of conventionality and, consequently, make us complacent and thus easy targets for manipulation. When we encounter a familiar generic cue—the town drunk, wolfsbane, “I’m just two weeks from retirement,” “Boil water and tear up some sheets”—we anticipate, out of habit, a limited number of corollary outcomes. If what follows falls outside the range of our expectations, however, as it does with genre bending, audiences may grow uneasy. Braudy goes on to say:

Genre films can exploit the automatic conventions of response for the purposes of pulling the rug out from under their viewers. The very relaxing of the critical intelligence of the audience, the relief that we need not make decisions—aesthetic, moral, metaphysical—about the film, allows the genre film to use our expectations against themselves, and, in the process, reveal to us expectations and assumptions that we may never have thought we had.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, it can be aesthetically exciting, although potentially disconcerting, when a genre film surprisingly switches from traditional genre use to genre bending, as in *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, which exploits our cozy familiarity with caper-movie scenarios and kills off one of our protagonists in an astonishingly unconventional way.

For Braudy, at their best, genre films bend their genres. Like Cawelti, however, Braudy focuses on the educational potential of genre films, justifying their aesthetic value, for instance, by suggesting that they “reveal to us expectations and assumptions that we may never have thought we had.” Throughout Braudy’s arguments, he emphasizes the ability of genre films to teach viewers about movies (Howard Hawks’s *His Girl Friday* [1940] is “a reflection on the importance of women reporters in many other films of the period”<sup>15</sup>), about society (genre films may contain a “radical critique of the values of the society that produced them”<sup>16</sup>), and about themselves (“self-conscious uses of genre can reveal our previous assumptions in a new perspective”<sup>17</sup>). In contrast, my argument addresses a specific effect of genre bending: the feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, and discomfort that arise when a seemingly conventional scenario ends up violating its own generic predictions. Such violations do not necessarily enlighten us, as Braudy and

Cawelti suggest. Rather, the genre benders considered here largely succeed in keeping us in the dark, always one step behind the films in our understanding of their meaning. In fact, genre bending often affects us precisely because it works below the level of our conscious understanding, exploiting our accustomed responses to coded stimuli without letting us know we have been so manipulated.

**1970s Genre Variation.** Genre breaking and genre bending represent opposite responses to the same phenomenon: the feeling, prevalent in the 1970s, that the conventions of Hollywood genres had worn out their efficacy. Genre breakers responded by sharing in audience's weariness with film tradition, standing back from the conventions and saying, "You can't manipulate us anymore" and, in effect, sounding the death knell of traditional genre use. Genre benders, by contrast, responded by using the same old conventions to manipulate audiences in novel ways, breathing new life into dying tropes. The first response seems almost inevitable, given the customary progression of a genre from classicism to exhaustion to parody.<sup>18</sup> The second response, however, is not inevitable. Although it necessarily relies on a classical period, genre bending can appear any time a skilled filmmaker sees an opportunity to exploit viewers' complacent acquiescence to cinematic tradition. One might expect to see genre bending, therefore, during a period such as the 1970s, when audiences were both tired of conventional Hollywood pictures and excited about cinema's new possibilities.<sup>19</sup>

As the foregoing remarks testify, 1970s filmmakers did not invent genre bending. Films such as *The Searchers* (1956, John Ford), *Touch of Evil* (1958, Orson Welles), and *Psycho* (1960, Alfred Hitchcock) all relied on genre to trip us up, and they used the contradiction between our conventional and unconventional responses to unnerve us. However, when 1970s filmmakers turned to genre bending, they refused to resolve the contradictions that arose, leaving us to sit uneasily with deeply inconsistent feelings about what we saw. Whereas earlier genre benders periodically reconciled the conflict in our responses so as not to make us inordinately uncomfortable or uncertain of our judgments, 1970s genre benders increasingly magnified the conflict, and normally we left the theater still feeling it.

A brief look at Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976) will help distinguish 1970s genre bending from genre bending in other periods. The film's protagonist, Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro), is in part modeled after the protagonists of westerns and private-detective movies of the 1940s and 1950s; the hero takes the law into his own hands in order to save an innocent girl from forces corrupting her. Scriptwriter Paul Schrader admitted that he patterned Travis in part after Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) from the earlier genre-bending movie *The Searchers*, and we can see in both characters a mixture of honorable savior and brutish murderer.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, *Taxi Driver* creates some of the same dissonant audience responses that characterize Ford's film, but it continually turns up the volume on the dissonance. For one thing, Travis is no John Wayne. A social freak, he turns to vigilantism to try to give purpose to his lonely life. However, even as the movie reveals our protagonist's perspective as distorted and disturbed, it uses a variety of generic conventions to encourage us to adopt his point of view: voice-over narration, a love interest, his



desire to save an abducted girl, a montage sequence of meticulous preparation and training, and a climactic shootout with a group of malignant foes. As his actions become more and more bizarre and unpalatable (starting when he takes his love interest to a pornographic movie and ending with his murderous rampage), the movie increasingly challenges our willingness to identify with him until, by the end of the film, his motivations are almost incomprehensible. Conventional behavior that, by tradition, we have come to consider satisfying and wholesome (such as efforts to save an innocent girl from a life of crime and degradation) here seem deeply troubling or even perverse. Far from resolving our conflicted feelings, the film's denouement only aggravates them when it reveals that society views Travis's bloodbath as an act of heroism and that he seems not to have worked his depravity out of his system. In *The Searchers*, conventionality and a feeling of resolution supplant the film's unsettling deviations from tradition. *Taxi Driver*, however, continually intensifies the conflict between our conventional responses and our unconventional ones, and, in the end, generic deviance wins out.

Scholars have given little critical attention to genre bending because the films do not form a tight group, and because their effects on audiences are usually more subtle than those of genre-breaking films and more difficult to demonstrate persuasively. However, these very qualities make them worthy of closer consideration.

***The French Connection and the Police-Detective Film.*** *The French Connection* is normally regarded as the supreme example of the police-detective film (sometimes called the "cop movie" or "police thriller"). However, the film is in fact a poor representative of the genre it supposedly epitomizes. Although famous for its scenes of action-packed excitement, its use of police-detective conventions is complicated, and the experience it delivers is more unsettling than that advertised by its flashy veneer.

The back of the video box for *The French Connection* reads as follows: "An action-packed thriller culminating in the biggest narcotics seizure of all time and the capture of all the smugglers ... except one." The only thing remarkable about this description is that it makes the movie sound like any other one might find in the "Action" section of a video store. By emphasizing the size of the narcotics seizure, the description highlights the success of the detectives, not the failure that is the ultimate focus of the film. The video box neglects to mention, for instance, that, while all but one smuggler were captured, most of them subsequently went free. The description even makes the escape of the main drug smuggler—the detectives' glaring error—sound, through a strategically placed ellipsis, like an exciting plot development, as though it were an element of the police-detective formula. The box misrepresents the film, ignoring those aspects that do not fit within the genre or distorting them so that they sound as if they do.<sup>21</sup>

The description on the box illustrates moviegoers' affection for genre. The writer of the blurb recognized that filmgoers prefer action movies that seem already familiar. Genre films promise an experience similar to ones viewers have enjoyed in the past, and they make the new and potentially different appear normal and comprehensible. Genre movies comfort viewers and make them confident in

their ability to predict outcomes. Like any other form of ritual, genre tells filmgoers where they are and where they are going.

*The French Connection* exploits filmgoers' confidence in generic promises by surreptitiously doctoring the police-detective formula. Viewers do what the back of the video box does: attempt to limit the movie to the dimensions of its generic mold. To feel comfortable with a film that quietly but frequently violates one's conception of a police thriller, viewers must somehow disregard the violations. In the end, however, the movie steps so far outside the formula that it undermines viewers' strenuous efforts to make it conventional. Hence, the movie works like a joke: it appears to head in a familiar and appropriate direction, but it ends somewhat off the mark it seemed to have been shooting for. As with a joke, we ultimately feel that, without our noticing it, the movie has been heading toward that ending all along.

Prior to its conclusion, however, *The French Connection* works mostly as a straightforward genre film. Gene Hackman plays Popeye Doyle, a violent renegade cop. Doyle leads the police department in arrests but is nonetheless distrusted and resented in his department, which is overly concerned with regulations and not concerned enough with the business of catching criminals. Working mainly on instinct, Doyle is rough, uncompromising, and obsessively committed to his case.

The description sounds familiar because it applies to lead characters in just about any police thriller released either before or after *The French Connection*, including the other major police thriller released in 1971, Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry*. Dirty Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) is, like Doyle, violent and headstrong, a renegade and a racist. According to a fellow officer, "Harry hates everybody—limeys, micks, hebes, fat dagos, niggers, honkies, chinks. You name it." He is in constant conflict with his superiors over his disregard of regulations and his excessive use of force. The most genre-typical exchange in the movie occurs between Callahan and the district attorney (Josef Sommer), the movie's spokesman for the rule of law, shortly after Harry apprehends a murderous psychopath:

D.A.: Where the hell does it say you've got a right to kick down doors, torture suspects, deny medical attention? Where have you been? Does Escobedo ring a bell? Miranda? I mean you must have heard of the Fourth Amendment. What I'm saying is that man had rights.

HARRY: Well, I'm all broken up about that man's rights ...

D.A.: This rifle might make a nice souvenir, but it's inadmissible as evidence ... It's the law.

HARRY: Well, then the law is crazy.

Focusing on "the system's" inefficiency in prosecuting criminals, the scene encourages viewers to identify with Harry in his vilification of "the law." Constitution or no constitution, it is hard not to take Harry's side.

Most police-detective movies made just before 1971 followed the same formula. In *Madigan* (1967, Don Siegel), Richard Widmark also plays a rough, unscrupulous police detective who, according to Chief Inspector Charles Kane (James Whitmore), nonetheless holds "more departmental citations for heroism and excellent service" than any other badge in the department. Kane has the following

conversation with Police Commissioner Russell (Henry Fonda) after Madigan allows a murder suspect to escape:

RUSSELL: Damn that Madigan. He was bound to get caught in a ringer sooner or later.

KANE: Madigan's a good cop, Tony. Doesn't always go by the book—

RUSSELL: I like the book, Charlie.

Constantly in conflict with his superiors, Madigan searches resolutely for the murderer, using any means, legal or not, to track down the criminal he has lost.

Steve McQueen's title character in *Bullitt* (1968, Peter Yates), while a good deal more wholesome than Callahan or Madigan, displays many of the same qualities. Detective Bullitt is nonconciliatory, uncompromising, and determined to catch his criminal. He has impeccable instincts about crime, does not play by the rules, and periodically ignores his superiors' orders. Midway through the movie, Captain Bennet (Simon Oakland) tells him to "play it by the book from now on." Bullitt, of course, plays it his own way, causing the same conflict with his boss that we see in *Madigan* and *Dirty Harry*. In all these movies, the detectives' instincts are always right and those of their superiors always wrong, though we are the only ones who know it.

The conventions of the police-detective genre extend at least as far back as 1950s police noir movies. Lieutenant Brown (Charles McGraw), for instance, from *The Narrow Margin* (1952, Richard Fleischer) and Detective Wilson (Robert Ryan) in *On Dangerous Ground* (1951, Nicholas Ray) display the thriller cop's characteristic roughness—they are tough cops who get results. Wilson's superior frequently bawls him out for his brutal tactics: "Make up your mind to be a cop, not a gangster with a badge." Sergeant Bannion (Glenn Ford) from Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953) exhibits all the traits of a full-blown thriller detective: he is rough, stubborn, lawless, and insubordinate, and his intuitions are invariably right. After he barges into the home of a big mobster, Bannion has the following exchange with Lieutenant Wilkes (Willis Bouchey):

WILKES: What makes you think you can walk into Lagana's house and slug his body-guard? ...

BANNION: I'm trying to tell you that nothing dirty happens in this city without Lagana's OK.

WILKES: I'm not interested in your theories, not when they affect my job. You're just begging to go back into uniform, pounding a beat out in the sticks.

Detective Diamond (Cornel Wilde) in *The Big Combo* (1955, Joseph H. Lewis) exhibits the same character traits as Bannion and has the identical relationship with his superior. Captain Peterson (Robert Middleton) bawls out Diamond for arresting the city's biggest mobster and all his hoodlums—"Ninety-six false arrests!"—and then closes the case. Like Bannion, Diamond is a fanatic, obsessively driving at the case anyway until all the hoodlums are dead or arrested.<sup>22</sup>

The dialogue in all these films is too heavy-handed to have been spoken in *The French Connection*, but the formula embedded in the dialogue is not. Doyle's immediate superior, Simonson (Eddie "Popeye" Egan, the real-life detective on whom Doyle is based), distrusts Doyle, as all proper cop-movie captains should. Theirs is the stock relationship of the genre. Early in the film, Doyle tries to convince

Simonson that an important drug shipment is heading to New York. When Doyle and his partner, "Cloudy" Russo (Roy Scheider), want to wiretap a suspect, Simonson cites the rule of law: "The first thing you know you'll wind up in an entrapment rap, the both of ya." FBI agent Mulderig (Bill Hickman), who is teamed with Doyle, also challenges him continually and holds a more personal grudge: "I know Popeye. His brilliant hunches cost the life of a good cop." Mulderig takes every opportunity to get in Doyle's way, coming across as more despicable than any of the criminals because his attacks on Doyle are so personal.

Whereas Simonson and Mulderig distrust Doyle, audiences of *The French Connection*—like those of *Dirty Harry*, *Madigan*, and *Bullitt*—have an intuitive trust in their protagonist's instincts. An early scene, in which Doyle and Russo visit a nightclub, helps establish that trust. When Doyle sees someone spreading money around, he becomes suspicious: "That table is definitely wrong." Like Doyle, the movie itself is suspicious of the table and "tells" us not to trust it. Whereas the shots of Doyle and Russo sitting at the bar are steady, those of the table are shot with a shaky, handheld camera, making the characters look suspicious. We see the table through Doyle's eyes, peering at the characters without hearing them. Instead, we hear eerie, high-pitched music along with Doyle and Russo's commentary ("Dig the creep that's coming to the table now." "That's Jewish Lucky. He don't look the same without numbers across his chest"). We trust Doyle's instincts because the movie does. Like Doyle, we know the table is "definitely wrong"; we can feel it. Doyle appears, at least at that moment, to be a generically suitable thriller detective.

One scene tellingly illustrates *The French Connection's* participation in the police-detective genre. The scene has all the elements: a headstrong cop working on instinct, obsessed with his case, trying to convince his reluctant superiors to let him continue an investigation the audience knows is worthwhile. In those respects, the scene is pure formula. Simonson wants to scrap the whole case: "If there was a deal, it's gone down by now." Doyle won't accept that: "I know the deal hasn't gone down. I know it. I can feel it. I'm dead certain." Agent Mulderig sparks a fistfight when he butts in, "The last time you were dead certain we ended with a dead cop." It's a cheap shot, spoken spitefully, and, what's more, we know Mulderig and Simonson are wrong; an earlier scene revealed that the criminals have put off the exchange and are planning to kill Popeye. Simonson yells at Doyle, "No collars are coming in while you two guys are running around town jerking off. Now go back to work! You're off special assignment!" The last line alone tells us the genre of the movie we are watching.

Anyone who has not seen *The French Connection* is probably wondering at this point why it is considered exceptional among police-detective films. The movie, as described, seems merely formulaic. In fact, except for its surprising ending, *The French Connection* works mostly as a standard police-detective film. Although much of the movie does indeed follow police-detective conventions, several incidents throughout the film disrupt the generic simplicity of the story and of our response to Popeye Doyle. *Incidents* is the right word because the movie treats them as though they are merely incidental. Like its hero, the film remains fixed on its goal: catching criminals. However, as a genre bender, *The French Connection* uses genre

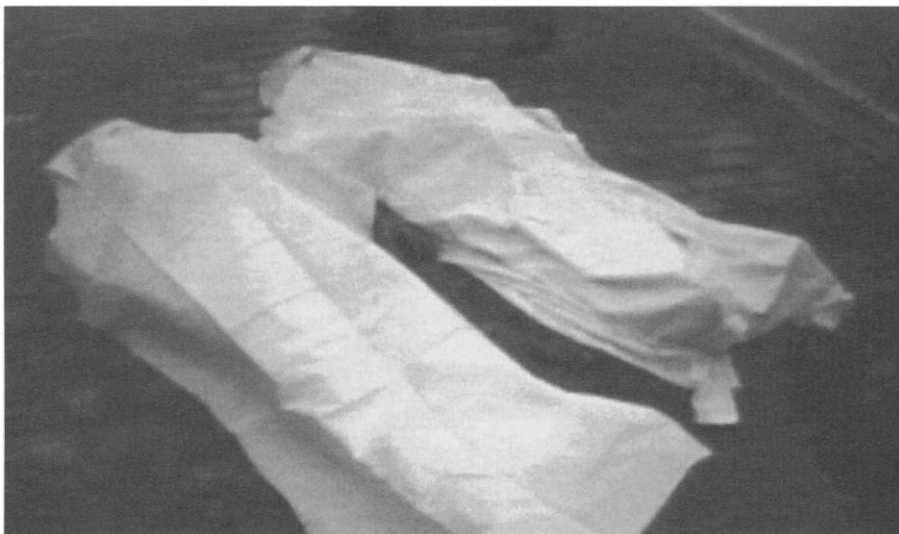


Figure 1. Detective Popeye Doyle seems completely indifferent to the bloody dead bodies of the teenagers. *We* notice because the camera shows them to us, but the movie seems only slightly less indifferent than Doyle. Courtesy Fox Video.

convention to set us up and genre deviance to make us uneasy and uncertain of its meaning. Ultimately, Friedkin builds his conclusion on these deviations, giving them a retrospective significance that they did not carry when we witnessed them. They merely hint at a meaning that becomes fully realized only when the film is over.

To explain the effect of such disruptive incidents, I want to return to the scene that earns *The French Connection* its police-thriller credentials—the scene that culminates in Doyle’s removal from the case—because the description above omitted one aspect that makes the scene unusual: it is set at the site of a car crash that has nothing to do with the main plot of the movie. There is almost no mention of the crash, which is precisely what makes its inclusion strange.<sup>23</sup> Doyle seems completely indifferent to the bloody dead bodies of the teenagers pulled from the cars around him. He does not even notice them. *We* notice because the camera shows them to us, but the movie seems only slightly less indifferent than Doyle. For the most part, the camera follows the main story line—Doyle’s argument with Simonson and Mulderig—while interspersing shots of the shocking setting. Although the deaths are extraneous to the plot and hence less important to us than Doyle’s unjust dismissal from the case, it is disturbing that neither Doyle nor the movie seems to care about those dead kids.

The car-crash scene is one of many that cause us to question the ethics of our hero and the ethos of the film itself. Several other scenes include similarly minor events that momentarily deviate from the police-detective formula, which traditionally proceeds to its climactic conclusion virtually undisturbed by viewers’ ethical



Figure 2. The famous chase scene depicts Detective Doyle (Gene Hackman) as a reckless maniac. *The French Connection* (1971, William Friedkin). Courtesy Fox Video.

misgivings. Immediately after the car-crash scene, one of the French criminals shoots at Doyle from a rooftop. The sniper accidentally (and incidentally) hits a woman pushing a baby carriage. The woman falls, Doyle tells bystanders to leave her, and that is the last we know of her. The movie never attends to her or comments on her death: there are no paramedics, no weeping child, and no parents identifying the body at the city morgue. She is completely out of the picture. Because the movie is as indifferent to her as Doyle is, we feel as though we are the only ones in the theater to notice that an innocent person was accidentally killed. The movie suddenly moves forward into arguably the most gripping car chase ever filmed (a chase, by the way, that depicts Doyle as a reckless maniac and that culminates when he shoots his unarmed suspect in the back). Like the dead bodies in the car wreck, the mother's death is not part of the main plot and therefore is of less consequence than the ensuing chase. We notice her death but soon forget it.

To a certain extent, the movie makes its viewers into fanatics like Doyle, more concerned with catching criminals than with anything else. In that way, the film exploits the similarity between Doyle's drive to solve the case and the audience's desire to resolve the narrative. More precisely, the movie treats viewers *as though* they were fanatics, although, because Doyle's behavior often disturbs them, it never quite permits them to *become* fanatics. Hence, viewers sense a discrepancy between their conflicted response to the movie and the fanatical response they think the movie expects them to have; that is, a discrepancy between what they *in fact* feel watching *The French Connection* and what they think the movie *wants* them



Figure 3. The chase culminates when Popeye Doyle shoots his unarmed suspect in the back. Courtesy Greatest Films Movie Posters.

to feel.<sup>24</sup> This effect is complex and difficult to study, but it is a compelling one, and understanding it is integral to understanding how the ending of *The French Connection* manipulates its audience.

When there is a disparity between our reactions to a film and our sense of the reactions we are intended to have, it normally indicates sloppy filmmaking (for instance, when a comedy is not funny). *The French Connection*, however, makes strategic use of that disparity so as to unsettle us. We would probably feel far less uncomfortable if the film did not seem to treat its incidental depictions of violence so cavalierly or if we sensed that the film at least recognized that the effect would be disturbing. The movie, however, never acknowledges our discomfort.

The most disturbing sight of all is Doyle himself. Although the movie encourages us to stand behind our protagonist, it still portrays him as lecherous, reckless, slovenly, and lawless. He is also a foul-mouthed drunk who likes to beat up people. Moreover, Doyle is a racist. He is not an indiscriminate racist like Harry Callahan, who “hates everybody,” including “honkies.” Doyle hates black people. “Never trust a nigger,” he says to his partner, recently stabbed by a suspect. Doyle harasses dozens of African Americans, shaking down an entire bar, for instance, just to make contact with one informant. He does not make a single arrest; he simply harasses the patrons. The most troubling aspect of Doyle’s racism is that the movie never condemns him for it. The racism does not ask to be noticed; it is not exaggerated; it does not seem to get in the way of his police work; and other characters do not admonish Doyle for it.<sup>25</sup> Again, it is as though we are the only ones who notice it.

Doyle is a different kind of protagonist from the clean-cut Bullitt or even Dirty Harry Callahan, who is as unscrupulous about the law as Popeye but has an integrity of his own. Harry may be a brute and a renegade, but *Dirty Harry* does not let us feel very disturbed by those qualities. When we watch *Dirty Harry*, the Bill of Rights is just a document that interferes with effective law enforcement. When we watch *The French Connection*, we question not only our “hero’s” tactics and scruples but also his commitment to the public good.

Our troubles with Doyle, however, do not feel like part of a *generic* response to the movie. On the contrary, they feel exceptionally personal. One’s doubts about Doyle’s ethics do not fit within the parameters of the police-detective genre, which might allow for some mild disapproval but rarely condemnation. Of course, we readily condemn corrupt policemen, such as Hank Quinlan (Orson Welles) in *Touch of Evil*. Quinlan is always just as despicable as we expect, and we would never figure on anyone thinking otherwise. But Doyle is not corrupt, and, by genre, he is our protagonist, so it is our generic duty to support him. More particularly, he is the protagonist we are stuck with; it takes effort to stay on his side.

One critic literally thought he was the only one in the audience bothered by Doyle’s darker traits. In an editorial in the *New York Times*, Garrett Epps wrote that *The French Connection*

is merely a celebration of authority, brutality and racism.... It is true that police practices across the country are racist, but there is a vital difference between demonstrating this fact, which the movie does not, and approving it, which it does. I saw the film in a



Southern city, and the white audience responded enthusiastically to the scenes of Doyle roughing up black people.<sup>26</sup>

Epps's response is a textbook example of the disparity we experience with this genre-bending film. He believes he is alone in his response because there is a difference between how he feels (troubled by the racism and brutality) and how he feels the movie *wants* him to feel (celebratory). It is impossible for us to gauge the enthusiasm of those white southerners, but Epps is nonetheless taken in by the subtlety of the film's manipulation, a subtlety that will not allow him to feel comfortable with the movie until he can categorize and condemn it. In effect, Epps wants *The French Connection* to be as obvious as a genre-breaking film, in which case it would not only advertise its position toward police violence but congratulate the audience for sharing it.

A genre bender like *The French Connection* impels us to watch uneasily, unsure of its meaning, which helps account for some viewers' urgent denunciations of the film and its hero. Attacks on Doyle are not unwarranted, just suspiciously adamant, suggesting that the commentators do not trust that other viewers saw in the movie what they did. Whereas genre films, as Braudy writes, generally "make us one with a large mass audience, often despite our more articulate and elitist views,"<sup>27</sup> genre benders, because of their ambiguity, can make us question whether our experience is at least somewhat idiosyncratic. Indeed, *The French Connection* panders to our sense that we are more astute, more sensitive, and more moral than the mass of viewers around us.

Such elitism is exhibited in Michael Shedlin's contemporaneous essay on *The French Connection*. Shedlin puts distance between himself and the viewers manipulated by the film's "subliminal message" that authoritarian police are good and necessary.<sup>28</sup> It is difficult to understand, however, how a police-detective film that ends by discrediting the detective can be seen, as Shedlin writes, as ultimately reinforcing "the heroism of the authorities it seems to be criticizing."<sup>29</sup> Shedlin fails to recognize that his responses are entirely typical, evidenced in part by other reviewers, who, whether they praised the film or panned it, regularly remarked on the racism and brutality of the detective.<sup>30</sup> Shedlin argues that audiences view Doyle's "fascism, homicidal compulsion, and white supremacy" as "minor character flaws" that serve only to make Doyle "someone we can identify with."<sup>31</sup> Shedlin does not include himself in the "we" who identify with Doyle and provides no evidence that other viewers do. Indeed, such character traits evidently *impede* viewers, including Shedlin, from completely identifying with their protagonist.

A more recent critique makes essentially the same point Shedlin does—that the film endorses the ideologies of its protagonist: "The film maintains no critical distance from (indeed, rather relishes) its 'loveable' hero's brutal vigilante psychology."<sup>32</sup> "Loveable" is in quotes presumably because, like Epps and Shedlin, the author thinks the movie invites viewers to delight in Doyle. However, if we can say anything for sure, it is that the movie invites viewers to think that *other* viewers delight in him.

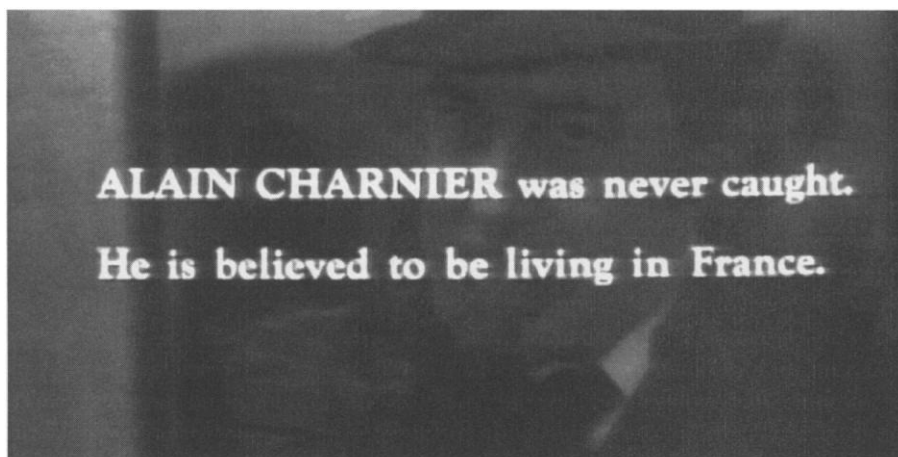


Figure 4. At the end of *The French Connection* we see a smirking photograph of Frog One (Fernando Rey) and a caption that indicates that he evaded justice. Courtesy Fox Video.

***The French Connection's Deviant Conclusion.*** The ending of *The French Connection* plays a subtle joke on its audience, unpredictably altering the trajectory of the film. The final scenes indicate that what we took to be the film's central concern—Doyle's righteous battle with the drug smugglers—was our own misinterpretation of the narrative. In the end, the movie becomes about all the troubling elements that have disrupted the simplicity of our responses, the very elements that distinguish *The French Connection* from standard police-detective films.

During the film's climactic shootout, Doyle and Russo follow the chief French smuggler, Charnier (Fernando Rey), into an abandoned warehouse. Doyle says confidently, "Frog One is in that room," and we have no reason to doubt him. He sees a figure moving in the shade and fires several rounds. The two detectives move toward the dead body, which, in fact, is that of Agent Mulderig. Shocked, Russo says, "Mulderig. You shot Mulderig." Reloading, Doyle replies, "That sonofabitch is here. I saw him. I'm gonna get him," and he runs into another part of the warehouse and disappears. A single shot rings out, and the screen turns black. The movie does not end with that shot, but we should pause here briefly to investigate the death of Agent Mulderig.<sup>33</sup>

The killing should be more satisfying since Mulderig is perhaps the most offensive character in the film, continually hounding Doyle for causing the death of a fellow officer. Mulderig's death, however, proves he is absolutely right about Popeye's trigger-happiness. Moreover, to our dismay and Russo's, Doyle is callously indifferent to the accidental shooting. Instead of lamenting the killing, or even noticing it, Doyle reloads his gun and goes after Charnier. His response—"That sonofabitch"—at first seems to apply rudely to Mulderig, but the fact that Doyle is

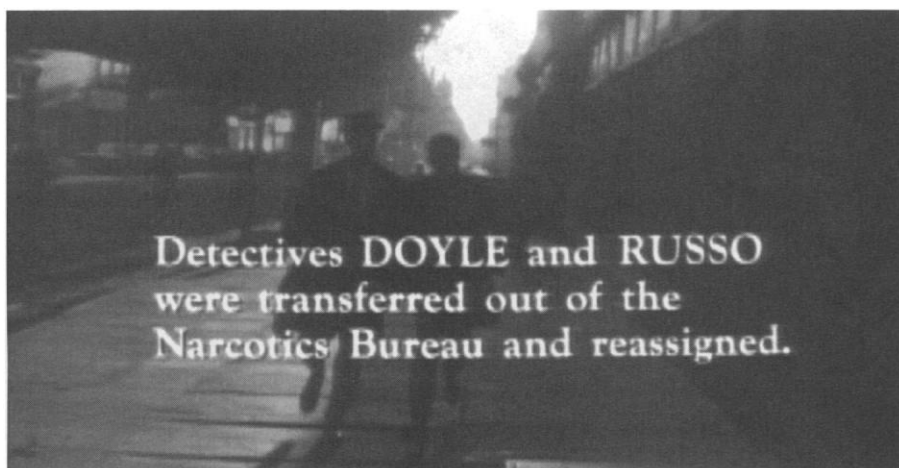


Figure 5. The last picture shows Doyle and Russo, the putative “heroes,” who were reassigned in disgrace. The screen fades out and the credits roll. Courtesy Fox Video.

thinking only about Charnier is no comfort. We should not be shocked that Doyle is completely unconcerned about Mulderig since we never saw Doyle care about anything except catching criminals and picking up women. Nonetheless, his callousness at this moment appears particularly cruel.

The change in our impression of Doyle is bolstered by the cinematography following Mulderig’s death. Before the killing, the camera tracks Doyle with straightforward medium shots and close-ups as he heads determinedly toward the room in which he thinks Charnier is hiding. As in the earlier scene in the bar, his point-of-view shots make the room appear suspicious: the camera slowly zooms in on the room as eerie music is heard on the soundtrack. After the shooting, however, the camera makes Doyle himself look suspicious by using a distorting, low-angle close-up shot. As Doyle, now swirling around wildly, races to find Charnier, the camera no longer follows him or provides his point of view. Instead, we watch him move farther and farther from the camera, until he disappears around a corner and we hear the off-screen gun blast.

Immediately after the gunshot, pictures of the captured criminals appear on the screen, along with captions indicating that most of their cases were dismissed or their sentences reduced or suspended. We then see a smirking photograph of Frog One—a still shot from the scene in the subway station in which he wittily evaded Doyle—with the following caption: “ALAN CHARNIER was never caught,” and, “He is believed to be living in France.” The last picture is of Doyle and Russo, and its caption reads: “Detectives DOYLE and RUSSO were transferred out of the Narcotics Bureau and reassigned.” The screen fades out and the credits roll.

On the one hand, the closing captions could inspire a generically conventional lamentation for the inefficiency of the courts, whose ineptitude ostensibly enabled

the main criminals to go free. Only two of the criminals, Lou Boca and Henri Devereaux—the definition of “small potatoes”—served any time in prison, the toughest sentence going to Devereaux, whom the movie portrays as a naive pawn in Charnier’s criminal conspiracy. On the other hand, we cannot blame the courts alone, especially since Charnier was never caught. That failure is clearly Doyle’s, and, taken together, the captions—which come at the point in the film when, according to police-detective convention, the detective is vindicated—contribute to our sense that Doyle has bungled the job. *Dirty Harry* ends when Callahan kills his suspect and triumphantly throws his badge into a river. At the end of *The French Connection*, Doyle and Russo are reassigned in disgrace.

The ending of the movie capitalizes on the fact that the stock virtues of a thriller detective have a darker side. In Doyle, these virtues emerge ambiguously as character flaws, the cause of his failure as a cop. His energetic pursuit of crime and disregard of the law are linked to his brutality. His determination and obsessive commitment to his case emerge as fanaticism and callous indifference. Most disconcerting, his impulsive, shoot-from-the-hip temperament results in the death of a fellow officer and leads to his suspect’s escape and a string of acquittals and reduced sentences. Before the ending, our hero’s character traits no doubt trouble us, but they are not so damning as to make him a bad cop. The movie teaches us to trust Doyle’s instincts, despite his flaws, and then presents him as untrustworthy, exposing finally the inadequacy and harsh indifference of the detective we mistook for our hero. Our only consolation is that the police seized the heroin, poor recompense for the trouble, expense, and loss of life. The movie does not even bother to mention the seizure (unlike the video-box blurb, which focuses on it, trying strenuously and speciously to make the detectives look triumphant). Whereas all along the film has largely allied us with Doyle against his critics, the ending largely aligns us with them against Doyle. For one of the only times in the history of the police-detective film, the detective’s critics, it turns out, knew better than we did.

Common sense says that such a conclusion should cause us to recognize that we have been wrong about the movie all along. Common sense is wrong. Because the film has surreptitiously prepared us for its disturbing ending, the ending does not come as a revelation but rather as a natural extension of a series of disturbing incidents that occurred throughout the movie, although only on the periphery of the screen. In the end, those throwaway incidents seem to define our hero; however, they do so only in retrospect since, at the time, they seemed extraneous, even impertinent, to the narrative. The nonformulaic ending is certainly unexpected, but it was foreshadowed. Doyle has troubled viewers from the beginning, although, had the movie ended differently—say, with the death of Charnier—our response would have probably been similar to that encouraged by the ending of *Dirty Harry*: He is brutal, but he’s a good cop; it’s a shame to lose him.

The other reason viewers do not notice how the film has manipulated them is that, even though the ending causes viewers to reevaluate almost completely the portrayal of their protagonist, the film has made them too unsure of their own judgments to clearly recognize the contradictions in their responses. Because the end-

ing deviates from generic conventions that the movie for the most part observes, viewers leave the theater uncertain of the meaning of the film, an uncertainty that no doubt elicits the adamant condemnations expressed in some critics' reviews.

*The French Connection* does not overtly challenge its genre's assumptions or critique the police-detective film's typically glorified portrayal of police brutality. Unlike genre-breaking movies, which comment on genre by conspicuously calling attention to it, *The French Connection* exploits the ambiguities of the standard tropes of the police thriller without ever advertising the ways in which it has altered the formula. If the movie did have something to say about its genre, then presumably audiences would "hear" it. But all the evidence suggests that viewers never become aware that this genre bender has used their generic expectations to manipulate them. Whereas genre breakers invite viewers to share in a joke about genre, *The French Connection* uses genre to play a joke on viewers themselves, a joke so subtle that, although they fall for it, they don't get it.

## Notes

I would like to thank Dana Sachs, Andrew Escobedo, and the anonymous readers for *Cinema Journal* for their comments on this essay.

1. John Cawelti, "Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 196.
2. Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 131.
3. William G. Simon and Louise Spence, "Cowboy Wonderland, History, and Myth: 'It Ain't All That Different than Real Life,'" *Journal of Film and Video* 47, nos. 1–3 (spring-fall 1995): 79.
4. Glenn Mann, *Radical Visions: American Film Renaissance, 1967–1976* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 83.
5. Cited in Jacob Atlas and Ann Guerin, "Robert Altman, Julie Christie and Warren Beatty Make the Western Real," *Show*, August 1971, 20.
6. Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," in Grant, *Film Genre Reader*, 29.
7. For more on the musical's concealment and exposure of its artifice, see Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), esp. 126–30.
8. Cawelti, "Chinatown and Generic Transformation," 194.
9. Ibid.
10. Stephen Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 49–50.
11. For a more thorough description of caper-movie conventions, see Stuart M. Kaminsky's chapter, "Variations on a Major Genre: The Big Caper Film," in *American Film Genres: Approaches to a Critical Theory of Popular Film* (New York: Dell, 1974), 100–29.
12. My argument here is indebted to Kristin Thompson's chapter, "Realism in the Cinema: *Bicycle Thieves*," in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Thompson writes that "many of the traits that have come conventionally to represent realism over the course of film history have done so primarily because they were departures from the prevailing classical norms" (201). She argues, in particular, that "neorealist films like *Bicycle Thieves*

- appeal to notions of the randomness of reality when they fail to provide other motivation for incidental or coincidental events" (208).
13. Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1977), 110.
  14. *Ibid.*
  15. *Ibid.*, 115.
  16. *Ibid.*, 180.
  17. *Ibid.*, 115.
  18. Thomas Schatz sees genre breaking as an inevitable outgrowth of a weariness with generic formulas. For Schatz, "The end of a genre's classic stage can be viewed as that point at which the genre's straightforward message has 'saturated' the audience. . . . As a genre's classic conventions are refined and eventually parodied and subverted, its transparency gradually gives way to *opacity*: we no longer look *through* the form . . . rather we look *at the form itself*." Schatz, *Hollywood Genres* (New York: Random House, 1981), 38.
  19. Space does not permit an examination of why, at this stage in Hollywood's history, filmmakers turned to genre bending and breaking. Such a study would want to explore the influence of film schools, which accounts for some filmmakers' critical knowledge of film tradition. Hoping to make something new out of the traditions they inherited, filmmakers who knew the history of Hollywood movies could use their own movies to remark on it (with genre breakers) or exploit it (with genre benders). We would also want to examine the influence of European filmmakers, who enjoyed a surprising popularity at this time, and, although in many ways were deeply respectful of Hollywood, opposed Hollywood conventionality. Additionally, we would look at the changing demographics of filmgoing. Whereas the traditional target audience for movies—the middle-aged working class—no longer attended movies very often, now wealthier, better-educated, college-age patrons became Hollywood's core filmgoers. Tired of traditional pictures, they wanted to see films that challenged the conventions they had come to find trite.
  20. Arthur M. Eckstein argues that Ford was responsible for creating the "dark and truly disturbed Ethan Edwards of *The Searchers*." Eckstein, "Darkening Ethan: John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956)," *Cinema Journal* 38, no. 1 (fall 1998): 4.
  21. The advertising on the video box was devised for the video release, but the original 1971 advertising campaign also emphasized the film's action, not the detectives' failure. One of the tag lines on the original poster read "The time is just right for an out-and-out thriller like this." The main tag line for the poster read "Doyle is bad news but a good cop," which acknowledges Doyle's brutality, even as it tries to contain it. The poster shot has a similar effect: it shows the climactic shot of the film's centerpiece chase sequence, in which Doyle shoots his criminal suspect. Some viewers might find the poster disconcerting in that Doyle is shooting his unarmed suspect in the back.
  22. Whereas the straight-laced police officers of many late-1940s detective films, such as *The Naked City* (1948, Jules Dassin) and *He Walked by Night* (1948, Alfred Werker), display a chummy camaraderie with their superiors, by the late 1960s the tension between the cop and his captain had become generic orthodoxy. That tension became so integral to the genre that *They Call Me Mr. Tibbs!* (1970, Gordon Douglas) includes it even though there is no motivation for it in the story. Captain Marden (Jeff Corey) continually yells at the generally upstanding Tibbs (Sidney Poitier) for the flimsiest of reasons, as if their clashes were included merely to satisfy the generic requirement.
  23. Pauline Kael refers to the scene in her pan of *The French Connection*: "At first, we're confused as to who the victims are, and we stare at them thinking they must be

- characters in the movie. It takes a few seconds to realize that they bear no relation whatsoever to the plot." Kael, "Urban Gothic," *New Yorker*, October 30, 1971, 114.
24. Renaissance scholar Stephen Booth discusses Shakespeare's strategic use of a similar discrepancy in *Twelfth Night*, in regard to the generally unfunny but generically comic character Sir Toby Belch. Booth, *Precious Nonsense: The Gettysburg Address, Ben Jonson's Epitaphs on His Children, and Twelfth Night* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 149–84.
  25. There is one exception. Russo's reply to Doyle's "Never trust a nigger" is "He could have been white," calling attention to Doyle's racist assumptions. Doyle shrugs the comment off with the line "Never trust anybody."
  26. Garrett Epps, "Does Popeye Doyle Teach Us to Be Fascist?" *New York Times*, May 21, 1972, sec. II, 15.
  27. Braudy, *The World*, 113.
  28. Michael Shedlin, "Police Oscar: *The French Connection*," *Film Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (summer 1972): 4.
  29. *Ibid.*, 3.
  30. Pauline Kael, for instance, writes that Doyle has "a complete catalogue of race prejudices ... The movie turns old clichés into new clichés by depriving the central figure of *any* attractive qualities." Kael, "Urban Gothic," 114. Richard Schickel says that Popeye "pursues pushers with a dedication that seems admirable at first, then comic, finally dangerous, maniacal." Schickel, "A Real Look at a Tough Cop," *Life*, November 19, 1971, 13. Arthur Knight's review also acknowledges an ambivalence toward Doyle, who, he says, "packs a drive and intensity that make one at once grateful and troubled that he is on our side of the law." Knight, "Crime in the Cities," *Saturday Review*, November 6, 1971, 70.
  31. Shedlin, "Police Oscar," 4.
  32. John Pym, ed., *Time Out Film Guide* (London: Penguin, 1997), 307.
  33. The real-life "Popeye" Egan did not kill the real-life federal agent Frank Waters. "I used to beat up on him once a week just for exercise, but I never shot him." Cited in Nat Segaloff, *Hurricane Billy: The Stormy Life and Films of William Friedkin* (New York: Morrow, 1990), 119.