Tough Ain't Enough

New Perspectives on the Films of Clint Eastwood

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his continual denials and rote answers. Kyle may never overtly question his duty or the circumstances that brought him to that rooftop high about the streets of Fallujah, but Eastwood does.

Notes

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5 Anne Gjelsvik, "Care of Glory? Picturing a New War Hero," in *Eastwood's Iwo Jima*, 103.
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4

"A Man's Got to Know His Limitations"

The Cop Films from Nixon through Reagan

JONATHAN KIRSHNER

A cycle of police dramas—from *Coogan's Bluff* (1968) to *The Dead Pool* (1988)—provide the bookends for the middle period Clint Eastwood's career. After a successful apprenticeship in television (*Rawhide*) and popular low-budget spaghetti Westerns, the savvy, curious and ambitious Eastwood took control of his own destiny. In the seventies and eighties, operating from the home base of Malpaso, the production company he established, Eastwood would become one of the biggest and most bankable movie stars in the world, maintaining a tight rein on his films, his image, and, invariably, his budgets.

The period from *Coogan* through *Dead Pool* was also characterized by a distinct political context. It began just as Richard Nixon was about to assume the presidency and concluded in the waning months of Ronald Reagan's second term—years that marked, with Jimmy Carter's four-year interregnum, a sharp conservative turn in American politics. Eastwood's own political leanings, and the politics of the eight films considered in this chapter, were very much in accord with these seismic shifts, attributes that surely resonated with the cultural sensibilities of the time and contributed to their commercial success.

The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by crime rates that were not simply soaring—there were about eight thousand robberies in New York city in 1964 and almost eighty thousand in 1972—they were also suggestive of a violence and chaos that seemed to be out of control, especially in America's big cities, which were also plagued by racially charged riots and other upheavals. Growing suburbanization and the end of the great postwar economic boom—and, with it, the erosion of blue-collar employment opportunities in traditional industrial sectors—left cities with sky-high expenses, declining public services, and a diminishing tax base, rendering them "ungovernable" in the apt phrase of the time—conditions that contributed to the rise of what Nixon would call a "silent majority" of disaffected middle-class Americans.[1] Majority or not, there were clearly a palpable cohort of citizens, neither rich nor poor, mostly white, feeling increasingly insecure and often resentful of the claims of others and craving the order associated with more tranquil times.

Nixon in 1968 ran a campaign that sought to capitalize on these concerns. Overtly, he placed a central emphasis on "law and order"—that is, getting tough with criminals and rejecting those policies that seemed to coddle them, such as the landmark Supreme Court cases that protected the legal rights for those *suspected* of wrongdoing.[2] Just beneath the surface also lurked the complementary "southern strategy," his party's successful scheme to use race-baiting rhetoric and implicit policy promises in order to flip the South, once held in hammerlock grip by segregationist Democrats, into the Republican column, just as President Johnson had predicted. Nixon also sought to cultivate these constituencies by running against the counterculture, castigating what he would summarize as "pot, permissiveness, and protest."

"Dirty" Harry, the protagonist of five of these films, has been recognized by many as the cinematic expression of Nixon's call to arms—and *Dirty Harry* (1971) itself as the ultimate counter-counterculture,[3] law-and-order film.[4] But Inspector Harry Callahan, and Eastwood's middle period cop films more broadly, is not so much about Nixon (that was more of a New Hollywood obsession[5]) as it was engaged with, and a reflection of, the general sociopolitical shifts that characterized these two decades more generally. And if anything, those years, and that movement, were even more essentially embodied by Ronald Reagan, who served as governor of California for eight of these years and president for eight more.

Reagan, sitting to Nixon's political right, pushed similar themes and spoke to the same constituencies even more plainly. In 1966, the former actor (Don Siegel directed Reagan's last film performance, *The Killers*, in 1964) running for governor made his promise to "take on the mess at Berkeley" a centerpiece of his campaign. And he would do so just like any good new sheriff in town would: by demanding that the college students of the Free Speech Movement "be taken by the scruff of the neck and thrown out of the university once and for all." He won in a landslide. In 1970, Governor Reagan spoke more bluntly still; weeks before four unarmed students were shot dead and nine others wounded by the National Guard at Kent State, he extended this advice for clearing out student protesters: "If it takes a bloodbath, let's get it over with." He was similarly direct on race. Running for the Republican nomination in 1976, Reagan worked the South by bemoaning the lot of hardworking Americans struggling to make ends meet, suffering the indignity of waiting in line at the supermarket watching some "strapping young buck" use food stamps to buy "T-Bone Steaks." Securing the nomination four years later, for his first speech as the Republican standard-bearer, Reagan choose a spot a few miles from Philadelphia, Mississippi, the infamous town where three civil right workers were brutally murdered in 1964, to offer a ringing endorsement of "states'-rights."[6]

Clint Eastwood's brand of libertarian Republicanism was in several ways very distinct from the ideologies of Nixon and Reagan, but on questions of "law and order," there was little daylight between their respective dispositions. And wherever their differences, Eastwood was an active supporter of each Republican president, and the appreciation was mutual—and public.[7] It is not surprising, then, that some of his films should reflect those underlying sensibilities, which, as I will discuss in this chapter, they do. Unfortunately, they tend to do so crudely, and the majority of these films are not designed to stand up to close scrutiny—they are not, ultimately, the best of Clint. But they were broadly popular, they mattered, and they demand attention.

Coogan's Bluff

Coogan's Bluff (1968) is an effective if formulaic and relatively undistinguished fish-out-of-water-cum-police-drama. Eastwood plays Coogan, an Arizona deputy sheriff sent to the big city (New York) to collect a prisoner wanted back out west. Inevitably, the wanted man is first held up by bureaucratic procedure and then makes his escape, forcing Coogan, alone, to navigate the urban jungle, track down the bad guy, and bring him to justice. Lee J. Cobb is predictably fine as a cynical, world-weary New York police lieutenant; Susan Clark has a trickier role as the social worker/romantic interest in a film that flirts awkwardly with both of those identities; and many of the smaller parts are memorably played. The Big Apple location work is superb, and Coogan even picks up a little humanity in Sin City, pointedly offering a cigarette to his prisoner at the end in direct contrast to his treatment of a not-dissimilar-looking thug taken into custody in the Arizona sequence that opens the film.[8]

Despite its occasional flashes of style and small pieces of humor, *Coogan*, well received at the time and a commercial success, would nevertheless not be especially notable but for the fact that it can be seen as the Rosetta Stone for

Dirty Harry and Eastwood's other cop films in this period. The production brought together contributors who would play essential roles in shaping those future efforts.

Eastwood had tapped Don Siegel to direct *Coogan*, and in addition to serving as the progenitor for Harry Callahan, the film can also be understood as the middle entry in a Siegel cop trilogy, following on the heels of his gently revisionist, New York–infused, similarly themed *Madigan* (1968).[9] Siegel—the liberal-humanist producer-director best known for the prison reform *Riot in Cell Block 11* (1954), the legendary *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and the tight, San Francisco–based noir *The Lineup* (1958)—promptly emerged as a crucial mentor figure for Eastwood. On the actor's initiative, they worked together on four films in quick succession (and only conflicting schedules prevented that number from being even higher), culminating in *Harry*. It was Siegel who signed Eastwood's DGA card and then served as an on-set security blanket by taking a small role in Clint's debut effort behind the camera, *Play Misty for Me* (1971). Eastwood valued Siegel's confidence, decisiveness, instincts, and, especially, his no-nonsense economy of shooting.

On *Coogan*, the two men polished multiple drafts of the screenplay before handing it over, on Siegel's recommendation, to Dean Riesner, who would become Eastwood's go-to script doctor. Filling out the family tree, Bruce Surtees operated one of the cameras on *Coogan*, displaying a facility with both action and location work, essential motifs of Eastwood's cop films, here seen most notably in the film's climatic motorcycle chase. Subsequently, as a cinematographer, Surtees would earn the distinction of one of the few top-shelf pros that Eastwood would repeatedly call upon.[10]

The character of Coogan is also recognizable as an early, working version of Callahan. The Arizona lawman is similarly bound by Eastwood's minimalist acting style, but he is a more complex character. Harry is the better cop—he makes fewer mistakes and would certainly never lose a prisoner or his gun, and he doesn't enjoy Coogan's enthusiastic sex drive.[11] But *Coogan* is pregnant with *Harry*, and their respective protagonists are men who live in the same world and see it through similar eyes. Loners and outsiders, they have little patience for courts and procedures and bureaucracy and legal niceties as civilization teeters on the brink of chaos—those are indulgences, even luxuries, in the midst of urban lawlessness, with criminals running amuck only to game the system when caught.

Coogan is more nuanced than the films of the Harry cycle on questions of race, and acknowledging the problematic treatment of racial issues is necessary for any frank consideration of those films. In *Coogan*, the smart black undercover cop clearly reflects Siegel's imprint; it was also on the director's forceful insistence that the early scene with a black doctor who tends to Callahan's leg was included in *Harry*.[12] But even *Coogan* shows its carbon dating with its clumsy portrayals of women and its anachronistic and occasionally embarrassing treatment of homosexuals as exemplars of decadence, camp, and sin, a retrograde awkwardness that is also shared by the early Harry pictures and that cannot be completely explained away by the cultural norms of the time.[13]

Callahan and Coogan also, explicitly, act as vigilantes when the law fails them, ruthlessly applying punishing and gratuitous violence against their adversaries and, quite notably, are commonly pitted against bloodthirsty hippies—a group more typically associated with peace, love, and dope than violent crime. It is not surprising that Dirty Harry, a Nixonian apparition, faces down one set of decadent longhairs after another; less obvious is why Coogan has a dog in that fight. The utterly tone-deaf portrayal of hippie culture in that film most likely reflects the fact that Siegel, born in 1912 and thus in his midfifties at the time, was an old-school liberal on the other side of the cultural divide. Perhaps that liberalism also accounts for why Coogan brings in his nemesis alive—something Harry never does. Ever.

Dirty Harry

Dirty Harry is Eastwood's best film from his long middle period. Much of this has to do with the talent that was attracted to the picture. Siegel was on board as producer-director (as a Malpaso production in partnership with Warner Brothers, Eastwood also had the authority of a producer). Dean Riesner was again called in to polish the screenplay (on both *Harry* and Eastwood's then just released *Misty*, as well as *Coogan*, Riesner's work was extensive enough that it earned a screen credit). And not to be underestimated were the contributions of cinematographer Bruce Surtees, who also shot the crisp monochromatic *Lenny* (1974) for Bob Fosse and the so-dark-you-can-barely-see-it masterpiece *Night Moves* (1975) for Arthur Penn and was known for his ability to push the envelope with darkness and minimalist lighting.[14] *Dirty Harry* features extensive night-for-night shooting, which is perhaps the greatest artistic strength of the picture, notably including but not limited to the "Jesus Saves" stakeout—a remarkable scene that required meticulous and elaborate preparation by the cinematographer (leading to some on-set tension with an impatient star)—and the long, elaborate location-to-location ransom delivery sequence.

It was Siegel's idea to move Harry's location from New York to San Francisco (Seattle was also considered), on "been-there-done-that" logic (*Madigan* and *Coogan's Bluff* had both been shot in the city).[15] But that setting could not have been better chosen for Harry; there was a compelling logic to establishing the icon of the counter-counterculture right in the belly of the beast. As host to the Summer of Love and the Grateful Dead, as well as an epicenter of gay culture, the left coast city was ground zero for pot, permissiveness, and

FIGURE 4.1 A *Dirty Harry* (1971) nighttime set piece staged in the abandoned, floodlit Kezar Stadium. Frame enlargement.

protest—Fun City without the hard hats. And the setting works beautifully for *Harry*, which is two-thirds of a great movie, with Siegel's sense for action and pacing, the majesty of Surtees camerawork, and a decent if off-the-shelf noir plot—a mad sniper terrorizing the city (with interesting shades of Edward Dmytryk's 1952 classic *The Sniper*, also shot on location in San Francisco)—coming together for a tight, imaginative, well-executed thriller.

To a point. And that point takes place about seventy minutes in. Throughout the picture, Harry is something of a loose cannon, to say the least, and his impatience with rules, procedures, and niceties is prevalent from the start—at times, the film pushes further, and more than hints at his barely suppressed rage. Driving through San Francisco's red-light district, Harry, twice surreptitiously peeps at naked women through a window. The second time, during the "Jesus Saves" stakeout, exploring the theme of voyeurism that smartly comes across as an homage to *Rear Window* (1954), Callahan mutters something about how he'd like to "throw a net" over the whole lot of them—anticipating mentally fragile Travis Bickle's premonition that "someday a real rain" will come and clean the streets of the scum in Times Square. Even more subversively, there are moments that suggest an equivalence between Harry and the deranged murderer Scorpio, in particular in the parallel construction of how each man recovers from his wounds following their violent encounter by the giant cross in Mount Davidson Park.[16]

That's the Harry who can track Scorpio down, shoot him as he flees—in another gorgeous nighttime set piece staged in the abandoned, floodlit Kezar Stadium—and then torture him in order to learn the whereabouts of his kidnapping victim. The resort to torture—which, when it occurs is shocking, brutal, unexpected, and not sugarcoated—was Eastwood's idea. And it is to his credit—as he observed, "most actors would not have done that," but he thought it came directly from the character.[17] But the movie chooses not to dive deeper into an exploration of that instinct. And Dirty Harry's enhanced interrogation comes up empty. The girl was already dead, which is just what

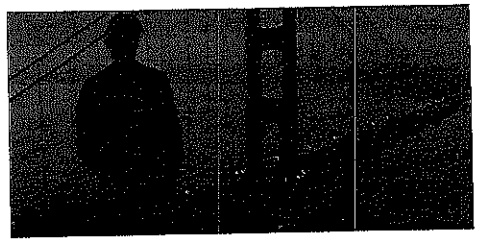

FIGURE 4.2 With the Golden Gate Bridge in the background, "Dirty" Harry looks stoically on as a victim's body is recovered. Frame enlargement.

Harry predicted when he initially opposed his feckless superiors' willingness to submit to the ransom demand. From the stadium, we cut to Harry, who, in long shot with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background, looks down stoically as the girl's nude, lifeless body is recovered. Roll the credits there, and the picture ends on a down note, but a thoughtful one: Scorpio is in custody, but given the body count, the victory rings hollow—which would have offered a nuanced consideration of a capacious and well-intentioned but deeply flawed hero of the counter-counterculture.

Unfortunately, the movie does not end there, and the majestic sweep of Surtees's camera pulling back from Kezar Stadium turns out to be not so much the movie's unwillingness to witness more of Harry's brutality as it is the film's withdrawal from any remaining semblance of reality. What was already a deeply dishonest critique of liberalism—we know Scorpio is guilty and a deranged killer, a sadistic embodiment of unmotivated evil with no redeeming qualities, and we could not be more primed to set teeth on edge as he demands his right to an attorney—becomes a completely unhinged right-wing fantasy. For whatever reason, the narrative resumes with Scorpio, sporting his hippie hairstyle and peace-sign belt buckle, walking free and clear of all charges—apparently none of his other murders, including the machine-gunning of a police officer and other various and sundry offenses, are prosecutable, because any evidence turned up during Harry's hot-pursuit search is inadmissible. Even Richard Schickel, in his 550-page mash note in the form of an Eastwood biography, acknowledges the utter implausibility of this legal reasoning.[18] Nevertheless, the district attorney, apparently unconcerned with the consequences, consults on-screen with a judge who teaches a course on such things, at, inevitably, Berkeley, the ground zero of criminal-coddling left liberalism. "That man had rights," they explain to Harry, who is more concerned for the victim: "Who speaks for her?" he wants to know.

Nobody, apparently. Not only is Scorpio free, a freedom he will soon predictably exploit to terrorize a hijacked bus full of small children, but the SFPD

can't even be bothered to keep tabs on him. Moreover, aided by an abetting media horde, Scorpio fashions himself a victim of police brutality, as the movie presents a liberal media machine more than eager to portray the police in the most negative light possible without regard for the evidence at hand. The liberal mayor, having apparently forgotten that paying ransom to Scorpio is a fool's errand, tries again to meet the demands of the deranged sadistic serial killer. In the end, of course, it is up to Harry alone, against orders, to do what it takes, save the day, and solve the problem once and for all by blowing Scorpio away with his .44 Magnum.

The politics of this movie are not subtle, and they were not missed. Pauline Kael, who acknowledged that the film was a "stunningly well-made genre piece" nevertheless had little trouble in identifying its central battle between a "hippie maniac" and a police force "helplessly emasculated" by the legal rights "that a weak liberal society gives its criminals." That stacked deck, she argued, yielded "a deeply immoral movie." Roger Ebert concurred, concluding, "The Movie's moral position is fascist. No doubt about it."[19]

Siegel and Eastwood, in contrast, were as they say, shocked . . . shocked by such outrageous claims, and each appealed to the ability of a mature audience to distinguish between fact and fiction. "I don't want my aunt in Des Moines to think I'm a sadist," Eastwood explained. "I give her credit for being intelligent to know I'm an actor playing a part."[20] Siegel, the lifelong liberal, was more defensive, renouncing the very question of such political connections and insistently repeating that his only purpose was "in making a successful picture,"[21] a claim that rings true. Much less convincing are his protestations regarding the distinction between showing a character and condoning that character's behavior. This of course is indisputable, and essential—we can and must distinguish between the philosophy of a given character in a movie and a film's underlying moral grounding. But this is where Siegel's (and Eastwood's) defense comes up so short. The moral content of *Dirty Harry* is not mysterious. Paul Newman, Burt Lancaster, and even Robert Mitchum (who played his share of really bad guys) rejected the role on the grounds of the inherent unsavoriness of the character. Nixon had a different reaction. He screened the picture at Camp David, invited Clint to a reception at the "Western White House" in San Clemente, and appointed him to a six-year term on the National Council for the Arts. Nixon knew what he liked.[22]

Despite its deeply objectionable politics, *Harry* was an excellent film—as noted above, its two-thirds of a great film. Regrettably, it was the last one that could stake such a claim. Eastwood returned to the Harry series when he needed his ticket punched—that is, when he was in need of a sure hit. Moreover, as economy-conscious Malpaso productions—or, more bluntly, as invariably frugal Malpaso productions motivated solely to fill the coffers—top-shelf talent and ambitious production values were assiduously avoided, and those

absences are plainly felt. Until late in his career, Eastwood kept his stories very simple and was virtually indifferent to dialogue, and so cheap, adequate screenplays, often from young or unknown writers, would be more than enough for the job at hand. Moreover, following the Keith Richards doctrine ("As far as I'm concerned, Art is short for Arthur"), proficient, workmanlike direction was all that was needed. And since the on-set producer and star knew how to direct, the path of least resistance was to hire journeymen directors, who, under Eastwood's watchful eye and authority, could be counted on to shoot it simple and shoot it fast. *Magnum Force* (1973) set the template for all that would follow.

Eastwood took on the *Dirty Harry* sequel after a few commercial misfires. The most important of these was his director-only effort *Breezy* (1973), a May-December romance featuring William Holden and Kay Lenz from a screenplay by Jo Heims, who had written *Play Misty for Me*. A thoughtful, interesting, understated film with something to say, its most novel insights are not about the unsustainable romance itself but in the personal politics between members of Holden's generation, and it considers those confrontations with a judicious, observing perceptive. Feminist film critic Molly Haskell offered qualified praise, calling it his "most accomplished directorial job so far" and "a love story in which almost everything works." But the film was both a critical and a commercial failure.[23]

Magnum offered a sure thing, and would indeed be an enormous hit. Written by John Milius (*Apocalypse Now*), who was just starting out, and Michael Cimino (*The Deer Hunter*), Eastwood raised eyebrows by hiring television director Ted Post over Don Siegel, who would have seemed the natural choice. But Eastwood had outgrown Siegel—or, more pointedly, had little interest in having an accomplished, reputable, feisty pro around who might have preferences of his own. Although Eastwood always acknowledged his great debt to the director, wrote a generous introduction to Siegel's memoirs, and prominently dedicated *Unforgiven* (1992) to both Siegel and Sergio Leone, forceful talent was not what he was looking for. After their intimate flurry of collaborations at the turn of the 1970s, the two men only worked together one more time, for *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979), during which, predictably, the two robust egos clashed.[24]

From *Magnum Force*, the Harry films would become a virtual genre unto themselves, with the predictable pattern of and structure as entries in the James Bond franchise. One or two preliminary episodes open a Harry picture, featuring light humor followed by the blood-soaked execution of violent rescue from an impossible situation by a just-happened-to-be-there Callahan, who kills all the sadistic, malevolent bad guys and saves the innocent. Promptly, however, he is called on the carpet for excessive use of force and disregard for property and criminals' rights[25] by obtuse, scum-coddling liberal brass with

eyes for nothing but celebrity and political patronage. Put on leave or bound to a desk job, Harry is soon called back by the desperate hypocrites, who are facing an enormous crisis with which they cannot deal and so willing to look the other way while Callahan does what everybody knows is necessary to get the job done. This, of course, is the implicit articulation of an authoritarian ideology that prioritizes stability over civil liberties. The films also suggest an anxiety about female sexuality—topless women and/or those expressing an uninhibited and enthusiastic sexuality inevitably meet with a terrible, violent fate; another common if dispiriting element is the way that Harry's efforts usually involve the ritual sacrifice of his (typically minority) partner. In sum, if you've seen one, you've seen them all.

Magnum Force is interesting, if at all, for its direct pushback against the charges of vigilante fascism leveled at *Dirty Harry*. The film opens with the requisite stacked-deck critique of liberal "justice," with an obviously guilty mob kingpin striding out of court a free man, his acquittal due to a legal technicality. This travesty, one character explains, "happened before and will happen again," thus setting in motion a nominal story: a death squad of young cops takes to meting out the justice that the system is incapable of providing. *Magnum* aspires to position Harry somewhere between the caricatured liberals and these cartoonish storm troopers, cops who kill fellow officers in cold blood and machine-gun a swimming pool full of nubile beauties who are either collateral damage in a necessary war or simply receiving their just deserts for consorting with gangsters. Positioning Harry in the middle ground between these unpalatable extremes, the move allows him to mutter unconvincing speeches about working within the system. Of course, Harry says it's "not too hard to understand how [a squad of blindly violent vigilante cops] happens" and, naturally, reminds his timid superiors that "nothing's wrong with shooting as long as the right people get shot." But when told by the young storm troopers who idealize him, "Either you're for us or you're against us," Harry chooses the law.

Once again, it was Pauline Kael who saw right through this half-hearted head fake: "Despite the superficial obeisance to the rule of law, the underlying content of *Magnum Force*—the buildup of excitement and pleasure in brutality—is the same as that of *Dirty Harry*, and the strong man is still the dispenser of justice, which comes out of his gun." David Denby assessed the film to be "vile"; Gene Siskel saw a "mediocre sequel" about "the supreme delight of holding one's quarry at bay while challenging him to make a move so you can have an excuse to blow his head off." Nora Sayre in the *Times* got straight to the point, opening her review with "let's hear it for hypocrisy."[26] Refreshingly, the remaining sequels didn't pussyfoot around with such questions of Callahan's moral standing. Regrettably, they didn't get any better.

Following the commercial failures of *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (Michael Cimino's debut effort) and the (Eastwood-directed) *Eiger Sanction* (1975), Clint again turned to Harry. For *The Enforcer*, Malpaso hired first-time director James Fargo, whose appeal was summarized by one Eastwood biographer as "someone who would not challenge his opinion, would not screw with his themes, and would get the film done quickly and within budget."[27] The first draft of the screenplay was purchased from two film students and handed over to prolific Hollywood pro-for-hire Sterling Silliphant, then polished by Riesner, who shared the principal writing credit with Silliphant.[28]

The Enforcer is paint-by-numbers Harry, and takes its shots against the usual suspects: uptight tsk-tsking spinsters in authority; wild-eyed, trigger-happy hold-up men; still more sadistic hippie killers; hypocritical police brass; media-hungry local politicians; and, of course, misguided liberals everywhere. Among this latter group, in a head-turning and once again unmistakably politically charged choice, is a liberal priest, a characterization that seems to implicitly align Harry with the bloodthirsty dictators of Central America. As if checking off a right-wing enemies list, in a clever a twofer, one chase sends Harry crashing through a skylight into the midst of a porn film production where the fictional crew's union flag is proudly displayed. More generally, the usual (non)subtleties hold—another partner is cut down, and at his deathbed, his widow shares this thought: "It's a war, isn't it? I guess I never really understood that."

The Enforcer boasts two notable novel attributes, neither distinguished. First, and contra the half-hearted protestations of *Mangum*, here Harry is plainly an extralegal executioner. As Eastwood explained in a 1978 interview, "I was one of the people who took the hero further away from the white hat." This, of course, is suggestive of the welcome new sophistication in American film that followed the end of the old censorship rules.[29] But much depends on just how far away from that white hat one wants to go—there is a difference between trafficking in moral ambiguity and celebrating the morally repugnant. In contrast to the old days of "Hayes office rules," Eastwood continued, "if some guy is trying to kill the character I'm playing, I shoot 'em in the back."[30] Or even, it turns out, if "some guy" is just running away. In the opening sequence of *The Enforcer*, Harry shoots a fleeing, unarmed suspect in the back, apparently clipping his genitals from behind as a bonus, a choice that could be interpreted as charged with the most ominous of racial overtones and inaugurates a disturbing thread that weaves its way throughout the Harry films. Second, Callahan is here saddled with a female partner, leading to a battle of the sexes that was simplistic even by the standards of 1976 and is little more than embarrassing today. Tyne Daly (Kate) does a fine job with a thankless role, and the actress fought to shape and defend the character during

production. Kate ultimately saves Harry's life, twice (once by icing a fake nun in cold blood) before being cut down by the hail of bullets that were meant for Harry.

All in all, however, *The Enforcer*, another big success at the box office, does not offer much substance to consider. The plot is wafer thin, even by Harry standards, and it is hard to recall a memorable shot (first-time cinematographer Charles Short would enjoy a long career in television). David Sterritt, in his careful study *The Cinema of Clint Eastwood*, devotes two paragraphs to *Magnum Force* and one to *The Enforcer*, which seems about right. Even Clint seemed to have had enough of Harry—it would be seven years and seven films before he agreed to the next installment.

The Gauntlet

The Gauntlet (1977) was the cop film that freed Eastwood from the rigid confines of the Harry franchise—Callahan has no flaws, no backstory, no friends—and Clint took on the directing himself as well. But despite these opportunities, at this stage of his career, Eastwood seemed simply unwilling to invest in the idea that the story might matter and remained content with journeyman writers-for-hire. Worse, even free of Harry, Eastwood here hangs on to his standard tropes: corrupt brass, an incapable DA (who "couldn't convict Hitler"), a seemingly respectable killer with embarrassing sexual proclivities to conceal, the exogenous appearance of hippie bad guys—solely there to deliver gratuitous beatings—and, most egregiously, the painfully predictable, utterly arbitrary ritual sacrifice of partner, in this case narratively unmotivated and inserted unnecessarily at the very end. Also, as in all the Harry films, even in the end, justice is administered extralegally, execution-style, with the killing of the two principal villains in turn, both unarmed. *The Gauntlet* also withholds sex from Ben (Clint), as it tends to with Harry[31]; it also pulls the *Magnum Force* fast one, introducing a character whose sole purpose is to spew forth an endless stream of raw-sewage misogynist rage in the direction of Ben's prisoner, Gus (short for Agustina), a hooker with a heart of gold played by Sondra Locke, Clint's then girlfriend. Thus the movie gets to vent its spleen and then some, but our hero is positioned on the right side of the argument.

Ultimately, *The Gauntlet* is a long chase scene in search of a movie (there's nothing wrong with that—*Midnight Run* [1988], for example, did it brilliantly), and its ending is, plainly, ridiculous. Certainly we go to the movies to escape, but at some point, logic, physics, and plausible expectations of human behavior must at least be acknowledged, if at a distance, and the long, long, climactic shoot-out simply fails to do so. Vincent Canby saw in the film "a kind of violent grace," but it is hard to disagree with his conclusion that "it is

a movie without a single thought in its head."[32] In the context of Eastwood's police films, however, glimmers of growth can be discerned. Ben is a much more flawed character than Harry—a bit of a renegade, yes, but less successful and a drunk—and this allows for greater dramatic possibilities. He is also indeed a different character: more soft-spoken, comparatively passive, and at times uncertain as to what to do next—this is not just Harry under another name. In fact, for a movie with a cartoonish level of gunplay, Ben himself does very little shooting at all. Finally, although *The Gauntlet* would never be mistaken as a feminist tract, it is notable that Gus is clearly smarter than Ben and one or even two moves ahead of his thinking every step of the way. Modest steps forward perhaps, but it could have been worse.

Worse, indeed, took the form of *Sudden Impact* (1983), which scrapes the bottom of the Harry barrel in search of box-office gold. Not much by way of praise can be said about this one other than that it is a pleasure to welcome back Bruce Surtees, whose signature nighttime exteriors bring a visual ambition to the proceedings not seen since *Harry*. Surely the best moments in the film—the climatic carousel sequence (spatial continuity errors aside), a well-executed homage to Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951)—were possible because he was on the set. Other than that, the principal motivation for this film was that, once again, Clint was in need of a hit, and again Harry delivered. Schickel, a reliable source for Eastwood's point of view, reports that he had mixed feelings about the project, which had its "impetus in a marketing survey" that suggested there remained a potent consumer demand for yet another sequel. Still, it "took a few Fridays to come up with a story he liked."[33] A few more Fridays might have been in order. Again content to lean on near-novice (and low-rent) screenwriters, the plot of *Impact* looks like something that was dragged out of the shallow end of the *Death Wish* (1974) pool. (The catatonic rape-surviving relative seems directly lifted from *Death Wish II*, which came out the previous year.) Not even Riesner's script doctoring, this time uncredited, can breathe life into this turkey.

Directed by Eastwood with his midperiod workmanlike efficiency, the prefatory set piece established one of the key lines of Reagan's America: "Go ahead, make my day." Indeed, the most notable aspect of *Impact* is that it exposes, without even pausing to contemplate second thoughts, the darkest corners of the Nixon/Reagan law-and-order doctrine. Jennifer Spencer (Sondra Locke) takes the law into her own hands—she's not a rogue cop, but a rape victim, and has taken to executing her previous tormentors one at a time. Two moves here have an especially sharp political edge. First, although, as necessary for a Harry picture, most of the bad guys are sadistic, irredeemable longhairs, one member of the gang has fallen out with that crowd, set his life straight, and is tormented by the guilt of his actions a decade previously. Confronted by

Spencer, he shares his remorse and begs for his life. She kills him in cold blood. Second, after all is said and done, Harry abets in the confusion of evidence that will pin all the murders on the main bad guy, as Harry (and, more to the point, the film—and the audience as well, which is rooting for her), explicitly endorses her crime-fighting (well, crime-avenging) strategy. This is another Harry movie pitched in opposition to civil liberties and due process. Consider the assessment of the *Time Out* film guide, searching for something nice to say about *Magnum Force*: that film, which in the end "fails to convince," at least is ultimately "far less objectionable than the later *Sudden Impact*."[34]

Before the film is over, *Sudden Impact* will have dutifully hit all its marks: a female judge tossing a case due to an illegal search with barely restrained glee, long speeches about the rigged system, a double serving of moments where the reading of rights is ridiculed, and, dispiritingly, the black sidekick/buddy who comes for a visit and gets his throat slit for his troubles. But ultimately, despite Reagan's embrace, *Sudden Impact* does not flash the same sharp political edge of its predecessors, *Harry* in particular. Most likely, with its egregiously clunky dialogue ("People have a nasty habit of getting dead around you") and action sequences that finally veer into self-parody, the film simply isn't good enough to sting. Even the cheerleading Schickel, who for some reason thought the basic premise clever, nevertheless laments that "the film does not execute it as crisply as crisply as it might have."[35] There wasn't much left for Harry to do, and Eastwood seemed plainly bored with the character.

Tightrope

Seemingly in response to the dead-end frustration of playing Harry, Eastwood would resurface within a year, playing by far his most complex and ambiguous cop yet, an experience that must have been liberating. *Tightrope* arrives as a breath of fresh air, easily Eastwood's most interesting and ambitious film since *Dirty Harry*, showcasing, again, the fine work of cinematographer Surtees at the top of his night-for-night game. Unfortunately, the film still suffers from Malpaso's penny-pinching. *Tightrope* was the debut (and only) original screenplay of Richard Tuggle (his first credit was for the adaptation of *Escape from Alcatraz*), and Clint signed him on to direct as well, though by all accounts, Eastwood's influence on the direction was even more overt than usual in such situations, to say the least—an interpretation buttressed by the observation that Tuggle would get only one more crack at directing: the universally derided *Out of Bounds* (1986). And the traditional weak spots seen in previous efforts are again plain and exposed: wooden dialogue, plot points in turn obvious and implausible, voluminous body count, ritual sacrifice of a valued companion, clichéd characters, rote denouement.

But let's not quibble. *Tightrope* is an interesting stretch for Clint and for his interpretation of the lawman. It is a film with some notable strengths and even, remarkably, of thoughtful introspection—attributes prominent even now and that were especially notable in the context of its time. The year 1984, after all, was the height of Reagan's feel-good, can-do, "morning in America," "my country right or wrong" popularity. (Reagan's historic landslide reelection a few months after *Tightrope*'s release was the high watermark for these sentiments; a stubborn recession proved costly at the ballot box in the 1982 midterm elections, and the Republicans lost control of the Senate in 1986, after which the president would begin his long, slow fade toward the sunset.) *Tightrope* looks all the more impressive, and daring—which it was—in the context of that historical moment; it was a year when John Milius's ludicrous, reactionary propaganda piece *Red Dawn* could both pass as entertainment and score big at the box office. The three biggest hits of the year were less objectionable but nevertheless paragons of moral certainty: *Indiana Jones*, *The Karate Kid*, and *The Terminator* all of which pitted noble underdogs against various forces of evil.

Tightrope, in contrast (and contra the core ethos of midcareer Clint) is an exercise in uncertainty and moral ambiguity. And as with the torture scene in *Dirty Harry*, Eastwood is doing things no other movie star of his stature and reputation would consider doing—most notably with the on-screen penchant of his character (Wes Block) for edgy bondage sessions with prostitutes picked up in the seamiest corners of New Orleans's pansexual red-light district. As David Denby subsequently observed, "Here was the biggest star in the world implicating himself in the kind of pathologies that his earlier characters had scornfully eliminated."[36]

Wes is no Harry. Flawed, compromised, and vulnerable, he is also—and this more than anything is impossible to imagine in Harry's universe—a family man. Not only is he the single father of two daughters; the film even hints at, if you are looking for it, some slight creepiness in his relationship with the older

FIGURE 4.3 In *Tightrope* (1984), Eastwood's character indulges in some of the pathologies that his earlier characters had scornfully eliminated. Frame enlargement.

child[37]—a daring and complex choice unthinkable within the confines of the Harry franchise. Moreover, his wife was not, as cliché would demand, murdered or even tragically lost; rather, she left Wes because she thought she could do better. And despite the standard-issue "women with jobs annoy me" meet-cute with new love interest Beryl (Geneviève Bujold), who is also saddled with clunky lines, the movie positions her as a real character who more or less holds her own. In fact, *Tightrope* would have probably worked extremely well as a silent movie, which would retain the essence of that relationship and if anything enhance the film's best qualities: several suspenseful set pieces, and the movie's central conceit, that only a razor's edge of barely contained self-control distinguishes Wes from the hooker-killing sadist he finds himself playing cat and mouse with.

This essential dualism was Eastwood's intention: "I stressed that even more in the film than the screenplay," he explained to David Thomson, "I liked the parallel between he and the killer, and I liked the not knowing." Clint even looped some of the villain's dialogue in an early scene to subtly nudge the audience in that direction. The viewer knows all too soon that Wes is not the killer, but Eastwood makes the compelling and perhaps deeper argument that even "when you know it isn't him," you realize that "it could very well have been him."[38] Well played, these qualities were noticed at the time and remain worthy of consideration. In an uncharacteristically insightful review from the preternaturally ill-mannered John Simon—although still inevitably condescending, mean-spirited, and (here properly) critical of the film's too-easy flirtation with softcore pornography, implausible thriller tropes, and routine ending—he calls attention to Wes's own "demoralization" as he comes to recognize his similarities with the serial killer, and Simon observes that "*Tightrope* makes some pertinent comments tersely and devastatingly."[39]

The Dead Pool

Whatever *Tightrope*'s limitations, it looks like *Citizen Kane* in comparison to *The Dead Pool* (1988), the last film in the Dirty Harry cycle, released just as Reagan was getting ready to head west into his senescence. It was written by amateurs, three friends of Clint who would share their only writing credit, and to direct the picture, Eastwood flipped the keys to his longtime stuntman/stunt coordinator Buddy Van Horn (another relationship that traces to *Coogan's Bluff*). Van Horn would direct once more, Eastwood's *Pink Cadillac* (1989), before returning to stunts.

It is tempting to say that Eastwood phoned this one in, but that would have required lifting the receiver, more effort than he appears willing to take on in support of the film, which is a lazy retread, often literally. The credit sequence (nighttime helicopter shots of San Francisco) repeats that of *Sudden Impact*,

and both films, if for ever-so-slightly different reasons, feature four men with machine guns taking Harry by surprise and spraying endless streams of bullets in his direction—to no effect. If *Dead Pool* has any pulse at all, it's in its sense of humor, as it (at times knowingly) flirts with self-parody: the movie within a movie allows for pontificating speeches about movie violence, a critique of commercial/video tie-ins takes place in the context of its own commercial/video tie-in, an amusing if physically impossible car chase offers a toy car homage to *Bullitt*, and a copycat killer in a copycat movie gets to plunge a knife into the heart of a famous female film critic. Other than that, it is yet again paint-by-numbers Harry, hitting the usual marks from start to finish. The final chase scene is suggestive of the series' closure, as it is the bad guy who holds the empty .44 magnum. And as if to prove that despite all the levity, Harry is still the vigilante executioner, he harpoons his defenseless prey through the heart, case closed. Eastwood's main objective in returning to Harry one last time was to provide some commercial cover for his ambitious Charlie Parker biopic, *Bird* (1988), which is an understandable business move. But as for *Dead Pool*, if he doesn't care why should we?

Coogan's Bluff and *The Dead Pool* mark the territory of Eastwood's midcareer. After a long apprenticeship, he emerged as a major movie star, and one with a serious interest in both the commercial and the artistic aspects of his career. But with the exception of a few experiments along the way, it was not until he was pushing sixty that Clint would let art rival commerce for his affections. The potential to make serious films was long visible—*Play Misty for Me* and *Breezy* each flashed real promise and ambition; it was the commitment that lagged. Norman Mailer, in a very favorable feature and interview for *Parade* in 1983, assessed Eastwood an important artist and called him out for squandering his talent and failing to try "hard enough for what's truly difficult." Mailer was especially dismissive of the Dirty Harry films, "movies made to manipulate audiences and satisfy producers."[40]

By the close of that decade, as if Mailer's message finally had time to sink in, Eastwood decided to put away childish things. *Bird* and *White Hunter Black Heart* (1990) were serious, reaching explorations about the self-destructive nature of artists and the enigmatic relationship between art and life. And in an even more remarkable volte-face, Eastwood seemed to come to acknowledge and embrace the sharpest critique of his most bitter nemesis: "With a Clint Eastwood, the action film can—indeed, must—drop the pretense that human life has any value," Pauline Kael charged in 1974. His films offer "an impersonal, almost abstract excuse in brutalization." In contrast to the "strong, quiet man of the action film," Dirty Harry is "emotionally indifferent."[41] With his mature films—including notably *Unforgiven* (1992) and *Mystic River* (2003), each of which were serious (and top shelf) ruminations on violence and its consequences (the latter in particular)—Eastwood clearly took these

criticisms to heart. He will be remembered as a major American filmmaker. But that reputation will rest largely on the achievements of the final decades of his long career.

Notes

1 Political scientist Ted Lowi urged Mayor Lindsay to declare New York City "ungovernable" and propose a radical reorganization of political arrangements. See Theodore Lowi, "Dear Mayor Lindsay," *Nation*, December 8, 1969, 626; see also Vincent Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay's New York and the Crisis of Liberalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

2 *Suspected* is a crucial word here. In the world of Eastwood's cop films, liberal reforms seem designed to protect the guilty, not the accused, an important political move those films managed to slip by.

3 Defining Harry as an expression of the "counter-counterculture" was a productive theme of conversations I had with a former undergraduate student of mine, Peter Cohl.

4 J. Hoberman, *The Dream Life: Movies, Media and the Mythology of the Sixties* (New York: New Press, 2003), 321–325.

5 Jonathan Kirshner, *Hollywood's Last Golden Age: Politics, Society and the Seventies Film in America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012).

6 W. J. Rorabaugh, "The FSM, Berkeley Politics, and Ronald Reagan," in *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s*, ed. Robert Cohen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 515; see also Gerard J. De Groot, "Ronald Reagan and Student Unrest in California, 1966–1970," *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 1 (Feb. 1996): 107–129.

7 Marc Eliot, *American Rebel: The Life of Clint Eastwood* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), 113, 202.

8 Coogan mistreats a Native American prisoner in Arizona, humiliating him and tying him to a post. His contrasting final gesture is suggestive of a type of progressive liberal humanism that is associated with Siegel.

9 *Madigan* features a tough cop (Richard Widmark) working outside the rules in desperate search for a killer and a morally compromised police commissioner (the iconic Henry Fonda, in a subversive bit of casting).

10 David Sterritt, *The Cinema of Clint Eastwood: Chronicles of America* (New York: Wallflower, 2014), 56, 58, 60, 75; Don Siegel, *A Siegel Film: An Autobiography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 300; Eliot, *American Rebel*, 91, 98, 125.

11 Harry's muted (repressed?) sexuality is another important element of that character; its fraught with meaning in a decade during which gender roles were being reassessed.

12 Siegel, *A Siegel Film*, 369–370, reports that the studio wanted to cut the scene.

13 Even Tony Rome, the tough-guy masculinist cop portrayed in 1967 by rat-packer Frank Sinatra—who at one time was slated to play Harry—seems more tolerant of alternative lifestyles and social change.

14 The ever budget-conscious Eastwood also highly valued Surtees's "gift for frugal improvisation." Margalit Fox, "Bruce Surtees, Oscar-Nominated Cinematographer, Dies at 74," *New York Times*, February 28, 2012; Eliot, *American Rebel*, 136.

15 Siegel, *A Siegel Film*, 358; see also 369–370 for Siegel's defense of the film's racial politics.

16 Dave Kehr pushes this observation even further in his capsule review for the *Chicago Reader*, arguing that "Eastwood's renegade detective" is "in the usual Siegel fashion . . . equated visually and morally with the psychotic killer he's trampling the Constitution to catch." Dave Kehr, "*Dirty Harry*," review of *Dirty Harry*, directed by Don Siegel, *Chicago Reader*, https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/dirty-harry/Film?oid=1069848. See also Roger Greenspun, who notes that the film "fails in simple credibility so often and on so many levels that it cannot even succeed (as I think it wants to succeed) as a study in perversely complimentary psychoses." Roger Greenspun, "Dirty Harry," *New York Times*, December 23, 1971.

17 David Thomson, "Cop on a Hot *Tightrope*," *Film Comment* 20, no. 5 (1984): 65.

18 Richard Schickel, *Clint Eastwood: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 269–270.

19 Pauline Kael, "Dirty Harry," *New Yorker*, January 15, 1972; Roger Ebert, "Dirty Harry," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 1, 1972.

20 Thomson, "Cop on a Hot *Tightrope*."

21 Siegel, *A Siegel Film*, 373, 495.

22 Mark Feeney, *Nixon at the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 280; Eliot, *American Rebel*, 133, 139.

23 Molly Haskell, "Breezy," *Village Voice*, November 29, 1973, 86.

24 Eliot, *American Rebel*, 148–149; Schickel, *Clint Eastwood*, 302.

25 Again, crucially, these films elide the distinction between criminals and suspects, a politically charged and consequential move that can serve to rally the audience to the side of "law and order."

26 Pauline Kael, "Killing Time," *New Yorker*, January 14, 1974; David Denby, "Law and Disorder," *Harpers*, March 1974; Gene Siskel, "Law and Order on Film," *Chicago Tribune*, February 17, 1974; Nora Sayre, "Review: *Magnum Force*," review of *Magnum Force*, directed by Ted Post, *New York Times*, December 26, 1973.

27 Eliot, *American Rebel*, 163, 172.

28 Schickel, *Clint Eastwood*, 340. Silliphant won an academy award for *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) and also wrote *The Lineup* (1958) for Don Siegel and seventies-cop-under-siege *New Centurions* (1972) with George C. Scott and Stacy Keach (more thoughtful than Harry but still middling); but he could also reliably crank out assembly-line work on demand, including *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972); the third installment of the Shaft franchise, *Shaft in Africa* (1973); and *The Towering Inferno* (1974).

29 On this point more generally, see Kirshner, *Hollywood's Last Golden Age*.

30 Richard Thompson and Tim Hunter, "Clint Eastwood, Auteur," *Film Comment* 14, no. 1 (1978): 75.

31 Women are attracted to Harry, and very occasionally, if safely offscreen, he does sleep with them.

32 Vincent Canby, "The Gauntlet," *New York Times*, December 22, 1977. Roger Ebert, who was often generous to a fault in his praise for mindless films, was kinder, reporting that the film "tells a cheerfully preposterous story with great energy and a lot of style." Roger Ebert, "The Gauntlet," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 1, 1978.

33 Schickel, *Clint Eastwood*, 385; see also Eliot, *American Rebel*, 206, 208.

34 G. A., "*Magnum Force*," review of *Magnum Force*, directed by Ted Post, TimeOut, accessed December 21, 2015, https://www.timeout.com/london/film/magnum-force.

35 Schickel, *Clint Eastwood*, 385.

36 Denby, "Law and Disorder."

37 Played by Eastwood's own daughter Alison, then age twelve, in her first screen credit.

38 Thomson, "Cop on a Hot *Tightrope*," 65, 66, 67; see also Christine Holmlund for a discussion of the movie's ambiguous position on women, its parallel constructions of cop and killer, and her observation that *Tightrope* undermines "the usual Hollywood alignment of a stable masculinity." Christine Holmlund, "Sexuality and Power in Male Doppelganger Cinema: The Case of Clint Eastwood's *Tightrope*," *Cinema Journal* 26, no. 1 (Fall 1986): 32.

39 John Simon, "Film: Dark Crannies," review of *Tightrope*, directed by Clint Eastwood and Richard Tuggle, *National Review*, October 5, 1984, 56; similarly, Sterritt assesses *Tightrope* as "hardly an essay in depth psychology, but it delves more deeply into hidden strata of American masculinity than previous Eastwood films, or most previous Hollywood films for that matter." *Cinema of Clint Eastwood*, 129.

40 Norman Mailer, "All the Pirates and People," reprinted in *Mind of an Outlaw: Selected Essays*, ed. Jonathan Lethem (New York: Random House, 2013), 398.

41 Kael, "Killing Time"; Sterritt also dates Eastwood's artistic maturity to *Bird* and *White Hunter Black Heart*. *Cinema of Clint Eastwood*, 3.

5

"I'm Not So Tough"

Melodrama and Performance in the Later Films

DIANE CARSON

Although melodrama is not often associated with the iconic persona of Clin Eastwood or his films,[1] for the four and a half decades of his directing and ac ing work since 1971, elements of melodrama have fortified and buoyed his na ratives. In fact, the stereotypical association of Eastwood with a "tough guy is a macho veneer that facilitates the acceptance of his melodramatic infusion making it more palatable than overplayed sentimental appeals by directo with reputations for more emotionally indulgent storylines. As significantl Eastwood's predominantly quiet, measured presentation of unsettling emo tions delivered through controlled, subdued performances encourages viev ers to embrace his melodramatic touches. In his last two decades, Eastwoo has appealed more directly to emotions than his previous popular persona d directorial reputation suggests.

Melodrama

As Barry Keith Grant writes about this "somewhat indistinct genre th refers to films about familial and domestic tensions," historically *melodram* "referred to stage plays that, beginning in the late eighteenth century, use