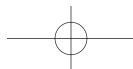




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Sorcerer



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Sorcerer

William Friedkin and the New Hollywood

Mark Wheeler

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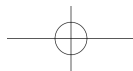
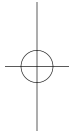
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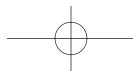
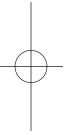
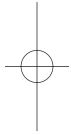
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Acknowledgments

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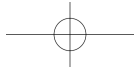
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Introduction

[B03.0] William Friedkin's film *Sorcerer* (1977) has been subject to a major re-evaluation in the last decade. A dark reimagining of the French Director H.G. Clouzot's *Le Salaire de la Peur* (*The Wages of Fear*) ([1953] based on George Arnaud's novel); the film was a major critical and commercial failure on its initial release. Friedkin's work was castigated as an example of directorial hubris as it was a notoriously difficult production which went wildly over-budget. Principally, both in terms of its content and filmmaking it was accused of being an example of how an egotistic 'New Hollywood' filmmaker had been allowed to behave in irresponsible manner when flushed with the enormous success of his two previous films, *The French Connection* (1971) and *The Exorcist* (1973).

[B03.1] Moreover, the film was seen as being out of step with the contemporary zeitgeist in Hollywood films as it was released shortly after the tremendous success of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977). Its dark and morally ambivalent vision of criminal inhumanity stood in stark contradiction with the prevailing sentiment. However, within recent years, the film has emerged in the popular and scholarly consciousness from enjoying a minor, cult status to becoming subject to a full-blown critical reconsideration in which it has been praised a major work by a key American filmmaker.

[B03.2] In deploying *The Wage of Fear's* basic story, the screenwriter Walon Green (coauthor of Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* [1969]) extends the tale of four desperate men who have ended up on the run in an impoverished and hellish village in an unnamed Latin American dictatorship. They are offered an escape by earning significant monies as truck drivers who must carry volatile explosives on ramshackle roads to put out a fire in a jungle based oil refinery. In his examination of fate, Friedkin provides an even more distinctive vision of exploitation and existential nihilism than Clouzot's film.



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In particular, in the opening act, the film provides a detailed series of vignettes of the criminal endeavours of the hitman, gangster, fraudster, and terrorist who comprise the group. Therefore, it provides significant insights about these men being placed under extreme pressure when attempting to escape their pasts and the prevailing conditions of institutional corruption, corporate malfeasance, banditry, desperation and poverty in the US-backed dictatorships within Central and Latin America.

[B03.3]

This monograph employs an interdisciplinary methodology concerning the economic, political and culture factors which contributed to writing, direction and production of *Sorcerer*. It will utilise Simon Cottle's construct of the 'production ecology' to take into account the political economy of media institutions, the social anthropology of the production processes and the organisational dynamics which shape the complexities of cultural production (Cottle 2003, 20).

[B03.4]

By utilising these criteria, it will be shown that within the Hollywood film industry of the 1970s, there were vital changes to the production process, the rise of a younger generation of filmmakers and a more significant degree of risk-taking by studio executives (Balio, 1987; Kramer, 2005). The new wave of 'auteur' US directors made films about the contradictions which existed in the American political economy and polity. For instance, *Sorcerer* was co-funded by Universal and Paramount, the latter which was owned by the oil corporation Gulf and Western whose power in the Dominican Republic (the film's main location) reflected Friedkin's critique of corporate malfeasance in supporting a dictatorship.

[B03.5]

Therefore, the focus of the book will be threefold. First, it contextualises Friedkin's film by discussing the interplay between the reforms in organisational and production processes during the 'New Hollywood' era. Consequently, Chapter One seeks to establish how the director negotiated the power structures within Hollywood. The chapter will consider how Friedkin, via his background in documentaries and television shows (*The People versus Paul Crump* [1962], *The Thin Blue Line* [1966]), his experience in filming theatrical productions (*The Birthday Party* [1968], *The Boys in the Band* [1970]) and his reconfiguring of the crime thriller and horror genres (with the box-office giants and award-winning films of *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist*), came to the fore of the so-called 'Auteur' filmmakers (Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich) in the mid-1970s with the formation of the Directors Company (Pye and Myles 1979, 95–97). He reached the height of his critical and commercial reputation with *The French Connection*, for which he won the Academy Award for Best Directing, and *The Exorcist* for which he was nominated for a Best Directing Oscar and became an all-time box office champion.

[B03.6]

The second chapter will focus upon the micro-level of *Sorcerer's* production history from its inception to distribution and exhibition. Therefore, it

[B03.7]

will consider how Friedkin employed his industrial prowess to attain the rights for the remake, how he negotiated his the relationships Hollywood's permanent governance in relation to Universal and Paramount Chief Executives – notably Lew Wasserman and Charles Bluhdorn who green-lit and co-financed the film – and how his directorial decisions resulted in the film's difficult production in its remote jungle locations.

[B03.8] In this respect, Friedkin's film compares and contrasts with other notoriously problematic films such as Werner Herzog's *Aguirre: Wrath of God* (1972) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1981), along with Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979). The film was subject to expensive over-runs, a lengthy schedule and a rapidly escalating budget of the then enormous sum of \$22 million. Friedkin's iconoclastic and often self-confessed hubristic behaviour was seen to personify the archetypical 1970s auteur filmmaker who sought perfectionism in the most extreme of locations. Moreover, he tried to persuade film super-star Steve McQueen to be the lead. However, due to difficulties in the star-director power-relations, McQueen withdrew and the film's cast was headed up by Roy Scheider (*The French Connection*, *Jaws* [1975]).

[B03.9] Second, there will be an analysis of the interconnections between politics and fiction to identify the themes of human endeavour which define the nihilistic vision of Friedkin's film. His narrative provides a critique of American democratic traditions, societal relations, anti-authoritarianism, and a fatalism wherein individual freedoms are subsumed by a combination of greed, fate and corporate malfeasance. Thus, in Chapter Three, there will be a discussion of the relationship between the source novel, Clouzot's version of the story and Friedkin's reimagining of the tale. In particular, the analysis will reflect on the different emphasis between the two film's narratives in relation to the themes fate, endurance and entrapment (Kermode 2017). In turn, the chapter will reflect upon Friedkin's acknowledgment of the importance of John Huston's version of B. Traven's book *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) on his and Green's thinking.

[B03.10] Moreover, *Sorcerer* relates to what Todd Berliner has described in terms of 'genre deviation' (Berliner 2010, 99) in which filmic narratives became more inventive and adaptable. Therefore, there will be a detailed analysis of Friedkin and Green's attempts to open up the backstories of the protagonists and how they create a thematic context to the main elements of the plot. Most especially, Friedkin saw the film as being a treatise on fate and that it was reflective of Miles Davis's jazz track 'Sorcerer' (Friedkin, 2013). Friedkin's narrative reflects a range of political, social and cultural insights which provide a critique of American democratic traditions, societal relations, anti-authoritarianism, and fatalism.

[B03.11] Thus Chapter Four considers how Friedkin's film widens its scope to consider the underlying geopolitical and economic conditions that have prevailed due to US imperialism and corporate interest within Global Southern

dictatorships. Individual freedoms have been subsumed by an inevitable and inescapable repetition of a combination of greed, fate and corporate malfeasance. In this respect, the film reflects the growing concerns in American cinema to reflect the political and stylistic critiques of 1960s and 1970s European filmmaking.

To fully investigate how the film uses the action-adventure genre to reflect upon the power structures and dominant ideologies of international capitalism there will be a structuralist critique of the film's narrative. In particular, the chapter will consider how 'myth' was utilised in the American Western and how the film shares many of the tropes of what Will Wright has considered the 'Professional Plot'. In this respect, *Sorcerer* not only shared the same screenwriter with Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* but many of its attitudes concerning the characters' amorality and the need to cooperate with one another in the face of adversity. Moreover, this chapter considers how Friedkin and Green took a 'magical realist approach' to its basic plot line and it was further influenced by Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967).

[B03.12]

Finally, the book will track the re-evaluation of the film from its initial rejection to a growing consensus that its dark vision has served to create a masterpiece of US filmmaking. Chapter Five will provide a detailed critique of the commercial and critical drubbing that was aimed at Friedkin and his film. Friedkin was accused of directorial hubris, irresponsible behaviour with his cast and crew, and for esoterically fusing together US and European filmmaking sensibilities (Biskind, 1998). Many critics attacked Friedkin for daring to remake Clouzot's classic and even dedicating his film to the French filmmaker, while Andrew Sarris claimed it was a pointless exercise which demonstrated everything that was wrong with contemporary Hollywood filmmaking (Sarris 1977).

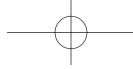
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Moreover, the type of film that Friedkin made which engaged in narrative challenges, characterisation, a critique of US power structures and institutions was seen to be out of step with the contemporary zeitgeist. It had the misfortune of being released shortly after the gigantic game-changing success of *Star Wars* which inadvertently ushered in an era of Hollywood filmmaking wherein generic blockbusters with standard motivations, expensive special effects and 'B' movie heroics became the norm. In turn, director's reputation and career would irrevocably suffer from the film's rejection by critics and audiences (Cook 2000, 106).

[B03.14]

Conversely, Chapter Six will track the re-evaluation of the film as there has been a growing consensus that its dark vision has served to create a masterpiece of modern US filmmaking. The growing reputation of *Sorcerer* has been related to a general upturn in Friedkin's directorial reputation. As the film has found a second life and a wider audience, Quentin Tarantino placed *Sorcerer* within his top ten of film greats in the 2012 British Film

[B03.15]

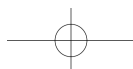
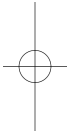


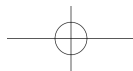
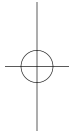
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Introduction

Institute's (BFI) Greatest Ever Film poll. Moreover, in 2014, Friedkin after a protracted legal battle with Paramount and Universal had the movie distributed theatrically on a limited basis and issued upon Blue-Ray Home Video. In turn, the best-selling horror writer Stephen King cited the film as his being his favourite when a new print of the movie was shown at the UK National Film Theatre in 2017 (Kermode, 2017).

[B03.16] The growing reputation of *Sorcerer* has seen it being revived at film festivals, being subject to articles and monographs. Friedkin has received a belated series of awards in acknowledgement of his directorial achievements. The film has been appreciated for its brilliant filmmaking, ambitious storytelling, thrilling drama and stunts, outstanding electronic score (by German pioneers Tangerine Dream), and detailed characterisations of the human condition when confronted with overwhelming natural odds. Therefore, in the light of this critical and popular re-evaluation, a monograph concerning the film's production, principle themes and revival would appear to be in order.





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Chapter One

William Friedkin, New Hollywood, and 'Auteurial' Filmmaking

[1.0] William Friedkin remains one of the most important directors to emerge from the 'New Hollywood' era. Throughout his life and films he has proven to be a divisive figure who has achieved commercial success and failure, along with critical approval and derision. Moreover, as his sobriquet 'Hurricane Billy' suggests he is either seen as a volatile visionary or a hubristic narcissist (Segaloff 1990, 274). This chapter will analyse, assess and explain his career and films up to the production of *Sorcerer* (1977) to demonstrate how the maverick director achieved his position of strength in Hollywood by the mid-1970s.

[1.1] To establish how Friedkin negotiated the power structures within Hollywood, this study will first employ Simon Cottle's construct of the 'production ecology'. Therefore, it will make reference to the interplay between the reforms in the economic (macro), organisational (meso) and production (micro) processes which occurred in the US film industry. By utilising these criteria, it will be shown that within the macro- and meso-levels of the Hollywood production ecology of the 1960s and 1970s, an interdependent set of business variables led to changes to the studio production process, risk-taking by the executives and the rise of agency 'packages' (Balio 1987; Kramer 2005).

[1.2] The chapter will consider how a younger generation of filmmakers emerged at the micro level of the Hollywood production ecology invariably through exploitation or film school backgrounds. The analysis will then consider how Friedkin entered the US film industry via his background in documentaries and television shows (*The People versus Paul Crump* [1962], *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* [1965], *The Thin Blue Line* [1966]). This led to him to serving his directorial apprenticeship in early feature film productions



such as *Good Times* (1967) and *The Night they Raided Minsk's* (1968) along with the filming of theatrical productions including *The Birthday Party* (1968) and *The Boys in the Band* (1970). Most especially, Friedkin enjoyed spectacular successes with his back-to-back pair of box-office giants and award-winning films of *The French Connection* (1971) and *The Exorcist* (1973) (Clagett 2002).

Friedkin came to the fore during the so-called 'auteur' filmmaking of the mid-1970s. This ostensible change in power relations was evidenced with his involvement with the short-lived Directors Company with his peers Francis Ford Coppola and Peter Bogdanovich (Pye and Myles 1979, 95–97). In this respect, Friedkin occupied a position of industrial and critical strength in a period that occurred after the ascent of the 'television' generation (Sidney Lumet, John Frankenheimer, Arthur Penn, Robert Mulligan, Franklin J. Schaffner) and slightly before the rise of the 'movie brat' (George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, John Milius, Brian De Palma) set of Hollywood filmmakers.

[1.3]

THE 1970S HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION ECOLOGY

[1.4]

To establish how Friedkin negotiated the power structures within Hollywood, this study will employ Simon Cottle's construct of the 'production ecology' to take into account the political economy of the media institutions, the social anthropology of the production process and the organisational dynamics which shape the complexities of culture (Cottle 2003, 20). While Cottle used these criteria in relation to the UK television production system, they can be usefully transferred to the business dynamics that have shaped the American Film Industry (Kerr 2013). Therefore Cottle identifies three significant factors which define output:

[1.5]

- *the macro-contexts* and surrounding regulatory, technological and competitive environments conditioning the operations and output of media organisations at global and local levels;
- *the meso-level* of impinging organisational cultures, corporate strategy and editorial policies informing production practices and the reproduction of conventionalised and changing cultural forms; and
- *the micro-level* of cultural milieu and interactions of producers situated within the norm-governed and hierarchical production settings and the relationships entered into with technologies, professional colleagues and outside sources. (Cottle, 31)

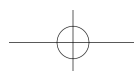
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By utilising these criteria, it will be shown that within Hollywood production ecology of the 1970s, an interdependent set of variables reformed the 'film

[1.9]



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William Friedkin, New Hollywood, and 'Auteurial' Filmmaking

industry into the film business' (Monaco 1979, 31). These included changes to the production process, the rise of a new generation of filmmakers and risk-taking by studio executives.

[1.10] THE MACRO CONTEXTS: CHANGES IN THE STUDIO SYSTEM AND CORPORATE RESTRUCTURING

[1.11] From 1950 to 1970, the studios declined, as they had become an anachronism in America's post-war economic, political and social life. The divestment of the cinema chains from the studio's production and distribution base after the Supreme Court's 1948 Paramount anti-trust decrees meant revenues were removed from the industry. Moreover, television had a drastic effect on Hollywood production. The moguls tried to compete for audiences through innovations such as wide-screen, Cinemascope spectacles; lavish costume dramas; musicals and the occasional novelty 3-D production. These attractions, however, failed to attract customers back to cinemas. In the resulting crisis of profitability, Howard Hughes sold Radio Keith-Orpheum (RKO) in 1955 and a short time later it was closed. The other majors, particularly Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Warner Brothers and 20th Century Fox divested themselves of their back lots and contracts with stars, character actors, writers, producers, directors and technicians.

[1.12] Hollywood remained under the control of the aging generation of the moguls whose choices proved disastrous. They were out of touch with a burgeoning youth market, which had expanded as baby boomers reached maturity to embrace rock music, countercultural values, radical politics and a critical view of the establishment. Instead, Hollywood financed epics such as Fox's *Cleopatra* (1963), which cost \$44 million (\$350 million when adjusted for inflation) and failed to recover its losses. It led to the fire sale of the back lot and Darryl F. Zanuck's return as head of production. He and his son Richard saved the studio from bankruptcy when they discovered it had the rights to *The Sound of Music* (1965) and the film was a spectacular success. This proved a double-edged sword, as the studios unwisely believed a market existed for family entertainments. They were left counting the costs of expensive, flop musicals including *Star* (1967), *Doctor Dolittle* (1967), *Hello Dolly* (1969), *Darling Lili* (1970) and *Paint Your Wagon* (1969).

[1.13] Consequently, fewer films were produced leading to fears that exploitation and pornographic films would become the staple product for US moviegoers. In turn, the studios were sold to transnational corporations. For example, Warners became a subsidiary of the Kinney Corporation, which had made its fortunes in car parks; Paramount was sold to the oil company Gulf and Western and United Artists (UA) became part of the insurance behemoth Transamerica. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Hollywood's most glamor-



ous studio, was bought by property magnate Kirk Kerkorian, who used the brand for his casinos in Las Vegas, thereby reducing film production and selling off the Culver City back lot.

THE MESO-LEVEL: NEW MOGULS, THE PACKAGE UNIT SYSTEM AND AGENCY PACKAGING

[1.14]

Hollywood's rebirth occurred as new executives such as Lew Wasserman and Arthur Krim took control. They had one foot in the old system, but realised the industry had to change. Most especially, the studios had declined as they seen television as a competitive rival. The Music Corporation of America (MCA), led by Wasserman, embraced the medium as it realised Hollywood had the facilities to produce syndicated programmes for the television networks. Therefore, he transformed MCA from a talent agency to a film and television producer when it bought Universal Studios.

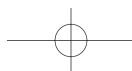
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Simultaneously, Arthur Krim, Bob Benjamin and David Picker oversaw a changeover in film production at UA from the Producer-Unit to the Package-Unit system. Previously, studios had fixed costs in which departments were established for writing, cinematography, art or costuming, and the talent was placed on contracts so power rested with the front office. Alternatively, Krim, Benjamin and Picker provided a 'package' for the talent, through which they would appraise a film's potential, arrange its financing, provide the production facilities, distribute the picture, and make an equitable participation deal for its box office revenues. By 1970, the transition was complete as the majors' functioned as bankers supplying finances and renting out studio space. For Krim, Benjamin and Picker once a film had been approved, the filmmakers were given creative autonomy. Thus, UA became a byword for quality, financing risky projects such as *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), which became the only X certificate film to win the Best Picture Oscar, and achieved a remarkable balance between critical and financial success.

[1.16]

Similarly, other studio management regimes at 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers (Ted Ashley, Frank Wells and John Calley who gave complete production independence to Stanley Kubrick) and Paramount (Robert Evans, Charles Bluhdorn, Frank Yablans, Peter Bart) became more interested in developing adult orientated features which facilitated directorial independence. At Fox, the Heads of Production Richard Zanuck and David Brown (before they were ousted by Zanuck's father Darryl F. Zanuck and formed their own production company in a deal with Wasserman at Universal which resulted in the commercial behemoths of *The Sting* [1973] and *Jaws* [1975]) demonstrated a knowledge of the evolving studio logics and they forged a close relationship with many literary agents to make film adaptations of best-sellers (Brown's wife Helen Gurley Brown was the editor of *Cosmopolitan*,

[1.17]



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William Friedkin, New Hollywood, and 'Auteurial' Filmmaking

an author and a leading New York publisher). They would green-light such hit films as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *Patton* (1970) (coscripted by Francis Coppola), Altman's *M*A*S*H* (1970) and Friedkin's breakthrough feature *The French Connection*.

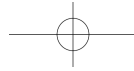
[1.18] With the predominance of the Package-Unit system in Hollywood film production, the agencies' power was enhanced, as they became the means through which the creative elements were brought together in a fragmented studio system. The powerful agencies; International Creative Management (ICM), Creative Associates Agency (CAA,) United Talent Agency and William Morris, packaged some of the 1970's most successful films, thereby ensuring the loyalty of a roster of stars, directors, writers and producers. Moreover, super agents such as ICM's Sue Mengers became known for their tenacious representation of stars such as Barbara Streisand, Steve McQueen and Gene Hackman.

[1.19] In the process, the deals between the agencies, the producers, the talent and the movie executives became more complex. Rather than buy a property outright, studios and producers often took an 'option' on the material, usually for one or two years at 10 percent of the purchase rights, to reduce their financial risk. Therefore, if the buyer failed to place the story into production, s/he would only lose the option money and the owner regained his or her full rights. Similarly, to reduce financial risks, producers entered into 'overall development deals' with studios, in which the studio agreed to finance a producer's projects in return for the producer making all of his films at the studio, or at least giving it the first opportunity to fund his pictures (Litwack, 1987, 156–57).

[1.20] A further complexity referred to the introduction of the 'pay or play' deal, which occurred once a script was completed and packaged with a star or director. Under this negotiation, a studio was required to pay the talent whether the film was made or not. Such fees were needed to hold the talent in place while the studio sought additional elements or oversaw rewrites (Litwack, 157). Alternatively, by the mid-1970s, this led to projects in which no agreement could be made being placed into 'turnaround', or studios rushing ill prepared films into production (Litwack, 58).

[1.21] THE MICRO-LEVEL: NEW HOLLYWOOD AUTEURS

[1.22] The independence which was evidenced at UA and greater creative autonomy provided by the agency packages, proved attractive to a new generation of filmmakers who were drawn from the counterculture, exploitation films, and film schools. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, these talents went from Hollywood's margins to become its leading figures. They were aided by the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA) decision to replace the



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Production Code with the Ratings system in 1968 enabling Hollywood to produce films with adult themes. Moreover, the studios' financial difficulties had created 'breaches in the defences [of the walled city], and occasionally you could get in through these breaches [to] see what was on the other side of the wall' (Milius 2003).

Several writers, directors and actors served their apprenticeship as cheap labour for the B-picture magnate Roger Corman. They included Peter Bogdanovich (a former film critic), Dennis Hopper, Peter Fonda, Jack Nicholson, Jonathan Demme and Robert Towne. Within poverty-row productions, they learnt how to work to budget and made exploitation films that tapped into new youth markets. From this experience, Hopper, Fonda and Nicholson, with the backing of Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson (who had made their fortune from the television show of *The Monkees*), made *Easy Rider* (1969). This low budget film connected with a new and lucrative youth market.

[1.23]

Two members of Corman's alumni, Coppola and Martin Scorsese, represented another dynamic: the crossover of talent from film schools to mainstream movies. They were accompanied by other 'Movie Brats' including Brian DePalma, Paul Schrader, John Milius, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. This group wanted independence and Coppola and Lucas attempted to forge a film collective, American Zoetrope, away from Hollywood in San Francisco with a distribution deal made with Warner Brothers.

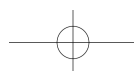
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This change in the guard also was reflected by the rise of new set of film technicians who provided innovative solutions in terms of camera work (e.g., Gordon Willis, Haskell Wexler, Conrad Hall, Vilmos Zsigmond, Lazlo Kovacs, John A. Alonzo, Owen Roizman), editing (e.g., Hal Ashby, Lou Lombardi, Gerald Greenberg) and sound design (e.g., Walter Murch). However, on the disastrous reception of the Zoetrope's first feature – Lucas's *THX 1138* (1971) – Warner's cancelled the deal and demanded the return of monies they had invested in supporting the film collective.

[1.25]

Paradoxically, it was Coppola's potential bankruptcy in the wake of Zoetrope's financial collapse, which led to him directing a studio assignment, *The Godfather* (1972), whose profitability confirmed the power of 'auteur' filmmakers in Hollywood. The film marked a turnaround in Paramount's fortunes which, led by Evans and Bluhdorn, forged close relations with European directors such as Roman Polanski and produced hits like *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *Love Story* (1970). It led to Hollywood studios financing and producing films as diverse as Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1975) and *Raging Bull* (1980), written in tandem with Paul Schrader, and with actor/stars including Robert DeNiro, Al Pacino and Dustin Hoffman as leads.

[1.26]



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[1.27]

WILLIAM FRIEDKIN'S EARLY CAREER PATH – FROM
THE LOCAL TELEVISION STATION MAILROOM TO
ENTERING THE HOLLYWOOD FILM INDUSTRY

[1.28]

While operating in tandem with his peers such as Coppola and Bogdanovich, rather than emerging through the exploitation or film-school route, Friedkin's rise occurred via directing local television shows and documentaries. In turn, he would be known initially as an 'art-house' filmmaker as his interest in films was dictated as much by the French New Wave (e.g., Jean-Luc Goddard, Francois Truffaut), German expressionism (e.g., Fritz Lang) and Italian Neo-Realist auteurs (e.g., Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, Robert Rossellini) as it was by Hollywood films (e.g., D.W. Griffith, Orson Welles, John Ford, Howard Hawks, Raoul Walsh). He was also heavily influenced by other feature film directors who had emerged from the television route including John Frankenheimer (*The Manchurian Candidate* [1962]; *Seven Days in May* [1964]) (Murray 2014a).

[1.29]

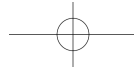
Friedkin was born in Chicago in 1935 to Ukrainian Jewish parents, although for a period of time in Hollywood he gave the impression that he was four years younger. Rather than going to college, he took a low-paid job in the mailroom of his local Chicago television station WGN (World's Greatest Newspaper)-TV after he had graduated from high school and rapidly worked his way up to become the studio floor manager.¹ At the age of twenty-one, he saw Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) and he realised films could be an art form as well as a commercial enterprise.

[1.30]

Simultaneously, he began his directorial career by shooting over one thousand hours of live television programmes and documentaries. His most notable work was *The People vs. Paul Crump* (which he made with the cinematographer Wilmer 'Bill' Butler [*The Conversation* (1974)], *Jaws*) in 1962. This film contributed to the commutation of the African-American Crump's death sentence and was controversially pulled from being broadcast. However, it won a prize at the San Francisco International Film Festival and got Friedkin noticed as a rising talent (Kermode 2006, 181).

[1.31]

This success brought the precocious Friedkin to the attention of the Hollywood via William Morris's fellow Chicago resident, musician and talent agent Tony Fantozzi who negotiated a contract with the producer David L. Wolper who made documentaries for the ABC network. The Wolper Company had used existing library footage with strong teleplays and had established itself when winning an Emmy for a documentary based on Theodore H. White's *The Making of the President* (1960). Friedkin made several films including *The Bold Men* (1964) and *The Thin Blue Line* (1965). In his time at Wolper, he established links with an editor Bud Smith, photographer John M. Stephens and writer Walon Green (who would work with him on *Sorcerer* as



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respectively the Associate Producer/Second Unit Director/ Editor, Director of Photography and the script writer).

Further, through another William Morris agent Joe Wizan,² Friedkin was introduced to Norman Lloyd who was working as a television producer for the *Alfred Hitchcock Hour* (1962–1965). Lloyd had been impressed by *The People vs. Paul Crump* and invited Friedkin to direct one of the show's final episodes entitled 'Off Season' starring John Gavin in 1965. The programme which marked Friedkin's first time on a soundstage was, perhaps, less notable for any artistic merit as it was last of the series and more for Hitchcock's admonishment of the brash young director for not wearing a necktie!³

[1.32]

Friedkin's documentaries caught the eye of the pop-star Sonny Bono and his business manager Steve Broidy. In 1967 he released his first feature film *Good Times* starring Sonny and Cher which was shot by Butler with a non-union crew and told the tale of the singing couple's attempts to make a feature film. It represented a form of 'guerilla' filmmaking as Friedkin stole shots in Los Angeles and the studio backlots at weekends. This was a low-budget cash-in on the singing couple's fame which co-starred the legendary George Sanders as an evil film mogul and won a few decent reviews.

[1.33]

It was followed up by *The Night They Raid Minskys* (1968), which was co-written and produced by Norman Lear at UA, on a much larger budget (\$5 million) and was a period comedy-drama about the invention of burlesque which starred Jason Robards, Britt Ekland, Elliott Gould and Norman Wisdom. Although Friedkin shot the film, the resulting edit was largely the work of Lear and it contained a few cinematic flourishes. The film, however, made very little real impact and Friedkin admitted that as a fledgling director he was out of his depth with the requirements of the production.

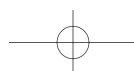
[1.34]

In turn, two 'art-house' films followed, including *The Birthday Party* (1968) with an all British cast led by Robert Shaw, Patrick Magee and Dandy Nichols which was adapted by Harold Pinter from his own play.⁴ Friedkin shot part of the film in the UK at the decaying seaside resort of Worthing, Sussex and revelled in the seediness of the filthy guesthouse at the heart of the drama. He claimed he learned more from his time with Pinter than in any other period of his film-making and he certainly imbued the film with a suitable degree of Pinteresque dread (Segaloff, 1990, 85). According to Vincent Canby, '*The Birthday Party* may not be a great movie, but it's a good recording of an extraordinary play' (Goodall 2011, 153).

[1.35]

Friedkin's work on *The Birthday Party* impressed Executive Producer Dominic Dunne and the playwright Mart Crowley.⁵ He was asked by them to film Crowley's then controversial play about homosexuality *The Boys in the Band* (1970) starring many of the off-Broadway cast including Leonard Frey (*Fiddler on the Roof* [1971]) and Cliff Gorman (*Cops and Robbers* [1973] and *Ghost Dog* [1999]). This adaptation proved to be a minor sensation and gained Friedkin some attention for his staging of the one-set filmed play.⁶ It

[1.36]



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would also become a lightning rod for those members of the gay community who felt that its bitchy representation of them was akin to homophobia – a claim which would reach a full crescendo against Friedkin when he was to make his controversial thriller set in the Sado-Masochistic gay clubs of New York in *Cruising* (1980) (see Chapter Five).⁷

[1.37]

Yet, despite receiving some good notices, all of these films were decidedly non-commercial. Consequently, Friedkin was in danger of being written off as an esoteric filmmaker whose films had failed to find their audiences. However, on inadvertently meeting Howard Hawks, Friedkin (who was then dating Hawk's model daughter Kitty) was advised by the veteran filmmaker to start making movies that would be financially successful otherwise the studios would stop backing him. Hawks informed him that this could offset his reputation as a director who had made 'lousy' pictures. He also commented that Friedkin should include a chase sequence, but make one which would be better made by anyone else. As Friedkin would comment he needed to acquaint himself with the 'business' end of 'show-business' and he planted quotes in *Variety* extolling the virtues of linear narratives and strong characters over the filmic visions of European directors such as Godard and Fellini (Biskind, 1998, 204)

[1.38]

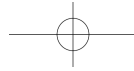
Consequently, on the maxim that 'action is character' (F. Scott Fitzgerald) Friedkin sought to fuse together that plot orientated attributes of commercial filmmaking with narratives that reflected the contemporaneous events that were occurring within the United States (Stevens 2013). Therefore, despite this apparent volte-face in the wake of the New Hollywood veneration of foreign films, he sought projects which focused upon crime, violence, institutional hypocrisy, amorality and moral ambiguity. This new direction led to Friedkin making two massively influential films – *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist*. These movies would prove to be enormous commercial and critical successes which sought to dissect an America that was changing in the wake of Vietnam, the Sexual Revolution, and Watergate. They would propel Friedkin to the forefront of the 'auteur' generation of filmmakers and provide him with an autonomy which would be crucial to his success (Friedkin 2013, 162).

[1.39]

THE FRENCH CONNECTION: DIRECTORIAL CONTROL, PRODUCTION INNOVATION AND NEW YORK POLICE DEPARTMENT

[1.40]

The French Connection was produced by Philip D'Antoni who had just scored a major financial success with his debut feature *Bullitt* (1968). This cop thriller was directed by Peter Yates and starred Steve McQueen who made the film through his Solar production company in a deal with Warner



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Brothers-Seven Arts. It was praised for its pivotal car chase which was filmed in the streets of San Francisco. D'Antoni established his own independent production company – Philip D'Antoni Productions – and he was represented by William Morris. Through Fantozzi, he contacted Friedkin at a mutual place – the Paramount steam room – to direct the project on the basis of his work as a documentarian and his belief that the director's early features showed some promise.

D'Antoni had bought the rights of Robin Moore's 1969 nonfiction book *The French Connection: A True Account of Cops, Narcotics, and International Conspiracy* about the largest drug bust in New York Police Department's (NYPD) history.⁸ At the centre of the story stood two NYPD detectives Eddie 'Popeye' Egan and Sonny 'Cloudy' Grosso who had established the 1961 case against Pasquale 'Patsy' Fuca, when by chance they observed Fuca in a nightclub consorting with well-known criminals. Acting on a hunch, they found out that Fuca was involved in a \$32 million drug trafficking operation with the 'French Connection' – Jean Jehan or 'Joe the drug' – who was the main figure in importing the huge heroin shipment into the US.

[1.41]

Friedkin was fascinated by the contrasting characters of Egan and Grosso, their street savvy styles and the way they could breakdown suspects by confusing them with interview techniques complete with non-sequiturs (e.g., 'Picking your feet in Poughkeepsie') that were eerily reminiscent of the Pinterseque dialogue in the interrogation sequences in *The Birthday Party*. In turn, D'Antoni and Friedkin extensively researched how the detectives conducted their investigations into the seamier side of the New York drugs underbelly by accompanying them on raids to heroin dens in Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant.

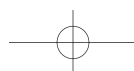
[1.42]

Subsequently, they commissioned several screenplays to capture the essence of the case and unique flavour of the detectives from a range of writers (including a draft by *Point Blank* (1967) screenwriter Alexander Jacobs) which they found unsatisfactory and rejected. Ultimately, Ernest Tidyman, a New York crime reporter and the author of a forthcoming book about a black private detective *Shaft* (1971), was hired to write a working script drawn for \$5000 from Friedkin's observations about the case and the characters of Egan and Grosso.

[1.43]

The project, however, was rejected by several studios until 20th Century Fox's Head of Production Richard Zanuck informed D'Antoni and Friedkin that he would finance the film on a small budget of \$1.5 million. Zanuck informed them that they would have to get their film into production as quickly as possible as he and his partner David Brown were about to be fired by Fox's board. Working on a tight budget on a five-week shoot, Friedkin had complete control over the creative decisions to make an 'induced' documentary-style thriller. In this respect, he was heavily influenced by Constantin Costa-Gavras' *Z* (1969) which had used handheld camerawork and

[1.44]



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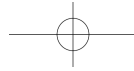
many documentary techniques to fictionalise the murder of a Greek politician during the 'Colonel's' dictatorship in 1963 (see Chapter Four). In effect, he virtually invented the police procedural thriller which not only placed an emphasis on action but demonstrated how the detectives had to engage in the hours of surveillance that were necessary to make a major crime case.

[1.45] To provide the movies' gritty look he employed the cameraman Owen Roizman who filmed it on a fast-film stock to use the available light on the New York streets. The Cuban camera operator Enrique 'Ricky' Bravo used light-weight Arriflexs to provide much of the film's cinema verite style (Pope 2013). Friedkin blocked the cast and crew separately and told Bravo, who had filmed much of the 1959 revolution in Cuba alongside Fidel Castro, to find the shot as if he was filming real-life events. Further, rather than using dolly tracks, Roizman and Bravo used wheelchairs or the windows of cars to create the requisite sense of camera movements. As Roizman commented:

[1.46] In the first meeting that I had with Phil D'Antoni and Bill Friedkin, they told me that the one thing they did not want was a 'pretty' picture. They wanted it to be rough, almost documentary, but with the look of a professional job to it. It had to be the kind of picture that would involve the audience. This meant that there would be a lot of hand-held camerawork, and they didn't especially care if the audience was aware of the camera (Roizman quoted in Rameaker 2010, 157).

[1.47] Friedkin's location manager (and bookmaker) 'Fat' Thomas Rand mapped out the seamy underbelly of New York to enhance the verisimilitude of the shoot and, with this attention to detail, the director relentlessly worked his cast and crew across eighty six locations in the city during one of its coldest winters in 1970. The film would also be noted for its sound design which included an aural city-scape of traffic, car horns and sirens, along with its spare use of the experimental jazz musician Don Ellis's avant-garde soundtrack (Friedkin 2013, 182).

[1.48] While maintaining doubts about his leading man Gene Hackman, who played Jimmy 'Popeye' Doyle (the fictionalised version of Egan), Friedkin deliberately confronted the actor to gain the performance of the bigoted police officer that he wanted. Hackman, best known for playing Buck Barrow in Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and starring in *I Never Sang for My Father* (1970), had largely been known as a character actor. His name had been well down the pecking order behind actors Peter Boyle and Jackie Gleason, the newspaper columnist Jimmy Breslin and even Egan when Friedkin was casting the film. According to Friedkin and Zanuck, Hackman had only been brought onto the production due to the insistence of his agent Sue Mengers and as he could not find anyone else in the time to start the shoot. Indeed, Zanuck commented:



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I didn't think Gene was totally right for the part. I was hoping to land a bigger star, because at that time he was a secondary player, and Billy [Friedkin] felt the same way. Sue single-handedly got him this job. She would call me three times a day, she was a relentless bird dog on this issue. I'd never been campaigned in my entire career like she campaigned for that role. She beat up on us, and we just couldn't take it anymore, so we did it (Biskind 2000).

[1.49]

Egan similarly expressed his doubts about Hackman, who actively disliked the racist Irish-American detective, but responded by giving a sensational interpretation of the role.⁹ The other lead roles were taken up by little known character actors such as Roy Scheider (*Klute* [1971]) as Buddy 'Cloudy' Russo (Sonny Grosso), the Spanish (rather than French) actor Fernando Rey (Bunuel's *Viridiana* [1961]) as Alain Charnier (Jean Jehan) and Tony Lo Bianco (*The Honeymoon Killers* [1969]) as Sal Boca (Patsy Fuca).¹⁰

[1.50]

Friedkin forged a strong relationship with Egan and Grosso.¹¹ He had the two narcotics detectives, along with other NYPD officers such as Randy Jurgensen, on the locations to act as technical advisors and to appear in the minor roles of Simonson (Egan) and Klein (Grosso).¹² Such an assistance from the NYPD proved vital in producing two of the film's most memorable action sequences – the cat and mouse foot chase between Doyle and Charnier or 'Frog One' in the subway at the Grand Central Station Shuffle and the outstanding car chase in which Doyle relentlessly pursues Pierre Nicoli or 'Frog Two' (Marcel Bozzuffi) in a hijacked 'El' train when driving under the elevated tracks in Brooklyn.

[1.51]

Friedkin was immeasurably helped by the police officers who allowed him to steal real location shots when filming the car chase without working with shooting permits.¹³ Further, he topped *Bullitt* (with the aid of the same stunt coordinator Bill Hickman) and demonstrated that he had heeded Hawks advice about making an action film in which he would include a better chase than any of its predecessors. The sequence was notable for its hair-raising stunts, its use of populated streets and real-life danger.¹⁴ Later, Friedkin was to admit that it was a miracle that no one was killed or badly injured, and that he regretted putting people's lives in danger to get the shot. However, it remains for many cinema-goers one of (if not) the greatest ever chase sequences in film history. Along with the rest of the film, it would be notable for its kinetic editing style and showed how Friedkin aimed to keep the plot moving fast to entertain the audience.¹⁵

[1.52]

However, *The French Connection* also contained a series of foreign film style complexities with reference to the characters' mixed motivations. Friedkin eschewed the typical moral compass of Hollywood good and bad guys to create the template for edgy 1970s thrillers (Kermode 2006, 181). In direct counterpoint of his abilities as a detective, Doyle emerges as an obsessive and flawed personality who harasses victims, brutalizes ethnic minor-

[1.53]



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ities and endangers others for the 'good' of the case. In contrast, his nemesis Charnier is suave, urbane and well-mannered despite being responsible for the largest heroin deal in American criminal history.

[1.54] This is highlighted in a sequence when the French criminals are seen to be eating rich food in an elegant, high-class Upper East-Side restaurant. Simultaneously, they are being staked out by Doyle and Russo outside on the freezing New York streets who sustain themselves with slices of inedible pizza and disgusting coffee drunk from paper cups. Finally, Doyle's obsessive pursuit of 'Frog One' leads him to inadvertently kill the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent Mulderig (Hickman) and to disappear at the finale literally chasing and shooting at shadows. Friedkin memorably ended the movie with an ambiguous off-screen gunshot.

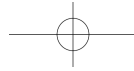
[1.55] THE FRENCH CONNECTION: RESISTANCE TO STUDIO INTERFERENCE, FINANCIAL SUCCESS, ACADEMY AWARD GLORY AND THE 'DIRECTOR AS SUPERSTAR'

[1.56] On completion of the shoot, Friedkin and D'Antoni were relieved to have got the film into the can. The director quipped to the producer that he felt that he got away with it but they would not be earning any Academy Awards! They were also fearful that the change in the management regime at 20th Century Fox could undermine their film. In some respects, these concerns were borne out when two of the older studio executives – Elmo Williams and Stan Hough – tried to reassert their power in the face of the new management led by the relatively inexperienced Dennis Stanfill as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Gordon Stuhlberg as the President of the Film Division. Most especially, Williams called for the film to be reedited and tried to have the sound remixed in post-production.

[1.57] The filmmakers resisted the proposed changes and the demands of the studio marketing department to retitle the film either 'Popeye' or 'Doyle'. In this respect, Friedkin was to discover that he had been supported by the older Zanuck in a telegram which was delivered to the studio chiefs on the film's opening day:

[1.58] Dear Elmo, Screened The French Connection last night and for its type it is a perfect masterpiece that should receive critical acclaim and will certainly hit at the box office. . . . Congratulations to you and all concerned. Best always, Darryl (Friedkin, 2012. 203)

[1.59] Zanuck proved to be prescient as the brilliant thriller was a major hit and, by 31 December 1973, it had grossed \$51,700,000 (a figure of \$290,460,000 when adjusted for inflation) at the North American Box Office.



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Moreover, despite Friedkin's earlier predictions, at the 1972 Academy Awards it became the first R-rated movie to win the Academy Award for Best Picture since the introduction of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) classifications and ratings system. The picture won awards for other Oscars in the categories of Best Actor (Hackman), Best Director (Friedkin), Best Film Editing (Gerry Greenberg) and Best Adapted Screenplay (Tidyman). It received several further nominations for the Best Supporting Actor (Scheider), Best Cinematography (Roizman) and Best Sound Mixing (Thomas Soderberg and Chris Newman). D'Antoni, Hackman and Friedkin also won Golden Globes for production, acting and direction. Friedkin also won the prestigious Directors Guild of America (DGA) Award for Best Direction.

[1.60]

Friedkin was acclaimed as New Hollywood's 'wunderkind' and 'inaccurately but appropriately claimed to be the youngest filmmaker to win the Best Director Oscar' (Kermode, 2000). He was now a 'hot' director and he announced several new film projects including two at Universal, one at Warners and a future one with D'Antoni.¹⁶ However, the most startling announcement occurred in September 1972 and referred to a deal at Paramount Studios with the formation of the Directors Company (New York Times, 1972). Gulf and Western's Austrian Chairman Charles Bluhdorn had decided to reward Friedkin and his peers Coppola and Bogdanovich, who had similarly achieved major successes with *The Godfather*, *The Last Picture Show* (1971) and *What's Up Doc?* (1972), with the opportunity to run their own production unit (Pye and Myles 1979, 95; Segaloff 1990, 122).¹⁷

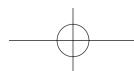
[1.61]

In this respect, Bluhdorn saw 'auteurism as a business plan' (Connor, 2016). He envisioned it as means to raid other studios of their top directors including Stanley Kubrick and Mike Nichols from Warner Brothers. This appealed to Coppola who had never forgiven Warners for its cancelling of his Zoetrope production deal and the financial debacle associated with Lucas' *THX 1138*. However, Bluhdorn's offer had occurred over the reservations of the Paramount production chief Frank Yablans who most definitely did not buy into the deal. Instead, he felt that company would be a bastion for the directors' egos leading them to produce non-commercial projects (Biskind 1998, 207)

[1.62]

Despite Yablans' doubts, he officially went along with the plan for Paramount to under-write the three filmmakers to the tune of \$31,500,000 to deliver twelve films on medium budgets of \$3 million over the next six years (three each as directors and another one as a producer). The directors would have complete control of their productions and sit on the board with Peter Bart and Yablans who publicly, at least, talked about developing a 'familial relationship' with them so they would not have 'auction their talents all over town' (Pye and Myles 1979, 96; Bart 2011, 194–95).

[1.63]



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[1.64] Moreover, Friedkin, Coppola and Bogdanovich were to receive a significant share of the box office generated, take control of their films, enjoy their independence and mentor fellow filmmakers (Segaloff 1990, 122). During this period, Coppola brought to Friedkin and Bogdanovich the opportunity to produce a new project which was being outlined by his protégé Lucas – *The Star Wars*. Coppola and Lucas had combined as producer and director on what would prove to be a massive hit *American Graffiti* (1973) at Universal. However, as there had been many difficulties with the studio during its production and as Lucas's film was yet to be released, both Friedkin and Bogdanovich rejected Coppola's proposal as neither of them could see its mass appeal (Guersario 2015).

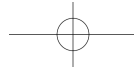
[1.65] Whereas Coppola directed *The Conversation* and Bogdanovich incorporated his current film *Paper Moon* (1973) into the Directors Company which proved to be a hit, along with the production of his adaptation of Henry James' *Daisy Miller* (1974) starring his then girlfriend Cybil Shepherd, Friedkin was significantly involved with his next project *The Exorcist* at Warner Brothers. In the event, although he had promised to make *The Bunker Hill Boys* – a semi follow-up to *The French Connection* – with the company, the limited revenues drawn from Coppola's critically acclaimed film and the financial failure of Bogdanovich's picture led to him withdrawing from the venture.¹⁸

[1.66] In particular, he felt that Yablans had deliberately sabotaged the company by enabling the other film-makers to produce 'vanity projects'. Coppola and Bogdanovich pursued projects elsewhere and the Directors Company quickly died. Moreover, Friedkin carried on in his belief that he would be best off in making audience-friendly rather than personal films, 'People want to . . . be moved viscerally. I'm interested in having an entire audience in the palm of my hand'. (Stevens 1974, 211)

[1.67] **THE EXORCIST: FRIEDKIN'S ASSERTION
OF DIRECTORIAL POWER**

[1.68] *The Exorcist* was based on William Peter Blatty's best-selling novel. He first met Blatty when he had rejected producer/director Blake Edwards' offer to direct a screenplay that Blatty had co-written with Edwards concerning a filmic version of the television detective show *Peter Gunn* (1967). Blatty had admired Friedkin for being honest with Edwards about the poor quality of the script which he also believed to be of an inferior standard. Subsequently, Blatty's career as a comedy writer (*A Shot in the Dark* [1964], *Darling Lili* [1970]) stalled and he decided to write *The Exorcist*.

[1.69] The book was loosely based on a true story of an exorcism of a teenage boy 'Robbie Mannheim' in Maryland that the writer knew about from his



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student days at the Jesuit University of Georgetown in Washington D.C. In the event, Blatty changed the gender of the possessed child to that of a young girl, used several characters from his experiences in Hollywood (Chris MacNeil was based on his friend and neighbour Shirley MacClaine and Burke Dennings on the director J. Lee Thompson) and set the majority of the novel in Georgetown. For a period of time the book sold poorly when it was published in 1971. However, this changed when Blatty appeared on *The Dick Cavett* talk-show (1968–1995) and explained the theological purposes underpinning the book. After this nationwide appearance, *The Exorcist* became a number one best-seller.

In turn, its popularity meant that it became a desirable property in Hollywood and the film rights were obtained by Frank Wells at Warner Brothers. After a protracted negotiation with Warners and another producer Paul Monash, Blatty received \$600,000 and set up with his agent Noel Marshall (who acted as the Executive Producer) Hoya Productions Incorporated. He ensured that he was attached to forthcoming film as its writer and producer as well as having directorial approval.¹⁹ The studio offered the film to several marquee or ‘name’ directors such as Stanley Kubrick, Peter Bogdanovich, John Boorman and Arthur Penn who all passed upon the option to make it.²⁰ Mike Nichols was also approached to make the film but rejected the assignment as he believed it would be impossible to cast a suitable child for the central part of the possessed girl Regan McNeil.

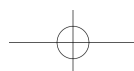
[1.70]

From the beginning of the production process, Blatty had lobbied for Friedkin over the objections of the studio chiefs including Wells, Ted Ashley and John Calley whose preference was for Mark Rydell who had recently directed the John Wayne western *The Cowboys* (1972). However, this attitude changed upon the release of *The French Connection* and Friedkin receiving the Academy Award for Direction. On the back of this spectacular success, his agent at William Morris, Fantozzi, negotiated a deal in which Friedkin was paid the princely sum of \$500,000 to direct the film along with ten percent of Blatty’s 37 percent of the net profits (Friedkin 2013, 232).

[1.71]

Friedkin, who had instantly loved Blatty’s novel, quickly asserted his control over the production. He rejected Blatty’s 243 page screenplay which he informed the author had betrayed his own book and oversaw a major rewrite of the script that was pared down to 100 pages. Friedkin argued with Blatty that the film should be more ambivalent in its depiction of faith and this remained a matter of dispute between the writer and director, most especially with regard to the ending of exorcism and its outcome. He also demanded that the writer should remove several unnecessary red herrings, subplots and backstories. Friedkin determined that his film should be rooted in a realistic depiction of the possession. In turn, he decided to shoot the film on the Georgetown locations and on soundstages at Filmways studios in New

[1.72]



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York to be well away from the interference of the Warners management back in California.

[1.73] Further, Friedkin asserted his directorial influence in his casting of the film. This led to the character actress Ellen Burstyn playing the part of the possessed girl's film star mother Chris MacNeil rather than star names including MacClaine and Jane Fonda. The rest of the cast was composed from other character actors including Lee J. Cobb (*On the Waterfront* [1954], *Twelve Angry Men* [1956]) Kitty Wynn (*Panic in Needle Park* [1971]) and Jack MacGowran (*The Quiet Man* [1952]) appearing respectively in the supporting roles of Lieutenant Kinderman, Sharon and Burke Dennings. As Father Lancaster Merrin, the titular Exorcist, he cast the Swedish star and Ingmar Bergman alumni Max Von Sydow (*The Seventh Seal* [1955], *The Virgin Spring* [1960]) in role of the elderly priest, although the actor was only forty-four at the time of filming.

[1.74] For the key role of the Jesuit psychologist Father Damien Karras, several stars including Paul Newman and Jack Nicholson, along with Roy Scheider (who Friedkin did not cast as Blatty had categorically ruled him out) and Stacy Keach, had expressed their interest. However, on seeing the stage play *That Championship Season* (1972) Friedkin decided to cast its playwright and the largely unknown actor Jason Miller as Karras. The most difficult piece of casting undoubtedly proved to be that of the pivotal role of Regan MacNeil. After auditioning several hundred girls, Friedkin picked the twelve-year-old Linda Blair as Regan who he believed could not only convey the innocence of the girl but also had the ability to react to the demands of portraying the possessed child.

[1.75] As he had with the NYPD cops in *The French Connection*, Friedkin placed several real-life Jesuit priests into minor roles and to act as technical advisors. In particular, Father Thomas Bermingham S. J. (Society of Jesus) who had advised Blatty when writing the book was called upon, as well as Father Bill O'Malley S. J. who played the small but important part of Karras's close friend Father Dyer. He would also use a Greek non-actress Vasiliki Maliaros in her only film role to play Karras's elderly mother and cast a street-drinker Vinny Russell to appear as the beggar who asks Karras for money on the New York subway.²¹

[1.76] Moreover, to add to the film's veracity he brought in Roizman and Bravo once more to be the cameraman and operator (Williams 1998). In terms of the production design, Friedkin employed designer Bill Malley to construct the sets on the Filmways sound stages. For the special effects team, Friedkin recruited Marcel Vercoutere to provide the practical equipment including the construction of the model of Regan for the head turning sequence. The make-up specialist Dick Smith from *Little Big Man* (1970) and *The Godfather* was employed to age von Sydow as Merrin and, most crucially, provide the prosthetics to turn Blair from an innocent child into a violent, raging demon.



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AN ACT OF FAITH, THE COMPLEX SHOOT,
AND THE BUDGET OVERRUNS

[1.77]

The Exorcist was seen to be an act of faith by Blatty who as a second-generation Lebanese Catholic was a true believer in good and evil. The Jewish raised Friedkin, an agonistic, steered the film into a more factually based account of the exorcism which he wanted to be rooted in a documentary style of realism. Therefore, by dispensing with the backstory and much of the subplot concerning detective Lieutenant Kinderman (Cobb) in the novel, Friedkin's film focused more explicitly upon the possession of twelve year old girl Regan MacNeil.

[1.78]

After several horrific instances in which Regan attacks her mother and her doctors, Chris MacNeil who is located in Georgetown while making a film with director Burke Dennings who is mysteriously killed on the steps outside the MacNeil house on Providence Street, requests the Georgetown University based Jesuit priest Father Karras to perform an exorcism on her daughter. Karras, who has recently lost his own mother and is facing a crisis in faith (exemplified in an outstanding guilt-ridden dream sequence about his mother), is reluctant to become involved. Alternatively, he suggests that Regan should undergo a series of painful psychological and physical examinations. When the girl's soul is taken over by the demon, she physically transforms into the manifestation of evil, claims to be the Devil and has to be strapped to her bed in the family house in Georgetown. Karras, who now believes that the possession is real, sets about to persuade his Jesuit superiors of the veracity of the case and the need to perform the Exorcism.

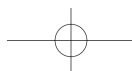
[1.79]

The Jesuits request that Karras calls for the assistance of Father Merrin to help him remove the demon – the unnamed Assyrian Pazuzu – from within Regan. Merrin in a ten-minute prologue is shown to have previously battled Pazuzu on an archaeological dig based in Northern Iraq. His entrance into the Georgetown house is one of the most memorable in cinema as his shadow is cast against a demonic shaft of light drawn from the bedroom. In this respect, Friedkin and Roizman designed the shot to be reminiscent of Rene Migrette's 1955 painting the 'Empire of Light'. The iconic image would also be used for film's poster design.

[1.80]

The final exorcism occurs in which the demon not only tortures the child but psychologically plays on Karras's doubts, fears and guilt over the death of his mother. This is accompanied by trail of obscenities and by further attacks upon Karras's genuine belief in God. Merrin orders Karras out of the bedroom and then dies from a heart attack induced by the demon during an epic battle between good and evil. The returning Karras discovers Regan/Pazuzu gloating over Merrin's body. Enraged he takes the demon into his soul and sacrifices himself by throwing himself out the bedroom window. Karras is killed at the bottom of a steep set of stairs which are immediately

[1.81]



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adjacent to the MacNeil residence. His friend Father Dyer administers last rights to the dying Karras and Regan emerges fully cleansed from the possession. Good has triumphed over Satanic evil.

[1.82]

The film contained a series of violent set pieces, notably Regan's projectile vomiting over Karras; levitations; Smith's makeup to brutally distort the possessed girl's flesh; the bizarre deaths of several characters; Karras's sacrifice on the steps and most controversially the girl engaging in masturbation with a bloody crucifix. Moreover, the possessed Regan spouts a range of obscenities to rile the priests so that they doubt their faith and she (in)famously rotates of her head 360 degrees in the finale. These complex special effects, Smith's prosthetics, the painful physical stunts (most especially, Karras's death which had to be performed twice by the same stuntman on what were described at the time as the 'Hitchcock', now known as the 'Exorcist', steps which were padded with rubber) and the production design for the freezing cold bedroom (which had to be achieved with the importation of air conditioning units) presented severe challenges.

[1.83]

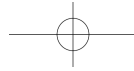
Moreover, on the adage of 'anything for the shot', Friedkin went to extraordinary lengths, reminiscent of tyrannical directors such as Eric Von Stroheim and Otto Preminger, in manipulating the actors to get the reactions he wanted. Both Blair and Burstyn suffered back injuries when they were yanked in harnesses by stuntmen to achieve the effects in the possession scenes. In particular, Burstyn landed on her coccyx during the scene that Regan slaps her mother and she objected to Friedkin's use of the take of her screaming in real pain in the final edit of the film. There was also disquiet when Friedkin had the mixers put the actresses' painful screams into the soundtrack.

[1.84]

When he could not get the right reaction from O'Malley, Friedkin asked the priest if he trusted him and on being told 'yes' slapped him hard across his face to get the distraught reaction of the emotional Dyer reading Karras the last rights. Moreover, he fired blanks without warning to elicit shock from Miller and informed him that the pea soup used for the green vomit in the projectile-vomiting scene would hit him in the chest rather than his face, resulting in the actor's disgusted reaction. By this stage of his career Friedkin was undoubtedly confident, if not overtly arrogant, in using a range of directorial tricks to provoke performances. The filming was also slowed down due to his daily firing and rehiring of crew members and his growing hubris. It was also suggested that on the back of his director's chair he had stencilled in on the cloth:

[1.85]

'An Oscar for *The French Connection*'. To right of his name was the outline of another Oscar, with a question mark inside it (Biskind 1998, 217).



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Incidents such as the Miller's son being hit by a motorbike and the mysterious fire which burned down the bedroom set attracted claims that the film was cursed. Indeed, after the fire, Friedkin attempted to get Father Bermingham to exorcise the set. However, in reality, the escalation within the budget from \$4–12 million had less to do with the occult and more to do with Friedkin's perfectionism and temperamental behaviour. Although Blatty was formally the producer, he would quickly discover that his director was in charge of the production and that David Salven had more power than him as the assistant (or line) producer on the budget.

[1.86]

Friedkin's demand for perfection and the complicated special effects meant that the US shoot overran in length from 105 to 224 days. The Exorcism scene took over a month to complete and was shot in sequence. It included innovative mechanical effects such as the use of air conditions so the bedroom set could be refrigerated to twenty below zero so the actors' breath could be seen. Friedkin would complete the filming with a British crew, along with von Sydow, the UK cinematographer Billy Williams and the French sound recordist Jean-Louis Ducarme, when he went to the city of Mosul in Northern Iraq to shoot the prologue. This was much to the chagrin of Wells who had failed to get the film relocated back to Los Angeles on numerous occasions (Brooks 2013).

[1.87]

POST-PRODUCTION – DIRECTORIAL AUTONOMY AND CONTROVERSY

[1.88]

During post-production, Friedkin would make several decisions which shaped the nature of *The Exorcist* and added to the controversies surrounding it. Friedkin employed four editors – Jordan Leondopolous, Evan Lottman, Norman Gay and his friend from his Wolper days Bud Smith – and decided to keep to the kinetic editorial style that he had perfected for *The French Connection*. In particular, Smith was responsible for editing the opening prologue set in Iraq in which Merrin initially confronts Pazuzu and he edited the film to the rhythm of the blacksmiths hammering metal against an anvil. For the sound mix, he contacted a Mexican Foley artist Gonzalo Gaviro (*El Topo* [1971]) to create the eerie effects which he provided by only using his body and by twisting an old cracked leather wallet made the sound of cracking bones when the demon's head completely turned around (Friedkin 2013, 296). As Jay Beck commented:

[1.89]

A number of 'signature sounds' are associated with a particular narrative event: the insect buzz of the amulet, the rats scratching in the attic, the bouncing bed, and Regan's demonic head twist (Beck 2010, 6).

[1.90]





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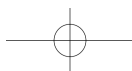
[1.91] On completing a fine cut of 140 minutes, he removed a further twelve minutes in accordance to Calley's suggestions to reduce the running time to just over two hours despite the objections of Blatty who had loved the preview version. Most especially, he cut out Regan's spider-walk due to the deficiencies of the special effects, a second doctor's consultation scene, the dialogue between Merrin and Karras about the 'meaning' of the possession and made the ending more ambiguous by removing a conversation between Dyer and Kinderman outside the MacNeil residence. Throughout this final editing session Friedkin barred the irate Blatty from the post-production facilities and commented that he was not making a commercial for the Catholic Church. The release cut remains the director's vision as he believed it played better at the shorter length, although in 1998 he would reinstate several scenes in a rerelease and then DVD version of the film entitled *The Exorcist – The Version You've Never Seen* (see Chapter Six). Friedkin would claim:

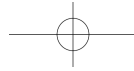
[1.92] Though film is the most collaborative of media, it *is* a director's medium. . . . At a certain point, you have to believe in the film you're making and what will be its final form. . . . Open that door a crack, and you've lost the film (Friedkin 2013, 293).

[1.93] The other post-production controversies referred to the director's use of subliminal shots (notably the inclusion of a shot of a make-up test of a demon's face for Regan's stunt double Eileen Dietz), the dubbing of the voice of the possessed Regan, Dietz's doubling for the role and the choice of soundtrack music. Friedkin had intended to use Blair's voice for the demon's dialogue by having it electronically distorted and roughened. While this worked for several scenes, the director felt Blair's voice lacked the sufficient dramatic power for the climatic scenes when the demon confronts the two priests.

[1.94] Therefore, he chose the Academy Award winning Mercedes McCambridge (*All the Kings Men* [1949]) an experienced radio actress to provide Pazuzu's voice. When recording the sequences, McCambridge, a lapsed Catholic and a recovering alcoholic, insisted on being accompanied by two priests. Further, she requested that she was strapped down in her chair as she summoned up the demonic voice by smoking heavily, drinking whiskey and ingesting roach eggs. Her voice was then mixed with animal sounds and an audio cassette of an actual exorcism received from the Vatican.

[1.95] After she had recorded the demonic voice Warner Brothers did not give McCambridge any credit during early screenings of the film. This led to her accusing Friedkin of acting in bad faith although the director claimed that the actress insisted on remaining uncredited when he had contacted her to act as a voice artist. In the event, McCambridge sought a Screen Actors Guild's





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(SAG) arbitration and she was credited for her performance. This controversy was accompanied by the complaints of Dietz who argued that she had been similarly snubbed so that Warners could focus their publicity efforts on Blair's performance. As a result, Dietz also received credit for the role of Regan even though Friedkin maintained she had only appeared for a mere twenty-eight seconds. Subsequently, he argued that McCambridge and Dietz's actions had undermined Blair's chances of winning the Academy Award.

Initially, the legendary film composer Bernard Herrmann (*Citizen Kane* [1941], *Psycho* [1960], *Taxi Driver* [1976]) was approached to write the score. However, the abrasive Herrmann clashed with the equally volatile Friedkin when watching a rough cut of the picture in Los Angeles and promptly returned back to London. The executive producer Noel Marshall suggested that the Argentinean musician Lalo Schifrin, known for *Bullitt*, *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), *Dirty Harry* (1971) and composing the theme tune for the *Mission Impossible* (1966–1973) television series should be commissioned to write the score. However, Schifrin's 'Bossanova' music was rejected out-of-hand by Friedkin and akin to Kubrick in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) used modern classical compositions.

[1.96]

Therefore, the soundtrack included samples from the 1972 Cello Concerto No. 1, of *Polymorphia* and other pieces by the experimental Polish musician Krzysztof Penderecki and Five Pieces for Orchestra by Austrian composer Anton Webern. These pieces were arranged and accompanied by some original music written by the rock musician turned film composer Jack Nitzsche (*Performance* [1970], *One Flew Over Cuckoo's Nest* [1975], *Blue Collar* [1978]). In what became known as the 'Theme from The Exorcist', Friedkin 'needle-dropped' the melody which appears on the first side of the progressive rock musician Mike Oldfield's 1973 debut album *Tubular Bells*.

[1.97]

According to the film critic Mark Kermode, this choice occurred by fluke when Friedkin was visiting Ahmet Ertegun, the president of Atlantic Records (who distributed *Tubular Bells* in the US) (Kermode 1998). On picking up a white label version of the album from a selection of records in Ertegun's office, he put it on the record player and decided that the music would be perfect for the movie. Although the theme only appears briefly in two scenes and the end titles, it became most commonly associated with the film as the 'Theme from *The Exorcist*'.²² The difficulties between Blatty and Friedkin, along with the director's changes to the soundtrack, led to the filmmaker only delivering his final print four days before its scheduled premier (Brady 1974, 81).

[1.98]



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[1.99]

THE EXORCIST – BOX OFFICE GLORY, THE 1973 ACADEMY AWARDS AND CAPTURING THE ZEITGEIST

[1.100]

The Exorcist placed Friedkin at the top of industrial tree as an 'A' list director who had successfully negotiated the tribulations of a complicated Hollywood production. For many, it revolutionised the horror genre and it is considered by critics such as Kermode to be one of, if not, the greatest horror film ever made (Kermode 2003). Friedkin himself has always denied it to be a horror movie and more a treatise on the act of faith. As a brilliantly made suspenseful thriller and indeed, horrific, movie it certainly followed Friedkin's belief in 'film being a director's medium' in which he could manipulate and shape audience expectations. His anointed place in the Hollywood pantheon was reflected by the film's spare opening titles by Dan Perri in which the first credit of 'A William Friedkin film' immediately precedes *William Peter Blatty's The Exorcist*.²³ Moreover, his name appeared prominently in the iconic poster used to for the film and the marketing material which Perri designed for the promotional campaign.

[1.101]

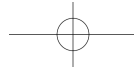
The Exorcist was released in the United States on December 26, 1973. The film was booked into a mere twenty-six theatres across America, although it was eventually opened out across the nation when Warner Brothers realised that the queues around the blocks indicated that it was to become a phenomenon. The R-rated picture played in US cinemas for many months and it earned \$66.3 million in the distributors' North American rentals during its initial theatrical release in 1974. This meant that it was the second most popular film of the calendar year after *The Sting* (1973) and it changed the way blockbusters would be costed and marketed (Kermode 2006, 182). As it continued to be reissued throughout the decade, it eventually grossed \$232,671,011 at the North American box-office alone.

[1.102]

When this number is adjusted for inflation, it remains the ninth highest-grossing film of all time and the top-grossing R-rated film on record at a total of \$1,025,254,300. In terms of its total domestic and international gross it has made \$441,071,011 worldwide and when this figure is adjusted this means that *The Exorcist* has earned \$1.794 billion. It made both Friedkin and Blatty extremely wealthy, although the writer and producer demanded from Warner Brothers that his percentage of the gross should be assigned to the original budget rather than to the film's eventual production costs which he blamed on the director's over-runs.

[1.103]

It was the first horror film to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture and earned ten nominations at the 1973 Oscars including a further one for Friedkin. Ultimately, it only received two awards – one for Blatty for the Best Adapted Screenplay and for Best Sound (Robert Knudsen, Chris Newman) – losing out to *The Sting* in terms of production and direction. However, it appeared that the film was subject to a backlash as several



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veteran Hollywood filmmakers, led by the elderly director George Cukor, felt that if *The Exorcist* had won Best Picture that the industry would be taking a serious turn for the worse. Conversely, it received four Golden Globes from the Hollywood Foreign Press for Best Picture (Blatty), Direction (Friedkin), Adapted Screenplay (Blatty) and Supporting Actress (Blair).

[1.104]

The film divided critics who were both ecstatic in their love or hatred of Friedkin's picture. In tandem, it was either praised as being 'deeply spiritual' by sections of the Catholic Church or damned as a 'Satanic' work by the evangelist preacher Billy Graham. It appeared that Friedkin had once again captured the zeitgeist of a divided America in terms of its politics, culture and values. Indeed, the film became subject to a nationwide hysteria as a range of violent audience reactions and supernatural incidents were reported in its wake. In this respect, it tapped into a raw nerve which existed between the progressive and regressive elements of the divine and depraved.²⁴

CONCLUSION

[1.105]

William Friedkin's iconoclastic behaviour reflected that of the archetypical 1970s US 'auteur' filmmaker who guarded his freedoms. These directors (Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich, Robert Altman, Sam Peckinpah, Hal Ashby, Bob Rafelson and Martin Scorsese) set up their films through independent companies either with creative producers or on their own to operate autonomously within the maelstrom of the changing Hollywood studio system. The success of his pictures demonstrated that for a period of time that the filmmakers and the studio heads were sync in terms of film content, if not in budgets. Friedkin was a leading member of those filmmakers who demonstrated that 'almost anyone with talent and the will to do so could become a film director'. (Cook 2000, 98)

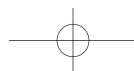
[1.106]

His films were noted for their technical brilliance, innovative camerawork, kinetic editing, sound design and use of avant-garde music. Like his contemporaries, Friedkin demonstrated his verisimilitude by insisting on shooting on gritty locations as well as on sound stages. In exploiting the creative and political freedoms, Friedkin's morally ambiguous visions of America's political, social and culture mores provided a commentary upon a period of extreme volatility in US history. These motion pictures explored issues of race, social injustice, individual liberties, anti-authoritarianism, the Vietnam War and civil rights. They also commented on the positive and negative American values of political liberty and culture.

[1.107]

For Friedkin, this meant he had found the formula for his cinematic success to connect with audiences. In this manner, he became a bankable director and had ascended to the top of the industry. As the 'bad boy' of the New Hollywood fraternity, Friedkin was (and remains) a controversial figure

[1.108]



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who displayed both the attributes of a visionary filmmaker and that of a hubristic personality who became drunk on power. Therefore, his mature position as a major 1970s filmmaker represented the confluence of the economic, political and cultural imperatives which shaped the development of the American film industry. Thus, it was within this industrial, cultural and political milieu that he would make his follow-up feature *Sorcerer* which would be released in 1977.

[1.109]

NOTES

[1n1]

1. Friedkin went to his Grammar and High School in Chicago with another maverick auteur filmmaker Philip Kaufman (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1978], *The Wanderers* [1979], *The Right Stuff* [1983]).

[1n2]

2. Wizan would later become a studio executive and an independent producer. He produced Friedkin's horror film *The Guardian* (1990).

[1n3]

3. Friedkin would achieve his revenge on Hitchcock when he won the DGA Award for Best Direction for *The French Connection*. On spotting Hitchcock and his entourage, he snapped off his rented bow-tie to the bemused British filmmaker and reminded him of his sleight. The show was filmed on the Bates Motel set at Universal Studios and was written by James Bridges.

[1n4]

4. Shaw had worked with Pinter on several occasions and appeared in the film version of *The Caretaker* (1963). Pinter had also adapted and directed Shaw's book *The Man in a Glass Booth* (1967). The actor was best known for playing the villainous assassin Donald 'Red' Grant in *From Russia with Love* (1963) and for his performance as Henry VIII in *A Man for All Seasons* (1966). He would later be best known for playing the villainous Doyle Loney in *The Sting* and the shark obsessed Quint in Steven Spielberg's blockbuster *Jaws* (1975).

[1n5]

5. It was at this time that the producers Irwin Winkler and Robert Chartoff seriously considered Friedkin to direct *They Shoot Horses Don't They* (1969). However, Fantozzi demanded that Friedkin receive \$200,000 and Winkler/Chartoff decided to employ Sydney Pollack instead. See Winkler, 2019, p.42.

[1n6]

6. Friedkin would sack his original director of photography Adam Hollander during the shoot.

[1n7]

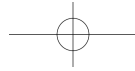
7. There have been a number of Queer theory analyses both positive and negative of Friedkin's work by Matt Bell and others. From these perspectives it has been suggested that *Boys in the Band* was Friedkin's breakout film. However, this position is more difficult to sustain in terms of box revenues which were minimal for the film or for its initial critical reception which was lukewarm at best.

[1n8]

8. Robin Moore had previously written *The Green Berets* (1965) which was turned into film which was codirected and starred John Wayne in 1968. D'Antoni and Friedkin discovered that Moore had made a deal for the rights of his book with G. David Schine the wealthy hotel heir and businessman best known as an aid for Senator Joseph McCarthy. They had to pay Schine off and gave him an Executive Producer credit, although he had no involvement in the production of the film. However, due to his right-wing associations in the McCarthy Red Scare and Moore's association with Wayne's film, several critics implied that the film condoned Doyle's 'fascistic' behaviour.

[1n9]

9. Hackman had wanted to withdraw from the role of the bigoted and racist Doyle. He thanked Friedkin for persuading him to stay in his 1972 Oscar acceptance speech. It was later claimed in the play 'I'll Eat your Last: A Chat with Sue Mengers' (2013) starring Bette Middler that Menger had blocked Friedkin's driveway until he agreed to use Hackman which the director says was a good story but denies. Hackman for contractual reasons with Fox would reprise the role in a sequel *French Connection II* which also included Fernando Rey as Charnier and music by Don Ellis. It was directed by John Frankenheimer and set in Marseilles. Neither Friedkin nor D'Antoni was involved in the production of this film. Indeed, Friedkin wrote to



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Frankenheimer to ask him not make the sequel as the older director had been a major influence upon him. Friedkin had been approached to act as the second unit director on Frankenheimer's *Grand Prix* (1966) but had turned down the opportunity to direct *Good Times*.

[1n10]

10. The casting of Fernando Rey had been by accident. Friedkin had wanted Francisco Rabal from Luis Bunuel's *Belle De Jour* (1967) for the role of Charnier, but the casting director Bob Weiner had mistaken him for Rey who had also appeared in Bunuel's film.

[1n11]

11. Grosso would become a film producer and worked on several other Friedkin films including *The Brinks Job* (1978) and *Cruising* (1980). He also appeared in small role as a policeman in *The Godfather* as Friedkin persuaded his friend Coppola to hire him. Egan who believed he resembled Rod Taylor and that Grosso was like Ben Gazzara would also enjoy the associated fame, appeared in television commercials and small roles such as Michael Ritchie's *Prime Cut* (1972) starring Lee Marvin and, ironically, as the chief villain called Mary Ann, Gene Hackman. Another film which was loosely based on Egan's police career entitled *Badge 373* (1973) was directed by Howard Koch, starred Robert Duvall and was made by Paramount. It was a critical and commercial failure. 20th Century Fox also made a television film entitled *Popeye Doyle* (1986) with Ed O'Neill which was an unsold pilot for a proposed series. Grosso died in 2020.

[1n12]

12. Jurgensen took Friedkin to heroin 'shooting galleries' in Harlem and worked as a stuntman when filming the car chase. The former detective would work with Friedkin on several other pictures including *Sorcerer* and *Cruising* which was based on his experiences as an undercover policeman. He would also act as one of the gunmen who would shoot and kick the corpse of Sonny Corleone (James Caan) in *The Godfather*. In his capacity as a NYPD officer he was responsible for arresting the comedian Lenny Bruce.

[1n13]

13. In order to gain access to the train and stations, Friedkin and D'Antoni made a deal with the head of the New York Metropolitan Transport Authority who was reportedly paid \$40,000 and a one way ticket to Jamaica as he was fired as a consequence of the film company's use of the hardware.

[1n14]

14. For the key chase shots, Hickman, Friedkin and Jurgensen set up a camera car in which they 'ran free' with only a police gumball on the top in the morning traffic in Brooklyn. Hickman and Jurgensen staged the epic car chase sequence in D'Antoni's follow-up film and semi-sequel to *The French Connection* entitled *The Seven Ups* (1973) which he produced and directed for 20th Century Fox. The thriller was based on Sonny Grosso's experience in an elite NYPD crime squad. He was once again portrayed by Roy Scheider (this time called Buddy Manucci) and the picture also starred Tony Lo Bianco.

[1n15]

15. Friedkin would cut several exposition sequences including Doyle's picking up of a girl on her bike while driving, his history as a baseball player and a breakfast scene in a bar with Fat Thomas. He also removed a sadomasochistic sequence with Niccoli and a prostitute. Friedkin explained that these scenes had acted as scaffolding which he deemed unnecessary in the final cut.

[1n16]

16. During this period, Friedkin was offered the chance to direct a James Bond film by the producer Albert 'Cubby' Broccoli. On being informed that he would not be required to shot any stunts and only work with the actors, Friedkin declined stating, 'Geez, I'd rather do the action! . . . Not where he hangs out at the bar and says to a beautiful young woman, 'Would you like a Martini? And I'll have one shaken not stirred'. Who needs to direct that?' (Kermode 2019)

[1n17]

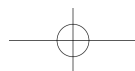
17. Friedkin recalls riding in Coppola's limo, a gift from Bluhdorn, with Bogdanovich and Ellen Burstyn along Hollywood Boulevard and celebrating their respective successes by shouting out at curious pedestrians. 'We were pranksters who made it big, making fools of ourselves'. See Friedkin (2013, 313).

[1n18]

18. Friedkin was assigned the blame for the Directors Company failure by Bogdanovich who claims that his fellow director did not want to be constrained to medium-sized budgeted features.

[1n19]

19. Monash did rather well out *The Exorcist* as he was both paid off and given points from the box office gross. As the film became a commercial smash he took a large amount of the backend profits. Blatty named his production company after the Georgetown University weekly student newspaper *The Hoya* to which he had contributed to as an undergraduate. As well as



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William Friedkin, New Hollywood, and 'Auteurial' Filmmaking

being an agent and producer, Blatty's agent Noel Marshall would later direct and star in (with his then wife Tippi Hedren and stepdaughter Melanie Griffith) *Roar* (1981). This highly troubled film took eleven years to film and was described as the most dangerous film ever made due to its inclusion of 132 lions, tigers, leopards, cougars and jaguars. Marshall had used his proceeds from *The Exorcist* to finance the film, leading some of the crew believing it was plagued by the "curse of The Exorcist".

[1n20]

20. Boorman had objected to the film being made due to his belief that it was a form of child abuse. However, he accepted the offer by Warner Brothers to make the sequel *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977). Neither Friedkin nor Blatty were involved in the motion picture, although Blair, von Sydow and Winn resumed their roles, and the follow up film is often cited as a disaster on every level. There have been a series of official or nonofficial sequels, including Blatty's *The Exorcist III* (1990) which was based on his book *Legion* (1983) in which Lieutenant Kinderman (George C. Scott) occupies the leading role.

[1n21]

21. Vasiliki Maliaros died on 9 February 1973 before the film opened. Friedkin cast her after meeting her in café in the Bronx, New York City.

[1n22]

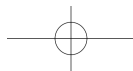
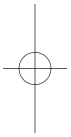
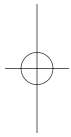
22. On the back of *The Exorcist*, the album of Tubular Bells became a platinum selling record. Its success helped launch the UK Label Virgin headed up by Richard Branson. The music was used in the opening ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics directed by filmmaker Danny Boyle (*Trainspotting* [1996], *Slumdog Millionaire* [2008]) to celebrate the formation of the UK's National Health Service. Boyle also commented that for American audiences the theme would resonate with them because of *The Exorcist*. It set a trend in using progressive rock music to score horror films such as the Italian band Goblin's eerie soundtrack for Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977).

[1n23]

23. *The Exorcist* provided title designer Dan Perri with his first solo credit. He would provide title designs for *Taxi Driver*, *Nashville* (1975), *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *Raging Bull* (1980). Perri describes having a cordial relationship with Friedkin in giving him major break, although the rest of the post-production technicians found the director temperamental. For further details, see Perkins, 2017.

[1n24]

24. *The Exorcist* was initially released on video in 1980 in the UK. However, it was considered a 'video nasty' due to the 1984 Video Recordings Act and the film was banned on home video by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) until 1998.



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Chapter Two

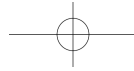
***Sorcerer* – The Film’s Production History and the ‘Politics’ of Hollywood System**

[2.0] This chapter will focus upon the micro-level of *Sorcerer*’s production history from its inception to the end of its production. At the macro- and meso-levels of the New Hollywood system in the 1970s, William Friedkin, as the director of the spectacular one-two successes *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist*, was a highly bankable commodity (Goldman 1997, 218). In this respect, he fielded a range of offers and made a lucrative deal from Universal studios. Friedkin later joked he could have made and released a movie out of his nephew’s Bar Mitzvah! In 1974 he stated:

[2.1] I can do whatever picture I want, any way I want. . . . It’s a constant struggle to maintain a sense of balance and sanity. . . . Don’t let your standards get so lofty that you put yourself above the audience (Stevens 2014, 213–15).

[2.2] However, Friedkin took the unusual decision to remake or what he preferred to ‘reimagine’ the French film *The Wages of Fear* (Friedkin 2013c). This would result in the three year-long production and eventual release of *Sorcerer* in 1977 (see Chapter Five). The chapter will analyse, assess and explain how Friedkin deployed his auteurial freedoms during the phases of pre-production, production and post-production in the making of the motion picture.

[2.3] Friedkin tried to persuade the superstar Steve McQueen to be the lead. However, due to difficulties in the star-director power-relations, McQueen withdrew and the film’s cast was headed up by Roy Scheider (*The French Connection*, *Jaws* [1975]) who would only sign on once the filming had



commenced. This would have significant consequences on the rest of the casting and Friedkin's decision to focus upon a deliberately gritty set of characters operating at the margins of society. Moreover, his decision to shoot the film in the remote and treacherous locations of the Dominican Republic (on the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with Haiti), Mexico, New Mexico and across several continents proved to be crucial. To this end, Friedkin argued that he believed that filmmaking should be an adventure and education for both himself and his collaborators (Friedkin 2013a).

It led to the enormous physical difficulties and technical complexities associated with the making of the picture. These problems were exacerbated by Friedkin's dictatorial relations with the cast and crew, often leading to the hiring and firing of key members of the production team. In this respect, his production compared not only with Henri-George Clouzot's original film (for example, the French director went significantly over budget and over schedule, suffered from a severely twisted his ankle and his two lead actors Yves Montand and Charles Vanel suffered from temporary blindness when filming in an oil slick), but with other notoriously difficult film shoots in extreme locations. Most specifically, it can be compared with Werner Herzog's *Aguirre: Wrath of God* (1972) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1981), along with Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

Moreover, due to his power as an auteur filmmaker who had enjoyed tremendous financial success his relations with the respective managements of the two studios who financed the film Universal and Paramount proved problematic. Not least, as with *The Exorcist*, the executives were deliberately kept at arm's-length by the filmmaker on location in the Dominican Republic and Mexico. Consequently, *Sorcerer* became a by-word in Hollywood for a lengthy schedule, expensive overruns and a total production and distribution budget that ballooned to \$22.5 million (inflation adjusted \$200 million).

FRIEDKIN'S PERIOD OF OMNIPOTENCE, HIS DEAL WITH UNIVERSAL STUDIOS AND THE CO-FUNDING OF *SORCERER* BY TWO MAJOR STUDIOS

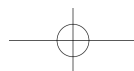
By the middle to the late 1970s several major directors had emerged within the New Hollywood era. Some would find that their careers had peaked and troughed (Altman, Peckinpah, Penn, Nichols, Hal Ashby), while the younger generation of 'Movie Brats' (Lucas, Spielberg, De Palma, Scorsese, Milius, Schrader) would indelibly make their mark on the reconfigured US film industry. As a 'marquee' filmmaker Friedkin became famous as he appeared on numerous television chat shows and enjoyed the financial spoils of his successes. In 1975, he filmed an interview with the famous German director

[2.4]

[2.5]

[2.6]

[2.7]



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The Film's Production History and the 'Politics' of Hollywood System

Fritz Lang (*Metropolis* [1926], *M* [1931], *The Big Heat* [1953]) which would later be shown on Italian television.¹

[2.8]

In terms of Friedkin's immediate peers – Peter Bogdanovich and Francis Ford Coppola (with whom he had briefly formed The Directors Company) – a mixed picture had occurred. Bogdanovich's career had taken a downward trajectory with the commercial failures of *Daisy Miller*, *At Long Last Love* (1975) and *Nickelodeon* (1976). By contrast, Coppola followed up the spectacular success of *The Godfather* with his acclaimed small, personal film *The Conversation* (which won the Grand Prix du Festival International du Film at Cannes and received several Academy Award nominations in 1974). He further enhanced his position in Hollywood with a lucrative and Academy Award laden sequel *The Godfather Part II* (1974) which won him the Best Picture and Best Director Oscars. On the back of his success, he resurrected American Zoetrope to announce he would make the Vietnam War film *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippines.

[2.9]

Friedkin's decision to shoot his reimagined version of *The Wages of Fear* in a similarly inhospitable terrain reflected his friendly but competitive relationship with Coppola (Biskind 1998, 308; Pelan, 2019). Jean Baptiste Thoret has described Friedkin as being 'Coppola's only serious rival – his evil twin in a way; just as megalomaniacal, just as crazy' (Thoret 2018, 42). In the 1960s, both filmmakers had vied to be the youngest directors to make a studio backed feature film. As they achieved maturity, Coppola and Friedkin exemplified what fellow filmmaker John Milius described as the archetypical 1970s 'American auteur':

[2.10]

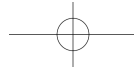
To be a real director you had to go off to some horrible place where there was strong possibility that you would not come back. It had to be malarial and knee-deep in a swamp. You had to be convinced you had lost your sanity. Otherwise you weren't really directing (Milius 2010).

[2.11]

Therefore, Friedkin's decision to make *Sorcerer* reflected a form of 'noblesse oblige' in which the 'Young Turks' of the New Hollywood could make any film they wanted to (Guersario 2014). Indeed, throughout their respective productions, the two would correspond with each other as they saw themselves as the new kings of Hollywood who were making the films of tomorrow (Guedj 2018). However, unlike his peer Friedkin did not risk his own money into his adventure but that of two studios (Blumenthal 2018, 4).

[2.12]

Friedkin describes how he had been asked in talk shows about the films that had influenced him. Most especially, he reflected upon Clouzot's *The Wages of Fear* which had been a model of cinematic suspense and thrills (Stevens 2012, 188; Friedkin 2013, 320).² It had been highly acclaimed international box office success. The film won the British Academy of Film, Television and Arts (BAFTA) Award for Best Film, the Golden Bear at the



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Berlin Film Festival and the Grand Prix at Cannes. Thus, Friedkin found himself drawn to the idea to resurrect the basic plot of four desperate men who have ended up on the run in an impoverished and hellish village in a Latin American dictatorship.³ They are offered an escape by earning significant monies as truck drivers who must carry volatile explosives on ramshackle roads to put out a fire in a jungle based oil refinery:

I tend to be attracted to characters who are up against a wall with very few alternatives. And the film then becomes an examination of how they cope with very few options. And that's, I guess, what interests me in terms of human behaviour (Friedkin 2006).

[2.13]

It was during this period Friedkin formed a strong professional and personal bond with Jules Stein, the founder and ex-Chairman of the Music Corporation of America (MCA) which owned Universal Studios (Pye 1980, 69). In terms of the 'package' unit production process, Stein offered him a \$1 million signing on deal to make two pictures with Universal and deal was made on 31 July 1972 (Friedkin 1975a). Thus, Friedkin's agent Tony Fantozzi negotiated his contract *Sorcerer* for a fee of \$500,000 with two of the then leading players of Hollywood's permanent governance – MCA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chair Lew Wasserman and Universal's President and MCA Chief Operating Officer (COO) Sid Sheinberg.⁴

[2.14]

Both were unhappy with Friedkin's deal as Stein had consulted neither one of them. Further, they remained unconvinced that a 'remake' of an 'obscure' foreign language film had any commercial possibility. Yet, at this stage of the production, the film was only modestly budgeted at \$2.5 million and it was to be side project to a more ambitious science-fiction picture *The Devil's Triangle*.⁵ Therefore, with great reluctance, Wasserman and Sheinberg decided to green-light *Sorcerer*.

[2.15]

However, when the costs soared as Friedkin's vision exponentially increased, Wasserman and Sheinberg sought to cover their investment. They told Friedkin they would only continue to finance the picture if another studio would stump up half the budget. These difficulties were heightened when the director informed Wasserman that he wanted to shoot the film in the civil war-torn Ecuador. The mogul angrily responded that Friedkin would either be killed or worse still that his picture would be uninsurable! The director informed Wasserman that he had a contract with Universal to make the films of his choice and where he saw fit (Urban 2002; Friedkin 2016). To confirm his position, Friedkin wrote the following letter to Wasserman on 9 October 1975:

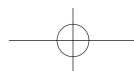
[2.16]

Dear Lew,

As you know, on July 31, 1972, I entered into an agreement with Universal pursuant to which I agree to direct two motion pictures for Universal, Pursuant

[2.17]

[2.18]



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The Film's Production History and the 'Politics' of Hollywood System

to our agreement, we decided that I would do a picture – now entitled ‘The Sorcerer’ – based on the book entitled *Wages of Fear*. Universal acquired the screen rights in that book. . . .

[2.19]

This will serve to further confirm to you that I am now ready, willing, and able to proceed with the production of ‘The Sorcerer’ on said budget in accordance with our agreement. In my view Universal is now committed to me, pay-or-play, for the photo-play based on the script which has been submitted. If for any reason Universal does not want to proceed with the film, Universal should pay me the compensation, to which I am contractually entitled, for the first photoplay, and my commitment to Universal for the first photoplay is fulfilled.

[2.20]

Sincerely, William Friedkin.

[2.21]

cc. Rudy Petersdorf, Sidney Sheinberg, Edgar F. Gross, Tony Fantozzi (Friedkin 1975a).

[2.22]

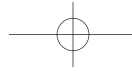
After a series of legal threats, the impasse was broken when Friedkin found an unlikely ally in Charles Bluhdorn at Gulf and Western who agreed to co-finance the film. The coproduction deal was brokered under the formation of a company called Film Properties International N.V. (Naamloze Venootschap or Dutch for a public company) between Wasserman and Barry Diller as the new Chairman of Paramount (who had replaced Yablans and headed up a team including Michael Eisner, Jeffrey Katzenberg and Don Simpson) (Friedkin 2013a; Blumenthal 2018, 91). This meant *Sorcerer* was unusually financed, marketed and distributed by two major Hollywood studios – Universal and Paramount.⁶ Technically, through its Dutch registered production company the film was bankrolled through the ‘captive profits’ made by their joint overseas distribution arm – the Cinema International Corporation (CIC) which was registered for tax shelter reasons in the Netherlands (Connor 2016, 161).⁷

[2.23]

The two companies planned to cooperate on the film domestically by dividing their distribution territories on either side of the Mississippi River while releasing it internationally through CIC. This financial arrangement would have profound consequences for the production, marketing, distributing and exhibition of *Sorcerer* (see Chapter Five). The deal also led to Friedkin agreeing to relocate the shoot to the Dominican Republic where Paramount’s holding company Gulf and Western had initially bought out the South Porto Rico Sugar Company, which was located on the island. Subsequently, Bluhdorn continued in his conquest by buying further assets and land so he became the major employer and tax-payer within the nation. He lived like a ‘medieval lord’ on a guarded estate and had ambitious plans to create a filmmaking production and tourist centre on the Caribbean island (Blumenthal 2018, 102).

[2.24]

In effect, the oil corporation ‘owned’ the state through its clientelist relationship with President Joaquin Balaguer’s government (Connor, 161; Bart



2011, 109; Anson 2015). As Roy Scheider would later comment when shooting commenced in the Dominican Republic, it was a ‘benevolent dictatorship posing as a republic’ (Kent 1977). Consequently, there was more than a touch of irony that a film, whose themes touched upon an American oil company’s domination of a Latin American dictatorship to plunder its natural resources, should be backed by a multinational corporation within a similarly strong arm state (Biskind 1998, 309) (see Chapter Four).⁸

THE PRE-PRODUCTION OF *SORCERER* – THE ACQUISITION OF RIGHTS, LOCATIONS AND THE SCRIPT

[2.25]

Before any filming could take place, Friedkin had to acquire the rights of *The Wages of Fear*. This was made more sensitive as Clouzot did not own them and was recovering from open-heart surgery. The copyright was controlled by *Le Salaire de la peur*’s novelist Georges Arnaud who had a long-standing feud with Clouzot and readily sold the rights.⁹ However, Friedkin still felt it was incumbent upon him to go to Paris to receive Clouzot’s blessing. When Friedkin informed Clouzot, via an interpreter, that he intended to reimagine *The Wages of Fear*, the French director expressed his surprise. He asked Friedkin why he wanted to remake the film in the wake of the recent successes of *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 224). Subsequently, while Clouzot did not exactly bless the project he informed Friedkin he would not stand in his way, not least as he did not own the rights to the film.¹⁰

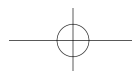
[2.26]

On 7 April 1975, it was announced in a column in the *Los Angeles Times* that Friedkin’s new project would be *Sorcerer* (working title *The Wages of Fear*). He initiated the pre-production process by reconnecting with David Salven, the Assistant Producer on *The Exorcist* who was now promoted to Producer, along with two other filmmakers – Bud S. Smith and Walon Green – he had met at Wolper in the 1960s. He appointed Smith to act as the film’s Associate Producer, Editor and the Second Unit Director.

[2.27]

Smith, who would spend three years on the film through all its stages of productions, toured many South American countries where he shot 16mm footage of the appropriate locales. Friedkin chose the locations in Ecuador which Smith had found as he felt they were ideal for his picture (Smith 2014). It was during this stage of the pre-production that the director and Associate Producer noted that the local drivers christened their trucks with either names of the girlfriends or other titles such as ‘Lazaro’ and ‘Sorcere’. Moreover, many of the decrepit vehicles that appeared on the Ecuadorian roads were composed of different coloured body parts attached to the chassis. Subsequently, when Bluhdorn agreed to co-finance the film Smith and Friedkin turned their attention away from Ecuador to the Dominican Republic.

[2.28]



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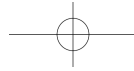
[2.29] Simultaneously, through Smith, Friedkin approached 'Wally' Green to write the script and to contemporise the basic plot of *The Wages of Fear*. Green was best known as the co-screenwriter with the director Sam Peckinpah of *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and based on a screen story Green had developed with stuntman Roy N. Sickner for which he had received an Academy Award nomination. Subsequently, Green had won an Academy Award for his documentary 'faction' about insects taking over the world *The Hellstrom Chronicle* [1971] which had been produced by Wolper.¹¹ Green had spent time in Latin and Central America as a student in Mexico City and spoke fluent Spanish. Further, he had worked in construction for a year in Mexico where he had seen corporate malfeasance in action and he knew the area well.

[2.30] Green, who spoke several other languages, read the source novel, which he could only find available in French.¹² On finding the book was a work of pulp fiction, the writer provided a ninety page treatment which Friedkin completely rejected as being too general and lacking in any dramatic tension (Segaloff 1993, 44; Djoumi 2014). Instead, Friedkin worked closely with Green scene by scene on a daily basis to shape the narrative, characterisation and subtext of the screenplay (Green 2018). Within the writing process they chose to focus on emphasising the pictures' visuals and action.¹³

[2.31] Green stated that he was influenced by David Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and Friedkin had previously met the legendary British director who told him that he would have cut the dialogue if he had a chance to remake the film (Clagett 2002, 176). On this basis the director and writer agreed there would only be thirty pages of dialogue in the whole script (Smith 2014).¹⁴ Further, the filmmaker explained his reasoning as follows:

[2.32] When I went on tour for *The Exorcist*, in Thailand . . . there was never a version either dubbed or subtitled in Thai. So they used to run an American film, often on a sheet tacked to a wall, and a guy would stand next to the screen and they would stop the projector every ten or fifteen minutes, and this guy would explain to the audience what the characters had said and what was going on. I made a silent vow to myself to never again make a film where they would have to stop it to explain it in Thai. (Steigbigel 2013)

[2.33] The writer and the director faced the unusual French legal principle of *droit moral*, in which the artist's work remains under his or her control even if they do not own the property. This meant while Clouzot did not hold the copyright Friedkin could not include anything that had been devised for the original film. Green stated this was not a problem as they had sought to tell the basic story in a different way with new scenes and different characters (Segaloff 1990, 156). Moreover, Green suggested the director should read Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), which Friedkin found to be a life-changing experience (Friedkin 2011). Marquez's



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magical realist tome would prove to be a potent influence on the film’s narrative, not least with regard to its cynical view on colonial greed, fate and corporate malfeasance (see Chapter Four).

[2.34]

In this manner, Friedkin wanted to make a movie in which fate determined the characters’ outcomes before they have even realised it. Therefore, he and Green opened up the first act by developing the four vignettes of the criminal endeavours of the hitman, the terrorist, the fraudster and the gangland wheelman who comprise the group (see Chapter Three). In introducing their anti-heroes, they based the prologues on the current events of the time including the story of French bank swindler who had to leave the country and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation’s (PLO) use of guerrilla tactics in the Middle East. Friedkin had similarly used background opening sequences set in New York in *The Boys in the Band*, Marseilles in *The French Connection* and in Northern Iraq in *The Exorcist*. This meant each character’s back stories would be shot across the globe in respectively Mexico, Israel, France and the United States. For Green these prologue scenes were vital:

The prologues are a very specific reminder to the audience that our film takes place in the time in which they are living. The characters are snatched by circumstances from situations and surroundings that we can all accept as real. I feel that this will make the strange netherworld of Ecuador’s Oriente Province a strong but tangible anomaly. We will be saying then, in effect, that this extraordinary circumstance . . . this town, the corruption, the oil, the guerrillas, the mystical undertones . . . cannot conveniently be stashed in ‘period’, but that is a parallel reality that exists today (Green 1975a).

[2.35]

With reference to the American instalment, Friedkin was inspired by the stories of a former criminal Gerard Murphy and ‘friend’ of Irish mobster Hughie Mulligan in Queens, New York. He employed Murphy as the Unit Manager and cast him in a small role of Donnelly – the ‘lead-off man’ – of the gang who rob the Catholic Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey for its bingo money (Simon 2017).¹⁵ Moreover, they tailored the character of the getaway driver Jackie Scanlon (who emerges as ‘Juan Dominquez’) to the cinematic requirements of a bona-fide film superstar – Steve McQueen.

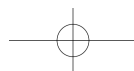
[2.36]

CASTING – FROM STEVE MCQUEEN TO ROY SCHEIDER

[2.37]

Friedkin and Green saw the role of Scanlon as being ideal for McQueen. The director stated the star was one his favourite film actors and that he had always wanted to work with him. Therefore, Friedkin believed *Sorcerer* would be the vehicle upon which they could combine their talents. Moreover, McQueen had a significant box office record with a string of recent hits such as *The Getaway* (1972), *Papillon* (1973) and *The Towering Inferno* (1974).

[2.38]



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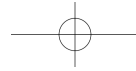
He was also the US's most popular star in the overseas marketplace (Reilly 2016).

[2.39] This meant Friedkin could enact his plan to cast two international stars – the Italian Marcello Mastroianni (*La Dolce Vita* [1959], *Otto e mezzo* [1963]) and the French (but Italian born) Lino Ventura (*Army of Shadows* [1969]) – in the other leading roles of the hitman Nilo and the fraudster Victor Manzan/ 'Serrano'. As McQueen had the superstar status both would accept lower billings so Friedkin could provide an all-star cast to appease Wasserman. In this original plan, the remaining lead of the terrorist Kassem/ 'Martinez' would be played by the French Moroccan actor (Souad) Amidou who had appeared in several films made by the French 'New Wave' director Claude Lelouch including *La Vie, l'amour, la mort* (1969).

[2.40] Initially, Friedkin's approach seemed workable. Green had known McQueen as a dirt-track motorbike rider and was able to set up a meeting with the star without the need of agents (Green 1988). The director and writer screened Clouzot's film to McQueen and explained how their film would compare. On this basis, the star committed to the picture. Further, on reading Green's completed screenplay, McQueen declared it to be the best script that he had ever read. He informed the director that he would make the film but only on a couple of conditions. As he had recently married one of Hollywood's leading female stars Ali MacGraw he suggested a role be written for his wife or, if not, she could be the Associate or the Executive Producer. Friedkin responded there was no available female part for the beautiful actress and that he believed that such a nominal production post was a 'bullshit' credit.¹⁶

[2.41] Subsequently, McQueen suggested he would only appear in the film if it could be shot in the United States as he did not want leave MacGraw at home for six months. Again, the director refused to compromise so McQueen withdrew from the production. As Friedkin later lamented, 'I [was to realize] a close up of Steve McQueen was worth the greatest landscape you could find (Friedkin 2013a). However, as Nat Segaloff has noted if McQueen had been the star *Sorcerer* would have been a 'Steve McQueen' rather than a 'William Friedkin' film (Segaloff, 2019).

[2.42] As McQueen was out, Friedkin approached Clint Eastwood, Jack Nicholson and Robert Mitchum as possible replacements. Neither Eastwood nor Nicholson wanted to leave the United States and rejected the offers (Green 1988; Corcoran Wilson 2011, 190). While Mitchum admired the script, the laconic actor asked Friedkin why he would go all the way to Latin Americato to fall out of a truck when he could do so outside his house. Following this rejection, the director met with Robert Blake (*In Cold Blood* [1967], *Electra Glide in Blue* [1973]) (Kagan 2014).¹⁷ However, he decided against the volatile actor, who responded by taking an advert out in *Variety* entitled, 'You can take 'Sorcerer' and put it where the sun don't shine' (Green 1988).



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Another candidate was the cult character actor/star Warren Oates who had made his name in the films of Sam Peckinpah (*Ride the High Country* [1962], *Major Dundee* [1965], *The Wild Bunch*, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* [1974]) and Monte Hellman (*Ride the Whirlwind* [1965], *Two-Lane Blacktop* [1971], *Cockfighter* [1974]). However, as *Sorcerer's* budget escalated beyond \$10 million, Wasserman and Sheinberg along with Universal Head of Production Ned Tanen decided that Oates was not big enough a star to carry the picture (Compo 2009, 22).¹⁸

[2.43]

At this point, Sheinberg half-heartedly suggested that Roy Scheider might be offered the role of Scanlon. While Scheider and Friedkin had successfully collaborated on *The French Connection*, the actor had remained resentful when the director had refused to cast him as Father Karras in *The Exorcist*. In the meantime, Scheider had scored an enormous success when starring as the police chief Martin Brody in Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (Universal) which was at the time the all-time number one box office champion. This meant the Universal executives were happy to have Scheider aboard as a recognisable name who gave them some assurance that the expensive production could be sold to American audiences. Therefore, Friedkin cast Scheider and a deal was made to pay the actor \$300,000 plus expenses and a share of the profits (Kent 1977). However, his all-star cast fell apart as Ventura refused to take second billing to the lesser known Scheider. Meanwhile, Mastroianni withdrew as he had access right issues for his son that he had with French actress Catherine Deneuve.

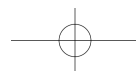
[2.44]

In turn, Friedkin chose the Spanish actor Francisco 'Paco' Rabal (who he had originally wanted to cast as Alain Charnier in *The French Connection*¹⁹ and had appeared in several films directed by Luis Bunuel including *Nazarin* [1959], *Viridiana* [1961] and *Belle de Jour* [1967]) as Nilo. The director decided to cast the French actor Bruno Cremer (*Le Bon et les Méchants* [1976]) as Manzan after seeing him in several films by director Claude Lelouche. Only Amidou remained from the filmmaker's first choices. In the supporting roles, Friedkin cast the versatile character actor Ramon Bieri (*The Andromeda Strain* [1971], *Badlands* [1973]) as the oilman Corlette, Karl John as the ex-Nazi 'Marquez' (*The Longest Day* [1962]), Peter Capell (*Paths of Glory* [1957]) as the oil company executive Lartigue, Friedrich von Ledebur (*Moby Dick* [1956]) as the bar owner 'Carlos', Chico Martinez as the explosive expert Bobby Del Rios and the cult performer Joe Spinell (*The Godfather*, *The Godfather Part II*, *Taxi Driver* and *Maniac* [1980]) in the tiny role of Spider.²⁰

[2.45]

He would also recruit his friend and NYPD officer Randy Jurgensen from *The French Connection* in the small part of Vinnie, a treacherous hood, whilst the NYPD officer simultaneously operated as the company's minder in the Dominican Republic (Smith 2014; Baia 2015).²¹ As for the casting process, the director expressed his dissatisfaction as Scheider, Rabal and

[2.46]



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Cremer were his fifth, sixth or seventh choices. However, as a 'superstar' filmmaker he remained convinced his name alone would sell the film to the public (Kagan 2014). As Jonathan Sanger commented:

[2.47]

At the beginning of 'Sorcerer' when he was top of the world and felt that he couldn't do anything wrong. Whatever he did would work and he had total control (Sanger, 1988).

[2.48]

THE CREWING FOR *SORCERER* AND
FRIEDKIN'S DIRECTORIAL AUTONOMY

[2.49]

At the same time Friedkin was casting the film, he set about recruiting an impressive production crew. He chose the British Production Designer John Box who had famously worked with the David Lean on *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Dr Zhivago* (1965) for which he had won two of his four Academy Awards for Best Art Direction. Box was a concept man who provided the sketches, visualisations and locations (Friedkin 2013). He was supported by other talented British and American craftsmen including the Art Director Roy Walker (*The Shining* [1980]), the Set Decorator Bob Laing (*Live and Let Die* [1973], *Rollerball* [1975]) and what would prove to be his regular property master Barry Bedig (*Sleeper* [1973], *Night Moves* [1975]).²²

[2.50]

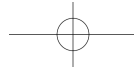
Both Box and Walker would rise to the challenge to produce a world of mud and blood that would get under the skin. They discovered the location of La Alto Gracia to stand in for the hellish village of 'Porvenir' which Friedkin described as 'a prison without walls'. In particular, Box would be responsible for creating the look of the all-important trucks. He provided drawings which emphasised the 'creepy eyes' of the headlights and 'teeth' in the grills on the fronts of the surviving lorry 'Lazaro' and the accompanying vehicle 'Sorcerer'.²³ The trucks were drawn from a range of old World War II army M211 vehicles whose parts were found across the Dominican Republic (Kagan, 2014).

[2.51]

In tandem, Box designed the Pazuzu style rock carving that Friedkin used to open the film and upon which the camera lingers as the four men begin their hazardous journey (see Chapter Four). Box and his team were also to construct the rickety rope bridges upon which the trucks had to cross the raging river in what would be the film's most complicated sequence.

[2.52]

In terms of the camera department, Friedkin again recruited 'Ricky' Bravo as the operator (Friedkin 2014). However, he decided to hire another UK technician Dick Bush as the DOP. The director had admired Bush's cinematography on two of Ken Russell's films *Mahler* (1974) and *Tommy* (1975), as well as his work for Lindsay Anderson. The sound department included Jean-Louis Ducarme and Buzz Knudsen from *The Exorcist*, and the stunt coordi-



nator was Bud Ekins, best known for doubling for Steve McQueen on the famous motorbike jump at the end of *The Great Escape* (1963).

[2.53]

Friedkin employed the Peruvian producer and future director Luis Losa (*The Specialist* [1995]) as his assistant and translator. He hired the Brazilian based Production Manager Roberto Bakker [*Moonraker* (1979), *The Emerald Forest* (1985)] and the experienced First Assistant Director Newton D. Arnold [*In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), *The Godfather Part II*]. Jonathan Sanger and Mark Johnson were appointed as the Second Assistant Directors. Sanger would later produce David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* [1980] and Johnson would make the Oscar winning *Rain Man* [1988] and be the Executive Producer of the television series *Breaking Bad* [2008–2013]).

[2.54]

The costume designer was the Academy Award winner Anthony Powell (*Papillon*, *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, Or Sitting Bull's History Lesson* [1976]). The rest of the large crew was rounded out by the producer Salven, the key grip Gaylin Schultz (who was responsible for the construction of the remarkable camera mounts that allowed Friedkin to shoot on and around the trucks), unit production manager Patrick Gordon and Bud Smith's son Scott as a production assistant, along with a range of other grips, recordists, transport captains and unit managers (Udel 2013, 221).²⁴

[2.55]

As before, Friedkin intended to shoot *Sorcerer* at an arms-length from the respective studio managements back in Hollywood. Thus, the director exercised complete control over the production during principle photography and this led to it being extended from six to ten months. As Edgar F. Gross, Friedkin's business manager, commented:

[2.56]

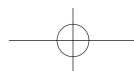
I'm sure that both [studios] regarded his actions . . . as a form of arrogance. . . . Let's face it: you had a fellow who was making a picture . . . far removed from the studios, except when they chose to fly down there. . . . If you have a multimillion-dollar negative . . . you are not about to tie his hands or throw him off the picture, so they were really at Billy's mercy. . . . He stayed down there and worked on that picture and worked on that picture and went over budget and they were upset about it. And in certain instances they might've been right to be upset; probably were right to be upset. After all, Billy's in show business and they're in show business. There's a difference, if you are accountable to stockholders and you are supposed to be a running a company that makes money you have to exercise financial prudence. (Gross 1988).

THE PRINCIPLE PHOTOGRAPHY FOR *SORCERER I*: SHOOTING THE BACKSTORIES IN PARIS, JERUSALEM, AND NEW JERSEY

[2.57]

Friedkin began the ten months of principal photography on *Sorcerer* in Paris on the 6 April 1976 where the fraudster Manzon's backstory took place. After this footage was in the can, the company relocated to Jerusalem for two

[2.58]



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weeks to shoot the opening section concerning the terrorist Kassem. This included the filming of a guerrilla-style bombing upon an Israeli bank which was shot in the cinema-verite style of Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). The scene was shot only a few metres away from the offices of the city mayor Teddy Kollek whose windows were violently shattered by the stuntman Nick Dimitri's (*Hard Times* [1975]) mock explosives (Kahn 1977).

[2.59]

Dimitri, who was playing an Israeli soldier, suffered from third degree burns and was required to reset a more controlled explosion (Cox 2011). Moreover, while the shooting was occurring, an actual bomb went off only a couple of blocks away. This enabled Friedkin to steal some shots of the real explosion (Friedkin, 2013, 330). The resulting chase, capture and killing of the terrorists, along with Kassem's escape was shot with the cooperation with the Israeli security forces who played themselves.

[2.60]

These early sections were filmed ahead of schedule and under-budget so the company returned to the United States to film the botched robbery of the church's bingo money during a wedding in Elizabeth, New Jersey on 19 May 1976.²⁵ This scene introduced Scheider as the getaway driver and the actor had been in training behind the wheels of a truck in Ventura County, California (Kachmar 2002). The rest of the gang was composed from Murphy and two real-life members of the Irish mob (Henry Diamond and Desmond Crofton), one of whom – Diamond – had been in the Irish Republican Army (IRA). 'Dessi' Crofton clearly enjoyed the process of filming as he explained to Jimmy Breslin:

[2.61]

We were in Elizabeth for two week's doin' this scene. One day there, Billy Friedkin said to me, 'What would you do if you were driving away from a holdup'? I told him I'd sing. He said, 'This time sing anything comes into your mind'. So we get in the car and he's sitting in the front seat with camera in my face and I started singin' into it. I'd like to that every week. . . . I got a great scene. . . . If they didn't shoot the priest and bring us bad luck I'd have been in the thing for an hour (Breslin 1977, 4).

[2.62]

In the sequence, the getaway car crashes and flips over to severely injure Scanlon and to kill the other mobsters after an argument has ensued between them (Cox 2011). The logistics of this complicated shot defeated the efforts of the New York based stuntmen who wrecked numerous vehicles without ever satisfying Friedkin's perfectionist intentions. Ultimately the director required the services of a specialist thrill-show driver Joie Sherwood Jr. who was called in by Salven from Los Angeles. Sherwood had the special effects crew build a forty foot long ramp so he could drive the car at top speed on two wheels, flip it over and crash it into a fire-hydrant. Although, Sherwood would accomplish the dangerous stunt in one take, it put the production behind schedule and raised the production costs as the repeated filming of the stunt required the closure of a busy intersection in Elizabeth. This would



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prove to be the start of many of the arguments over the budget between Friedkin and Salven. These tensions would inevitably come to a head when the company moved to the Dominican Republic (Smith 1988).

THE PRINCIPLE PHOTOGRAPHY FOR *SORCERER II*: THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC – TENSIONS AND DIFFICULTIES

[2.63]

The majority of the film was to be shot in 40,000 acres of the primeval jungle based in the military dictatorship of the Dominican Republic. Throughout the summer of 1976, the filming became intolerable for the cast and crew due to the rain forest's inclement weather, illnesses, poor living conditions, power cuts, security matters and Friedkin's autocratic behaviour. The perfectionist director would often refuse to film certain sequences until he had every detail to his exact bidding including the weather, wherein he required overcast grey skies rather than blue skies (Clagett 2002, 182). Moreover, the company and the trucks had to be helicoptered into the inhospitable jungle settings. This meant the film fell many days behind its schedule (Baia 2015). As Bud Smith comments:

[2.64]

What Billy wanted to do originally was two and a half million and then we went into it was about 11, in that neighbourhood. When we put it into theatres at the end it was around 22 million. I was talking to someone the other day about doing a film in the jungles again and I was telling them how difficult it was. I mean your housing for the main crew is three hours from the location. The jungle was 30 miles, but it takes three hours. Billy would use a helicopter to the location and on a daily basis that's a tremendous cost factor (Smith 1988).

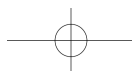
[2.65]

These difficulties led to Friedkin becoming impatient with his production team and resulted in the sacking of seventy members of the crew including the Head of the Teamsters. On one infamous occasion, after firing a rash of unit managers, the director showed more sympathy to an injured pig than to anyone else on the set. The pig had been hit by a car which was taking Scheider's character back to the cantina at the end of the film. Friedkin immediately ran to the side of the road and started to weep at the distressed animal's fate (Segaloff 1990, 163). Unsurprisingly, his actions were not appreciated by the remaining members of the crew whose morale had hit rock bottom.

[2.66]

The tensions proved too much for David Salven whose marriage and family life was coming under strain. Salven had felt that much of the location footage could have been accomplished in the United States (Clagett 2002, 179). Further, he could no longer continue to mediate the fractious relationship between Friedkin and Universal's Head of Business Affairs Rudy Pe-

[2.67]



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tersdorf who was assigned to the production. This resulted in Salven leaving the picture and being un-credited for his contribution. Subsequently, Friedkin took control of the budget and exerted his authority against the on-set CIC representative Ian Lewis who technically acted as the producer once Salven had resigned (Johnson 1988).

[2.68]

In effectively taking charge of the film, he fired a further five production managers some who were deemed to be ineffective. Tensions were heightened as some were seen to be agreeing kick-backs with local engineers and suppliers. As the Second Assistant Director Johnson joked, the director removed so many people that if the film had gone on any longer he would have become the producer (Segaloff 1990, 163). Friedkin's condescending attitude to the 'suits' produced some moments of a cruel levity. For instance, when he discovered that Universal and Paramount executives were viewing his dailies before him, Friedkin instructed a local grip to peer into the camera and phonetically say, 'More per diem Meester Wasserman, more per diem Meester Wasserman'. Subsequently, the same man was taught to comment, 'Mr Wasserman you a jerk off' (Segaloff, 163).

[2.69]

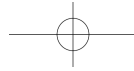
Similarly, when Friedkin needed a photograph of the executives of the rapacious oil company that was exploiting the grim dictatorship portrayed in the film, he tore out a picture of the Gulf and Western board from the company's annual report (see Chapter Four). The director wanted to point out the 'irony in documenting first world oppression of a virtual slave state via the studio boot on locals' necks, (while) gleefully sticking two fingers up at Paramount '(Pelan 2018). This usage of the image according to Green meant that Bluhdorn 'had a shit haemorrhage' (Biskind 1998, 310).

[2.70]

While Friedkin had been pleased with the cinematography for the prologues, it became clear that the DOP Dick Bush could not deal with the jungle's ever-changing lighting conditions. Consequently, these scenes were underexposed and too dark to be processed leading to Friedkin telling Bush the footage was useless causing a severe breakdown in relations. In response, Bush told Friedkin that it was impossible to shoot the film in the rainforest with natural lighting and it needed to be filmed on a sound stage. Moreover, the DOP had formed a strong alliance with fellow Brits Ian Lewis and his wife Ann which the director felt was detrimental to the filming (Gross 1977).

[2.71]

Bush was promptly removed from the production and replaced by the American cameraman John M. Stephens (*Billy Jack* [1971]; *Boxcar Bertha* [1972]) who had been working on the second unit (location shots, truck wheels, and helicopter shots). While Stephens had worked on several features and in US television as a DOP, Friedkin had known him as a documentarian at Wolper and had called on him to work on the second unit.²⁶ When he checked the rushes, Stephens realised that the problems with the shadows cast by the jungle trees could be overcome by the use of reflectors, alterations in the Panavision camera lenses and the use of a faster film stock. From



thence on, there were no more problems with the camera department (Burgess 2012).

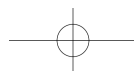
Yet, as the production fell further behind the schedule, many of the crew became increasingly unwell contracting malaria, food poisoning and gangrene. Nearly half of them were either hospitalised or sent home. Only the actors could not be so easily disposed of and Friedkin had a fractious relationship with many of them, most notably Scheider. In part, it appears that the actor had become more ‘difficult’ after his success in *Jaws* and because he was suffering difficulties in his marriage with his wife Cynthia (who had been hired as an assistant film editor) (Kirschling 2008). However, Friedkin would later admit, the gruelling production and the extreme locale had strained their relationship (Simon 2017).

From Scheider’s perspective, he felt his character was too unsympathetic and had urged the director to include a subplot about Scanlon forging a friendship with a local youngster (Segaloff 1990, 171). Friedkin, however, refused to countenance the suggestion as it did not fit into his design of the character. He persuaded the actor that his vision of the film was correct. Yet, as Scheider commented, ‘with Billy you sometimes get the dark side of the dark side of the dark side’ (Kermode 2000). The actor also objected to Friedkin’s belief that his dictatorial working methods got the best out of the cast and crew. In particular, Scheider complained he was tired of having to go to the airport to say goodbye to so many members of the unit.

Conversely, Scheider admitted Friedkin was a talented filmmaker who had persuaded him to undertake many of the dangerous stunts when driving the trucks on the perilous jungle tracks. He added that shooting *Sorcerer* had ‘made *Jaws* look like a picnic’ but on viewing the results on film he ‘knew it was worth it’ (Sorcerer Press Book 1977). In another interview, however, Scheider mentioned many of the stuntmen were unhappy because the leading actors had often performed so many of their own stunts (Scheider 1977).

THE PRINCIPLE PHOTOGRAPHY FOR *SORCERER III*:
THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, MEXICO, AND NEW
MEXICO – STUNTS AND DANGERS

As a suspense driven action-adventure film, *Sorcerer* contained several set-pieces that had to be filmed within the shanty town, upon the treacherous dirt roads and in the middle of the jungle. These sequences included the explosion of the oil refinery; the resulting riot of the local populace which is brutally subjugated by the Junta; the collapse of a rotten wooden platform that occurs when one of the trucks has to take a sharp hill-side turn; the bandit’s attack on Scanlon and Nilo’s truck and the detonation of an enormous kaoba tree that is blocking the road. Most notably, there was the central



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action scene which required the trucks to precariously drive over a raging river on a rickety road bridge in the middle of a nightmarish jungle storm.

[2.77]

All these sequences would prove to be extremely complicated to film, required the construction crew to build roads and contained many life threatening stunts. The oil refinery explosion was created by the special effects man Marcel Vercoutere (*The Exorcist*) and proved to be extremely effective. It was created by pumping thousands of gallons of diesel mixed in with raw propane. The resulting fire was so hot that nobody could get within fifty feet of it until it was brought under control. The verisimilitude of the riot was notable, not least for the real-life volatility of the local extras. According to Green:

[2.78]

When they began filming . . . Billy had an excellent translator, who was also his assistant, named Luis Llosa . . . [who translated Friedkin's speech as] . . . 'I was told that I couldn't shoot this sequence in the Dominican Republic because I was told you people have no balls. The government has taken them away'. . . . The people got crazy. You can see the anger in them in that riot scene (Green quoted from Clagett 2002, 191).²⁷

[2.79]

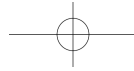
When filming the sequence which involved the removal of the giant, forty-foot kaoba tree, Friedkin was faced the vicissitudes of coping with the special effects team along with the unexpected visit of Charles Bluhdorn. For the purposes of the scene, in which the drivers use the nitroglycerin to blow up the obstacle, Vercoutere was similarly responsible for setting up the intended explosion and had packed the tree up with dynamite. However, at the very moment Friedkin was about to shoot the complicated sequence, he found his set being interrupted by the landing of a large Sikorsky helicopter. Suddenly, Friedkin was confronted by Bluhdorn who was accompanied by Marty Davis (Gulf and Western's public relations head) and a beautiful blonde German model. On being informed about the logistics of the scene, in which the explosion would be filmed by four cameras, Bluhdorn declared in his heavy Austrian accent, 'That Fweedkin is ah genius! Ah genius! . . . Looka this! Only ah genius would think up a scene like this!' (Friedkin 2013, 333).

[2.80]

Subsequently, Friedkin advised Bluhdorn and his party to retreat, provided them with ear plugs and gave the cue to film the explosion. Yet, while there was a loud bang only a few twigs flew off the barely damaged tree. Friedkin inquired why the explosives had failed to make any impression, to which Vercoutere admitted they had not used enough dynamite. Simultaneously, Friedkin heard the raw of the helicopter blades as Bluhdorn made a quick retreat without saying goodbye and 'Fweedkin' was no longer still such a genius!

[2.81]

This calamity prompted Friedkin to reach out to an arsonist from Queens in New York who had blown up failing business for insurance scams. This



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was the criminal Bert Lippman who used beauty products as explosives who had been given the pseudonym ‘Marvin the Torch’ by the reporter Jimmy Breslin. After engaging in a long-distance telephone call with the arsonist’s wife, who was known only as ‘Mrs Torch’, in which Friedkin had to explain that he required ‘Marvin’ for the purposes of a movie rather than crime, the fire starter arrived in the Dominican Republic. He brought with him two cases of what he called ‘beauty supplies’ which, in reality, contained the explosives he would use to obliterate the tree in one take (Friedkin, 344).

These difficulties, however, were as little when compared with the shooting of the trucks’ crossing of the rickety rope bridge. This scene was one of the most complicated in Friedkin’s career topping his work on the car chases in *The French Connection* and *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985) and the special effects in *The Exorcist*. Initially, the production team had planned to shoot it in the Dominican Republic and a suitable river was found for the construction crew to build the swinging bridge across for a cost of \$250,000. Box designed the bridge to have concealed hydraulics to enable it move and swing as required when the truck drove across it. However, despite Friedkin being assured that the river remained a raging torrent throughout the year, the waters dropped so much that it became no more than a stream. An alternative location was sought out at Tuxtepec in Mexico and the construction crew was sent there to rebuild a hydraulic rope bridge while Friedkin completed filming in the Dominican Republic.

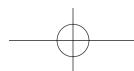
[2.82]

Subsequently, the company relocated to Vera Cruz to shoot Nilo’s prologue and then to the nearby jungle area surrounding Papaloapan, which had once been an ancient Aztec settlement. It was here that Friedkin’s reputation was to precede him as upon arrival he was confronted with the mass exodus of the village. The deeply religious population had heard that the director of *The Exorcist* was arriving and they wanted to avoid him. In addition, the director was tipped off by an undercover Mexican policeman that a number of the crew and cast were using drugs. They were promptly sent home rather than risk any lengthy prison sentences. However, one local actor had to perform his final scenes with two policeman pointing guns at him either side of the camera.²⁸

[2.83]

Yet again, the river in Mexico ran dry and it appeared that Lewis had been duplicitous as he produced reports on the wrong river which had a history of running low (Gross 1977). Ultimately, it had to be dammed and diverted with the aid of large pipes and pumping equipment. It proved necessary to place a twenty-four hour guard around the bridge as some superstitious members of the local population had threatened to blow it up. They believed it was the bridge and the ‘intruders’ who were responsible for the river running shallow. When Friedkin eventually came to film the sequence, five trucks each were required to stand in for Lazaro and Sorcerer when they

[2.84]



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were crossing the swinging bridge. These vehicles were driven respectively by Scheider and Cremer, along with several stunt drivers.

[2.85]

To cover the ever-decreasing rapids, the director decided to assault the trucks with a man-made storm which was created by wranglers' hose-piping water from powerful rain towers. In turn, two helicopters sprayed the water onto the bridge, along with huge electric fans, to create the effect of the torrential storm (Friedkin 2014). To ensure that the truck's wheels maintained the necessary traction across the suspension bridge, the key grip Schultz cross-hatched the road planks so repeated trips could occur (Udel 2013, 221). Simultaneously, shooting could only occur at the beginning and dusk of each day when it was cloudy enough to produce the effect of the storm. Once the rising sun burned through, the light was too bright for the filming to occur. This meant that Friedkin and his crew lost many hours by having to split the daily schedule into two. Johnson explained the logistical complexities in getting a shot:

[2.86]

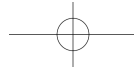
I just remembered a simple shot – a single shot in the bridge sequence which we did in . . . Mexico . . . it took forever just to set up a single shot. We did a shot of a truck coming across the bridge. The assistant director had to get the helicopter – we had two helicopters to warm up – and then we had a team of about 50 Mexicans up river who would start throwing timbering and different debris into the stream and to time it so we were making a shot when the debris started coming under the bridge at the time we starting to shoot (Johnson 1988).

[2.87]

Ultimately, the arduous bridge crossing scene took three months to achieve (Emery 1997). On a number of occasions, Friedkin, his actors, crew and stuntmen went over the side of the bridge as the trucks lost their balance and crashed into the river. Eventually, three trucks and three cameras were lost. Further, as the actors had been shot on telephoto lenses, the effect of the bracing rain against their faces had been lost when the film was exposed. Therefore, to maintain the effect Smith's second unit crew was required to shoot a manmade spray against a black background so it could be optically superimposed later in post-production (Smith 2014). In total, it cost over \$1 million to complete the scene of which most of the monies had not been budgeted for and Friedkin earned the nickname 'Hurricane Billy' (Segaloff 1990, 161).

[2.88]

The final scenes in which Scanlon is seen to be driving through a nightmarish landscape while hallucinating were filmed in the extraordinary rock formations of the Navajo bad lands of Bisti/De-Na-Zin surrounding Farmington, New Mexico. This location had been found by Box and Friedkin believed that the 'lunar' landscape perfectly captured the confused state of Scanlon's mind (see Chapter Four). The sacred area had also been the home to many sorcerers and alchemists. On completion of its principal photogra-



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phy the film had become a super-production with a budget of \$22 million and approximately 1200 camera set-ups.

Friedkin would later claim that of all his films, *Sorcerer* was his most physically demanding and required enormous energy levels (Kermode 2019). In the process, he lost fifty pounds and contracted malaria. For many, the director's decision to shoot the film on location had been the main cause of the over-runs. However, for actors including Peter Capell and Frederik van Labadur, Friedkin had shown remarkable directorial and leadership skill (Friedkin papers 1977). In particular, Mark Johnson believed that Friedkin's relentless pursuit of perfectionism within the challenging production had meant that he considered:

[2.89]

As far as what is generally referred to as 'career development', *Sorcerer* has been singular for me; not so much in terms of location or in length of shooting but much more so in terms of concentration. I have never been asked to give so much of my analytical self in so tight a period of time as several moments/days of this movie. Only a jackass could walk away from those highly charged situations without being richer (or at least shrewder) from them'. . . . 'My entire experience of this past ten months has been controlled by what some *Sight and Sound* critics in summing up his explication of *Sorcerer* will refer to as William Friedkin's strength of vision'. In all sincerity, I have never been so impressed by any one's single mindedness of purpose and dogged determination as I have with your refusal to betray your intent of this movie with any form of compromise or mediocrity. (Johnson 1977)

[2.90]

POST-PRODUCTION: THE EDITING, SCORING, AND TITLING OF *SORCERER*

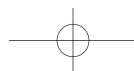
[2.91]

Throughout the shoot, as the editor Smith had been responsible for cutting the material together. While this process had been relatively harmonious, he had been subject to the exploits of a would-be 'bomber' in the Dominican Republic who had wanted to be cast in the film and was promptly arrested! When Smith returned to Hollywood, he and his co-editors Robert K. Lambert (*The Brinks Job* [1978], *Driver* [1978]) and who acted as the music editor) Ned Humphries, Jere Huggins and Cynthia Scheider, along with Friedkin, waded through the footage to shape the picture through to its final cut (Segal-off, 1990, 164). For the director, the editing of a feature has remained his favourite part of the filmmaking process:

[2.92]

I look at the shooting of the film as nothing but raw material for the cutting room. That's where the film is shaped. . . . I found that all of my films . . . were made and discovered in the cutting room. My intention for how the scenes were going to be used often changed radically in the editing room. To me, that's the most creative process in filmmaking (Newell 2014).

[2.93]



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[2.94]

In particular, they had to stitch together the many shots from the numerous takes which occurred in the filming of central action sequence of the trucks crossing the rope bridge into one seamless whole. They also discovered that they had more than enough footage to pace the film and sufficient coverage so that they could reconfigure or remove certain sequences to streamline the plot.²⁹ Friedkin kept to the visceral, kinetic style of his previous features and decided to include several flash cuts in Scanlon's hallucinatory sequences in the final reel (Friedkin 2016).

[2.95]

Moreover, due to the complicated production logistics, much of the film's sound mix had to be brought together in post-production. These audio elements included a symphony of truck engines, gear changes, explosions, insect noises, the groaning of the bridges and the omnipresent malevolence of the primeval jungle vegetation. The wind sounds used in the bridge sequence were accompanied by the draws of a bow across a viola. Further, when Scanlon clubs a bandit to death the sound mixers incorporated the growl of a slaughtered animal and when the dead arrived in the town from the oil refinery the crinkling of body bags.³⁰

[2.96]

To accompany the dramatic visuals and the sound mix, Friedkin took an unconventional approach to the film's score as he commissioned the music from the Germanic electronic band Tangerine Dream.³¹ Friedkin had become aware of them when he was touring Germany to promote *The Exorcist* and went to see the group play at a midnight gig in an abandoned church in the Black Forest. He had been impressed by their sound which had included synthesizers playing searing chords accompanied by intense rhythmic patterns. On meeting the band in Paris, he told the leader Edgar Froese that he would have used their music in *The Exorcist* and he wanted Tangerine Dream to write the score of his new film. Upon learning that it was to be a remake of *The Wages of Fear*, Froese and the other members of group Peter Bauman and Christoph Franke readily agreed to work with the director.

[2.97]

Friedkin proposed a unique way of working with the band as he told them they he did not want them to score the film after it had been completed. Instead, he asked them to compose their musical impressions from his observations and the screenplay while he was making the film. Therefore, Friedkin sent the group a copy of Green's script and, in turn, some ten months later he received a huge package of audio-tapes which included many hours of their raw, unabridged score when he was shooting the bridge-crossing sequence in Mexico. On listening to the music, Friedkin contacted Froese to tell him not to change a note.³² He would later write on the liner notes of the accompanying soundtrack album that he felt that Tangerine Dream's innovative music was inseparable from the film in terms of its tone and tempo (Kermode 2015).³³

[2.98]

Subsequently while editing the picture, Friedkin, Smith and the other editorial assistants employed the pre-recorded music to re-edit or shape the



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rhythm of the sequences (Segaloff 2019). Simultaneously, the editors cued the music into the soundtrack where they believed it to be appropriate (Pessaro 2015). This was accompanied by the improvisations of the American jazz-fusion musician Keith Jarrett. His track ‘Spheres (Movement 3)’ from his album *Hymns/Spheres* (1976), which was recorded on the Karl Joseph Riepp Baroque Pipe organ in Ottobeuran monastery in Germany, was seamlessly meshed into the Tangerine Dream score to add to the ominous effect of sound mix.³⁴ To this end, the director devised a montage sequence (see Chapter Three) using the band’s music from a range of shots of the lead characters fixing the broken trucks when preparing for the journey:

It’s telling the story visually. When I shot those different scenes, I had no idea how I was going to use them. I had made close-ups of the big oil well fire that I didn’t know how I could ever use again. I had a beautiful close-up of Rabal, and I shot it because he was sitting next to a candle in his room, and the light was so beautiful on his face that I made shots of him without knowing how I could use them. The whole sequence of rebuilding the trucks, in effect raising them from the dead – that’s one of the reasons why the second truck is called Lazaro, or Lazarus – I thought I would keep that whole scene together without any interruption when I shot it. (Steigbigel 2013)

[2.99]

Friedkin believed that the film’s dark vision should be reflected in the title of the film. He had initially decided to call it *Ballbreaker* which Wasserman had rejected out of hand while questioning the director’s sanity (Friedkin 2011). Subsequently, Friedkin considered calling the film both *Dynamite* (which had been used by another film and was trademarked) and *No Man’s Land* but discarded it as Harold Pinter had written a play with the same title. Ultimately, he came up with *Sorcerer* by claiming that it referred to the evil wizard who in this case represented the inequities of fate and it may be also seen to have a Magical Realist connotation (see Chapter Three and Chapter Four).³⁵

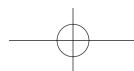
[2.100]

This explanation further name checked the Miles Davis jazz album of ‘Sorcerer’ and Davis’s song ‘So What’ was licensed to be used by the filmmakers. The title also referred to the name painted on the second truck driven by Manzon and Kassim. When Friedkin had gone to Ecuador at the beginning of the pre-production, he and Box had noticed how the local truck-drivers had christened their own vehicles with similar names and had copied them. Another reason that Friedkin later admitted was to link the film explicitly and rather clumsily in the public mind with *The Exorcist* (Kermode 2017).

[2.101]

Most especially, Friedkin determined to take full control of the post-production process. He jealously guarded his directorial autonomy and only allowed Wasserman, Sheinberg, Tanen and Diller to view a work-print of the film at a studio screening room. On seeing this version of the film, Sheinberg

[2.102]



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expressed his concern that the movie had started with two of its four opening scenes with subtitles so it might be mistaken as a foreign picture. The credits for the cast and crew unusually for the time appeared at the end of the film and were designed by the French Canadian Jean Guy Jacque.³⁶ In particular, he used a memorable graffiti style font for the film's main title card.³⁷ Not least, as Scheider was the only recognisable US name amongst a host of international players. In response, Friedkin (who felt that Sheinberg was an idiot) contemptuously asked the Head of Production whether he would like the foreign actors to have Anglicized pseudonyms? Sheinberg backed off.³⁸

[2.103]

Further, on learning that he was to receive note sat a lunch meeting with Sheinberg and Diller in a private Universal dining room, Friedkin instructed Smith, Green and assistant editor Humphreys to arrive unshaven and unkempt. He told them not react to anything he was about to say or do, and to remain completely nonplussed throughout the luncheon. When the waiter arrived Friedkin ordered a bottle of Smirnoff from which he proceeded to swig vodka throughout the meeting. While, Diller and Sheinberg were sipping ice-teas they became increasingly unsettled by Friedkin's drinking and the nonresponse from his team. After ten or fifteen minutes, the director collapsed on the floor:

[2.104]

I wasn't drunk, I had a high tolerance for alcohol, I just fell on the floor, and they didn't say anything. After a few more minutes, they turned to Wally Green, and said, "Does this happen often?" And he said "Everyday" (Friedkin 2013b).

[2.105]

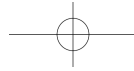
As a power play Friedkin had intimidated the studio bosses. However, despite informing them that he would not shoot 'inserts' of the odometers measuring the truck mileage, he decided it was necessary to shoot these sequences on the studio back lot. While Friedkin had won the battle with the studio managements in conceiving, shooting and editing his film as he saw fit; the question remained whether he would win the war in receiving audience acceptance for what he believed would his career defining epic action-adventure.

[2.106]

CONCLUSION

[2.107]

Throughout the stages of its production *Sorcerer* was subject to expensive over-runs, a lengthy schedule and a rapidly escalating budget of \$22 million (\$200 million when adjusted for inflation). Friedkin's perfectionist behaviour personified the archetypical 1970s auteur filmmaker (Cook 2000, 98). Along with other epic films of the era, it appeared that the filmmaker had put his and many others' lives and sanities on the line in an extremely primitive and inhospitable set of locations. As Friedkin commented:



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The film became an obsession. . . . It was to be my magnum opus, the one on which I'd stake my reputation. I felt that every film I'd ever made was preparation for this one (Friedkin 2013b).

[2.108]

Friedkin had imposed his control over the cast and the crew throughout the production. He also illustrated how as a powerful director he could gain his way with the various increases in the budgets. His methods had undoubtedly been controversial and led to clashes with the studio executives who Friedkin had seen to be the enemy. In particular, he reserved his contempt for Sheinberg and Diller back in Hollywood and the CIC representative Ian Lewis on location. However, as Edgar Gross pointed out, 'Bill Friedkin strove for perfection on this picture but at no time did he goof off' (Gross, 1977).

[2.109]

At the end of post-production Friedkin believed that he had created his masterpiece and he had his finger on the pulse of the taste of American audiences (Friedkin 2013, 345). The director considered the rope bridge sequence as his finest piece of filmmaker (Newell 2014). By this stage of the process he was receiving support from Wasserman, Sheinberg, Tanen and Diller who had positively responded to the film's internal studio screenings. Indeed, amongst the director and the executives there were high hopes that the expensive picture would be a hit. As Paramount and Universal planned the film as major release, Friedkin predicted that *Sorcerer* would make \$90 million at the US box office. This was reinforced by Leonard Hirshan at the William Morris Agency in a letter dated 29 June 1977:

[2.110]

Dear Billy,

Thanks to your secretary, Toni, I went to Universal last night to see a screening of your picture 'Sorcerer'. Billy, you are absolutely magnificent. I have the greatest respect and admiration for you as a director and I was thrilled by the picture. The reason my respect is growing so bountifully this morning is because I am comparing it to other works that I have recently seen by directors who are getting undue acclaim. Billy they can't shine your shoes. When you get back from Europe, if you don't give me a lunch date to sit down and tell you personally how thrilled I was with 'Sorcerer' last night, I will be building up a frustration in myself that is bound to explode. I am proud knowing you and you made me very happy last night.

[2.111]

[2.112]

Kindest regards,

WILLIAM MORRIS AGENCY. INC

LEONARD HIRSHAN (Hirshan 1977)

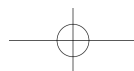
[2.113]

[2.114]

[2.115]

While the summer competition was strong, it was deemed to be beatable; *The Deep* (Columbia), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (UA), *A Bridge Too Far* (UA), *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* (UA), *Smokey and the Bandit* (Universal) *New York, New York* (UA) and, ironically, *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (Warner Brothers). Friedkin believed he still held the ability to take the

[2.116]



audience wherever he wanted to take them and they would be happy to follow (Friedkin 2013c). However, there remained one unknown quantity – a medium budgeted science fiction/fantasy which Friedkin had rejected when he had been involved in the short-lived Directors Company (see Chapter One) as he could not see its appeal – George Lucas's *Star Wars* (20th Century Fox) (Guersario 2015).

[2.117]

NOTES

[2n1]

1. The interview was shot in black and white by Bill Butler and William Fraker. It was initially produced for private use but was restored several years later to be shown on Italian television.

[2n2]

2. Friedkin also admired Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955) which had been favourably compared to the thrillers of Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock had tried to buy the rights of George Arnaud's novel in 1951.

[2n3]

3. *The Wages of Fear* had been originally remade in the United States in an uncredited version as a Warner Brother B-feature *Violent Road* (1958) starring Brian Keith and directed by Howard W. Koch. It may be seen to have also influenced several other UK films such as *The Hell Drivers* (1957) directed by the American Cy Enfield, *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958) made by J. Lee Thompson and even an episode of Gerry Anderson's puppet adventure *Joe 90* (1968–1969).

[2n4]

4. Universal had been taken over by the Music Corporation of America (MCA) in 1959. It was led by Wasserman and Sheinberg on corporate lines and was known for its conventional and often conservative approach to filmmaking. This was enhanced by the giant profits it had gained in television production and for effecting a 'factory' style formula in making product.

[2n5]

5. Friedkin's UFO film would be gazumped by Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and would never be made. Interestingly, Spielberg was photographed wearing a *Sorcerer* t-shirt when making his science-fiction opus.

[2n6]

6. Such an arrangement had occurred between Warner Brothers' executive Ted Ashley and 20th Century Fox's Gordon Stuhlberg when they had agreed to cover their costs on the expensive production of Irwin Allen's blockbuster disaster film *The Towering Inferno* (1974) starring an all-star cast led by Steve McQueen and Paul Newman. It would also be repeated by Universal with Columbia for Steven Spielberg's expensive World War Two comedy flop *1941* (1979).

[2n7]

7. CIC was a non-trading distribution or 'shell' company which operated out of England and Wales. While being registered in the Netherlands, it provided an effective means through which Paramount and Universal could avoid paying taxes on the international profits made by their films. For further details, see J.D. Connor 2016.

[2n8]

8. Bluhdorn had built several luxury resorts and staged a Miss Universe Beauty pageant in 1977 in the Dominican Republic. Further, the capital Santa Domingo had stood in for Havana during the Cuban sequences in *The Godfather Part II*. For further details, see Anson, 2015.

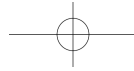
[2n9]

9. Arnaud was an ornery figure and his real name was Henri Girard. He had been imprisoned on a murder charge against his father, aunt and servant for eighteen months before being released. This had occurred due to an outstanding defence speech made by his lawyer Maurice Garçon. He had subsequently married and become a debtor, forcing him to go to South America where he became an author and reporter.

[2n10]
[2n11]

10. Friedkin would dedicate his film to Clouzot in the final titles.

11. As well as having a background as a documentarian, Green had been a dialect coach on several films such as *The Outrage* (1964) and *Morituri* (1965). He had also provided a dialogue polish on a low budget exploitation film entitled *Winter Go Go* (1965) where he had meet the stuntman and second unit director Roy N Sickner. With Sickner and his friend film star Lee Marvin he would develop the original screen story and the first-draft script for *The Wild Bunch*. For further details, see Stratton 2019. Green would subsequently have a bountiful career in film and television, providing the screenplays to Friedkin's *The Brinks Job* and Stephen Frear's



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adaptation of Max Evan's *The HiLo Country* (1998) as well as being a writer, co-producer and co-Executive producer on numerous television shows including *Hill Street Blues* (1985–1986) and the many variations of *Law and Order* (1994–2006). He also had a character named after him in *The Wire* (2002–2008) as the show-runner David Simon named *The Wild Bunch* as one of key inspirations and got his writers to include twenty lines of dialogue from the film into Season Two of the programme. He sent a tape to Green. See Inskeep 2008.

12. In fact Arnaud's novel had been translated into English by Norman Dale in 1952 and was published as a pulp novel. However, by 1977, this translation would have appeared to have been out of publication for many years.

[2n12]

13. The novelist E. M. Nathanson (*The Dirty Dozen* [1965]) was contacted by the production to novelize the screenplay for film tie-in purposes. When this arrangement fell through another writer John Munahan was contacted. However, the tie-in novel was never produced.

[2n13]

14. The original script included several sequences that did not appear in the final film. This is often the case as films invariably change during the shooting and editing process. Some of these scenes would be reinstated in the international release of the film (see Chapter Five).

[2n14]

15. Friedkin states that Murphy had actually pulled off a real-life robbery of a nearby church in Elizabeth for its bingo monies as the New Jersey mob's 'lead-off man'. Murphy would have a more sizable role as 'Sandy' in Friedkin's *The Brinks Job* (1978) as well as appearing in Martin Scorsese's *King of Comedy* (1983), Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984) and Abel Ferrara's *King of New York* (1990).

[2n15]

16. There are only two reasonably significant female roles in Friedkin's film. The first refers to Manzon's elegant wife Blanche (Anna Marie Deschodt) who appears briefly but crucially in the Paris prologue. The other one is Agrippa (Rosario Almonte) the barmaid, cleaner and possible prostitute in Carlos's bar. She remains silent throughout and her dowdy appearance reflects the squalor of Porvenir. This role exists in contrast to Linda, played by the beautiful actress and wife of the director Vera Clouzot in Clouzot's version, who is in love with Mario (Yves Montand) and is used and abused as a skivvy by the bar owner. In the original novel the character is more ostensibly written as a prostitute.

[2n16]

17. As a child actor Blake had appeared as the small boy selling badges in *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*. He was best known for playing the murderer Perry Smith in *In Cold Blood* and for the television series *Baretta*. He would later be known for facing a murder trial for the death of his second wife Bonne Lee Bakley. While being acquitted in the criminal trial, he was sued and found liable for her wrongful death in a civil court.

[2n17]

18. Oates would later appear as 'Specks O'Keefe' in Friedkin's film of *The Brinks Job* (1978).

[2n18]

19. Rabal expressed his disappointment that despite being cast in a leading role in an American production that his role meant that he went on location in the Dominican Republic and Mexico rather than to shoot the film in Hollywood.

[2n19]

20. 'Spider' was the nickname of Spinell who was a friend of Jurgensen and Friedkin. He appeared on the set to help Jurgensen provide security with reference to the difficulties of it being located in the Dominican Republic.

[2n20]

21. Jurgensen would often jog with Scheider in the Dominican Republic and recalled that the actor was recognised and cheered by the locals from his role in *Jaws* as the man who killed the shark.

[2n21]

22. Barry Bedig would act as the property master on all Friedkin's films up to *Bug* (2006). He is also credited as a consultant for *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985).

[2n22]

23. At one point in the production, Friedkin employed the French comic book illustrator and co-founder of *Metal Hurlant* Magazine Phillipe Druillet to provide designs for the trucks. Later, Druillet would be commissioned by George Lucas to produce a poster design for *Star Wars*.

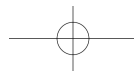
[2n23]

24. In an un-credited capacity, the blacklisted actor and producer Mickey Knox was employed as an English language dialogue coach for Cremer, Rabal and Amidou. See Blumenthal (2018, 131).

[2n24]

25. The filming of the New Jersey sequences was caught on 8mm by local amateur cameramen. There was, however, no formal 'making of' film as only a very few productions were subject to these promotional items at the time. Friedkin has said that this was the case with

[2n25]



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Sorcerer despite a behind the scenes account of Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* which was shot at the time by Coppola's wife Eleanor. This material was later re-edited with interviews from Coppola, Martin Sheen and others by George Hickenlooper and Fax Behr. It was screened as the documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (1991). However, in an interview conducted with Nat Segaloff, Bud Smith suggests that he was originally hired to make such a feature (Smith 1988).

[2n26]

26. Stephens had forged a lucrative career in shooting commercials and in developing photographic innovations. For instance, he was well-known as the technician who had manufactured a 'pan and tilt' device to set on the camera mounts for the Formula One racing cars in John Frankenheimer's *Grand Prix* (1966) and for the underwater camera cases on John Sturges's *Ice Station Zebra* (1969). Stephens devised the bicycle chase for Spielberg's *E.T.* (1982) for which he remained uncredited and James Cameron employed him for *Titanic* (1997) to provide many of pickup shots after most of the film was finished. Dick Bush would also be removed by Cameron when they fell out during the production of *Aliens* (1986) and replaced by Adrian Biddle.

[2n27]

27. It has been suggested by Green that the unintended consequence of the riot scene was the overthrowing of the effective dictatorship in the Dominican Republic when the president nullified an election shortly after the filming. This led to the people of Alto Gracia protesting in the centre and to other towns showing their contempt, eventually leading to the removal of the President in the capital Santa Domingo. For further details, see Clagett (2002, 191).

[2n28]

28. However, when a stunt man Fred Wah hitched a flight with Friedkin back to the US via El Paso, the custom's officer's dog detected marijuana in Wah's suitcase. The director was detained for eight hours and was made to sweat it out by US customs for a further ten days. See Urban 2002.

[2n29]

29. It was during the post-production process that Friedkin was approached and agreed to produce the 1977 Academy Awards show. The television production for the show was not well-received and Friedkin would never again have another one of films being nominated for a major Oscar award. See Segaloff (1990, 166–69).

[2n30]

30. Such sound mix techniques employing animal roars would be used by Walter Murch on Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and by Martin Scorsese for the fight sequences in *Raging Bull* (1980).

[2n31]

31. The group were founded in Berlin and had been part of the loose formation of so-called 'Krautrock' bands which had included such diverse acts as Kraftwerk, Neu and Can. Moreover, another electronic band Popul Vue had provided numerous soundtracks for Werner Herzog including *Aguirre: Wrath of God*, *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979) and *Fitzcarraldo*.

[2n32]

32. Friedkin would employ the British New Wave band Wang Chung in a similar fashion for *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985) wherein he commissioned the music before he had made the film (See Chapter Five). See Kermod 2019.

[2n33]

33. In this respect, Friedkin pioneered the trend of American and British filmmakers using electronic music for their scores. He would be immediately followed by Alan Parker's choice of disco producer Giorgio Moroder to score his film *Midnight Express* (1978) and Hugh Hudson and Ridley Scott choice of Vangelis to score *Chariot's Fire* (1981) and *Blade Runner* (1982) respectively. Tangerine Dream's accompanying soundtrack album would reach Number 25 in the UK charts and remain there for seven weeks. The record proved to be their third largest seller and they would score several more films such as Paul Brickman's *Risky Business* (1984) and most notably Michael Mann's *Thief* (1981) and *The Keep* (1983). They would also provide an alternative soundtrack to Ridley Scott's *Legend* (1985) when he decided to replace the original score composed by Jerry Goldsmith. Further, John Carpenter would be directly influenced by the *Sorcerer* score and used synthesisers in writing music for his own films such as *Halloween* (1978), *The Fog* (1980) and *Escape from New York* (1981). See Grow 2014 and Jones 2017.

[2n34]

34. Friedkin and Paramount would issue exhibitors with the instruction that Tangerine Dream's music should be played for a three minute overture in a darkened cinema before the film began.

[2n35]

35. Friedkin also considered calling the film *Lazarus* in relation to the other truck *Lazarus*.



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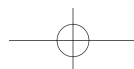
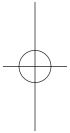
36. At the time most features provided the full titles and credits at the beginning of the film. However, Coppola and Lucas had bucked this trend in *The Godfather*, *The Godfather Part II* and *Star War Trilogy*. Friedkin has similarly only used spare opening credits in *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist*. It was necessary to get a DGA and WGA waiver in agreement that Friedkin and Green's names would have appeared first and second in the end credits. See Friedkin 1977b.

[2n36]

37. A similar graffiti title design was used for Walter Hill's *The Warriors* (1979).

[2n37]
[2n38]

38. Sheinberg had a controversial reputation with maverick filmmakers. Most notably, he publicly sought to re-cut Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil* (1985) to change the ending for the US release of the picture despite contractual guarantees providing Gilliam with final cut. Alternatively, his close mentorship of Steven Spielberg at Universal led to industry wags dubbing the director as the 'son of Sid Sheinberg'.



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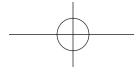
Chapter Three

Sorcerer – From Source Novel to Friedkin’s ‘Reimagining’ of H. G. Clouzot’s *La Salaire de la Peur* (The Wages of Fear) (1953)

Fate and Entrapment

[3.0] In this chapter, there will be a discussion of the relationship between the Georges Arnaud’s source novel of *The Wages of Fear*, H.G. Clouzot’s film version of the story and William Friedkin’s reimagining of the tale with *Sorcerer*. In deploying *The Wage of Fear’s* basic premise, Friedkin and the screenwriter Walon Green extended their focus upon the tale of four desperate men driving explosives across the jungle. Friedkin saw the story as a metaphor for how countries would have to overcome their hostilities by cooperating with one another in order to stem a wider catastrophe or else die (Kermode 2017, 36). However, as the director believed that he was ‘bullet-proof’, he intended his film to be a more fatalistic tale. It would be about obsession, futility and betrayal wherein ‘no one gets out alive’ (Friedkin, 2016).

[3.1] Therefore, as Friedkin and Green developed their vision upon the story, they took a more nihilistic approach to the material. This accorded with the director’s viewpoint over the flimsy lines of good and evil which exist that he had respectively shown in *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist*. Friedkin was concerned to explore what the philosophers Immanuel Kant and Isaiah Berlin described as the ‘crooked timber of humanity’ in which ‘no straight thing was ever made’ (Berlin, 2013; Friedkin 2012a). This construct refers to the essential duality in people between good and evil, and how



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suffering may occur through inadvertent actions. Such an approach established the film's view of its protagonists' histories which led them to the impoverished village of Porvenir (renamed from Las Piedras in the novel and Clouzot's film). Moreover it would dictate how Friedkin presented their fateful attempt to take on the perils of the jungle in trucks laden with volatile explosives

I would make it grittier than Clouzot's film, with the 'documentary feel' for which I had become known. I believed that I could make the audience care about the unlikeliest of heroes – a swindler, a terrorist, a hit man, and a driver for the Irish mob, with no redeeming characteristics (Friedkin 2013, 320).

[3.2]

This analysis reflects upon the different emphases on fate, endurance and entrapment which exist between Arnaud's book, Clouzot's adaptation and Friedkin's film (Kermode, 2017). Consequently, this chapter provides an analysis of Arnaud's novel and considers how Clouzot developed the narrative in his film. While it maintained many of plot points from Arnaud's book, the motion picture made some substantive changes in terms of tone, setting and characterisation. These related to the book's narrow emphasis upon the two main characters – a pimp and a murderer; its opening sections in the hellish setting in Guatemala (although the location was never directly communicated) and several incidents on the road.

[3.3]

In turn, the analysis will demonstrate how Friedkin and Green opened up Arnaud and Clouzot's narratives. In this respect, *Sorcerer* relates to what Todd Berliner has described in terms of 'genre deviation' (Berliner 2010, 99). Throughout the 1970s, many US filmmakers challenged the tradition norms and tropes of the Hollywood film genres such as Sam Peckinpah, Robert Altman, Arthur Penn, Stanley Kubrick, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Hal Ashby and Friedkin. Most especially, in *Sorcerer* Friedkin does not employ the traditional central (anti-)hero and develops an alternative narrative structure in which multiple viewpoints are expressed (Segaloff 1990, 165).

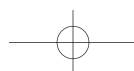
[3.4]

Therefore, within its prologue *Sorcerer* includes four vignettes concerning the criminal endeavours of the hitman, terrorist fraudster and getaway driver who comprise the group of protagonists. These background stories have a direct influence on personalities, behaviour and actions of the main characters throughout their nerve-shredding jungle odyssey. In this respect, the director wanted to demonstrate the moral ambiguities and human imperfections within his leading characters. Instead of Clouzot's noble proletarian heroes, his protagonists were all driven to the edges of society by their criminality.

[3.5]

Additionally, Friedkin would develop the second act of *Sorcerer* to demonstrate the power relations and plight of the protagonists in the hellish

[3.6]



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From Source Novel to Friedkin's 'Reimagining' of La Salaire de la Peur

Porvenir. These included the oil company's control over the squalid town; the oil well's explosion; the local riot which occurs after the corpses are returned from the tragedy; the recruitment of the drivers and how the chosen teams put their mechanical skills together to assemble the ramshackle trucks for the journey. The third act focuses on the treacherous journey within the unforgiving jungle. It includes several units of suspense such as the roads dissolving into mud; rotten wooden platforms that heave under the weight of the trucks; the hazardous rope bridge; the huge Koaba tree that blocks the jungle track; the bandits' attack and the hallucinatory terror that is invoked by the moon-like landscape that precludes Scanlon's arrival at the oil refinery.

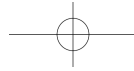
[3.8] Finally, the chapter will consider the visceral tone of the film with reference to Friedkin's skilful direction. Most especially, his staging of the action sequences proved to be vital. These techniques, along with the economy of the narrative and the leading actor's characterisations, contributed to how Friedkin saw his film as being reflective of the interconnections between the themes of fate and human endeavour which defines the existential vision within Friedkin's film. As Segaloff notes:

[3.9] Billy is an autodidact and he has read Dostoevsky and, perhaps or perhaps not, Camus. He sees life as a mixture of comedy and tragedy. He looks at fate and how cruel and ironic the filmic universe can be. His film philosophy comes out of his view of life (Segaloff, 2019).

[3.10] GEORGES ARNAUD'S SOURCE NOVEL AND H. G. CLOUZOT'S *LA SALAIRE DE LA PEUR* (THE WAGES OF FEAR)

[3.11] Georges Arnaud's book was written in French and published in 1950. It provides the basic narrative (or indeed 'high concept'¹) of the truck-drivers carrying nitroglycerin on a 200-mile trek across the jungle to be used to quell an explosion in a remote oil refinery. The pulp fiction was an immediate bestseller that sold over two million copies worldwide. It quickly became a byword for suspense and it was published into English by Bodley Head in 1952. Subsequently, Clouzot's French-Italian coproduction of the film appeared in 1953 and was received with great success (see Chapter Two).

[3.12] Arnaud's novel opens with the devastating explosion of one of the derricks of the American Crude Oil Corporation's oil refinery in the jungles of Guatemala. The explosion which has killed several native workers leaves the company to deal with a fire that it needs to quickly put out for commercial reasons. The oilmen recognise that it can only be stopped by blowing it out with high explosives. However, the sole way to transport the dynamite to the remote jungle location is to haul it with great delicacy in trucks across 200 miles of treacherous jungle roads.



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The book contains a significant amount of technical information about the extraction of the ‘colourless’ liquid of oil, while demonstrating the US executives contempt for the lives of the local population. The company puts out a call for drivers who will be well-paid at the insistence of the leading oilman Mike O’Brien. O’Brien while deeply cynical is the only American who shows some compassion for the men as against the other more corrupt managers. Most especially, the slimy Humphrey wants to pay a minimum to the drivers to further exploit the situation.

[3.13]

After a series of test runs, four desperate men are chosen to make the journey. They are all foreigners who hiding either from crime or debt, and are hoping to buy their way out of the poverty-ridden town of Las Piedras. The principle character is the Parisian smuggler Gerard Sturmer who has become a pimp. He essentially ‘owns’ his prostitute-lover Linda and has no qualms in renting her out to the rest of the invariably drug-addled and low-life figures who occupy the town’s seamy saloon – the Corsario Negro – including the sleazy bar-owner Hernandez. Along with Gerard the driving teams are composed from Johnny Mihalescu, a Rumanian who had knifed his best friend in Tequicigalpa; a Spanish Stalinist Juan Bimba, and the Italian labourer Luigi Stornatori of which little is known. The drive includes many perils over the ramshackle roads and it concentrates on the shifting tensions between Gerard and Johnny in terms of fear and courage.

[3.14]

Upon the journey, they discover that the brake’s fluid supply has been cut by the resentful German Smerloff who sees his opportunity to blow up their truck so he can become a reserve lorry driver. Further, the drivers are also misled by the local mayor and village priest of Los Totumos who believe that their community will be damned by the passage of the trucks. Subsequently, Bimba and Luigi’s truck explodes, and in negotiating the resulting oil slick Gerald is forced to drive it over Johnny when he is guiding him across the pool of dark sludge. In doing so, Gerald breaks and fatally infects Johnny’s leg and he dies after a period of delirium. Ultimately, Gerald delivers the payload, but on insisting in driving back to Las Piedras accidentally turns off the road and is killed.

[3.15]

In many respects, Clouzot and his cowriter Jerome Geronimi (actually Clouzot’s brother Jean) followed the basic plot of Arnaud’s book. However, they made changes in terms of the narrative structure, temperament and tone. Las Piedras remains an economically moribund and squalid hell-hole in which the Southern Oil Company directly bribes the local Junta rather than offers any of its spoils to the local population. Yet, the film is less cynical, violent and deviant than the source novel. For instance, the Los Totumus episode is removed, along with the references to the drug-taking and prostitution.

[3.16]

While, this reflected Clouzot’s sensibilities and his commitment to a filmic structure, it was the result of contemporary censorship as much as the-

[3.17]



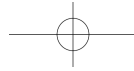
matic interpretation (Lloyd 2007, 93). Moreover, due to the requirements of the European coproduction, the French filmmaker expanded the roles of several characters to accommodate the international cast who provided the funding. Therefore, in terms of the characterisations, Gerard becomes the more sympathetic Mario (Yves Montand) who is down on his luck playboy rather than an outright criminal and Johnny becomes the older gangster Jo (Charles Varnel). They are both Frenchmen – Mario is a Corsican and Jo a Parisian – and while there is something a homoerotic subtext in their relationship, any direct reference to the homosexuality of some of the characters mentioned in the book has been removed.

[3.18] Further, it is made apparent that Mario's love interest is the beautiful and vivacious if rather incongruous Linda (Vera Clouzot).² In turn, she, while being subject to abuse from the bar-keeper Hernandez (Dario Moreno) and treated by Mario with disdain, is clearly not a prostitute while in the book Bernardo pays Gerard to sleep with Linda before killing himself.

[3.19] In addition, the character of Luigi (Falco Lulli) is a more thoroughly rounded out figure and has been sharing his digs with Mario. He is a good-hearted labourer who is dying from a lung disease brought on by working in the heavy cement dust. Bimba's (Peter Van Eyck) nationality was altered from Spanish to German. Therefore, he is a quiet man whose father was killed by the Nazis and who worked in a salt mine for three years rather than being the Stalinist figure from the novel.

[3.20] Instead of starting the film with the oil refinery catastrophe, Clouzot's film spends much of its time in setting up the characters and outlining the locale. The film opens with a shot a semi-naked native black boy idly poking a stick at insects to create a sense of foreboding and malevolence.³ In the introductory sequences, Clouzot places his focus on the Corsario Bar to demonstrate the power relations and enmity amongst the impoverished expats. Therefore, there is a fall-out between Mario and Luigi, who feels usurped when Jo arrives and the Italian labourer has a brawl with the French gangster. Linda is a more spirited figure than the docile character from the book and her sensuality is played up by Vera Clouzot. The other characters such as Smerloff (who Jo appears to have intimidated from making the drive) and the suicidal Bernardo round out the ex-pat bar flies. The American oilman O'Brien (William Tubbs) remains a cynical, if sometimes more humane character, particularly in his treatment of Jo who it is indicated he has known previously during the bootlegging era.

[3.21] Subsequently, when the oil refinery explosion occurs about an hour into the film, Clouzot ironically undercuts the action-adventure generic conventions during the truck journey when the main characters are forced to confront the forces of nature. As the trucks carry their fatal payload, the suspenseful scenes include the washboard road, the platform, the stone and the pool of oil left by the explosion of Luigi and Bimba's lorry. Further despite



Jo's misgivings, Mario, Luigi and Bimba manage to overcome their previous antagonisms to work collectively to blow up the enormous boulder that blocks the road with some of the payload of nitroglycerin.

Yet for all their efforts, the brutal force of fate will make itself evident. The gust of air that blows away the tobacco of Jo's cigarette, which serves as a predecessor to the explosion that kills Luigi and Bimba, is particularly effective. Despite Linda's romantic passion and hopes to leave with Mario, Clouzot demonstrates how fate undercuts any chance for redemption. Most especially, Jo's descent into cowardice is made more poignant as he had been shown earlier as a strutting strong man. Varnel's performance physically changes as Jo becomes a pathetic figure. Eventually, he is made more sympathetic when he shows his mettle in helping Mario through the oil slick. However, as his leg is snapped under the wheels of truck he succumbs to the resultant gangrene. Like the novel, the ending contains the final twist wherein Mario having made the delivery of the explosives and having received the \$4000 in cash, in his exuberance while swerving on the road to the strains of 'Blue Danube' loses control of the truck on the return journey. While Linda is dancing in the cantina she appears to faint as Mario is killed in the resulting accident.

[3.22]

The film is brilliantly paced with a superb ensemble cast and the action sequences employ tautly edited rhythms to enhance the tension. Clouzot uses a range of low and high-angle camera positions to reinforce the sense of entrapment and the futility of the venture. The look of the film was a result of the decision to photograph it in the harsh bright light of the Camargue and Cevennes rather than at a jungle location (Lloyd 2007, 92).⁴ This meant that the motion picture opens in the severe tropical heat and, metaphorically, the characters in the Corsario are shown to be imprisoned by the bar-like shadows which hit them. As Christopher Lloyd concludes:

[3.23]

Clouzot's great achievement in *Le Salaire de la peur* is to revitalise the adventure film, so that it no longer seems a juvenile and formulaic genre whose main purpose is to offer the spectator the vicarious pleasure of ritualised violent confrontation in a fantasised universe (Lloyd 2007, 109–10).

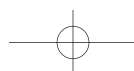
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SORCERER: AN EXPANSION UPON THE ACTION-ADVENTURE GENRE AND THE OPENING UP OF THE NARRATIVE

[3.25]

Friedkin similarly takes a serious approach to the action-adventure genre. His version of the story represents how American films in the 1960s and 1970s could explore the darker aspects of previously straightforward generic formulas as in the case of Peckinpah's western *The Wild Bunch* coscripted by Green (Stratton 2019). As Berliner comments, the key US filmmakers showed a 'keen interest in genre-filmmaking, albeit of an unconventional

[3.26]





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sort' (Berliner 2010, 99). This meant that they challenged many of the conventions and brought new life into the traditional tropes of filmmaking.

[3.27]

As shown in Chapter One, Friedkin had taken on the genres of the policier in *The French Connection* and horror with *The Exorcist* to give them a more ambiguous twist with a European sensibility. It meant that his narratives and characters often operated in relation to genre expectations while simultaneously subtly subverting the conventions to affect a more unsettling effect upon audiences. In the case of *The French Connection*:

[3.28]

[Friedkin] exploits spectator confidence in the generic promises by surreptitiously doctoring the police detective formula . . . (so) the narrative moves so far beyond those (genre) boundaries that it undermines efforts to limit the movie to the dimensions of its generic mould. (Berliner, 103).

[3.29]

Throughout Friedkin's work he has revelled in effecting narratives and forms of characterisation that are developed in terms of complexity rather than simple forms of moral juxtaposition. As Berliner notes, Friedkin 'has always seen himself as an artistic daredevil, [whose films reflect] conceptual incongruities [to] stimulate more intellectual activity than a high concept [movie] would predict' (Berliner, 128–29).⁵ Thus, in defiance of the conventions of the action-adventure genre, Friedkin opens up *Sorcerer* by fading up to a Pazuku like stone carving. Moving from left to right, the graffiti style title of *Sorcerer* is superimposed on this background.

[3.30]

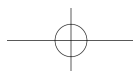
The sense of mysticism and foreboding is enhanced as the disturbing visual is accompanied by a synthesis between Keith Jarrett's pipe organ recording of 'Spheres' with the brooding electronics of Tangerine Dream who's central track is entitled 'Betrayal'. The tone is conspicuously dark and relates more to that of a horror film than to an action adventure movie. Subsequently, in developing the film's storyline, Friedkin deliberately disorientates the audience's view point by opening with four separate backstories and defying the narrative convention of initially focusing upon a central action hero (e.g., the opening of a James Bond movie [1962-onward] from a previous adventure or Steven Spielberg's introduction of Indiana Jones [Harrison Ford] in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* [1981]).

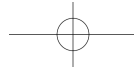
[3.31]

PROLOGUE

[3.32]

The prologue shows the social background of each of the four principal characters in different parts of the world. The first sequence is set in Vera Cruz, Mexico. As a fiesta is taking place in the main square, a man is seen smoking a cigarette in an apartment. He turns round, pours a drink and looks up to be surprised when he sees the mysterious Nilo (Francisco Rabal) has entered the room. Nilo pulls out his gun with a silence and executes his





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target. The well-dressed assassin leaves the scene of his crime, takes a lift down to the foyer, and disappears into the square. The sudden nature of the hit quickly establishes the tone of mortality and death.

The next sequence is located in an Israeli occupied area of Jerusalem and it focuses on Kassem (Amidou) who is introduced walking past the Damascus Gate. He is joined by two other apparently Jewish friends who in reality are part of a group of Palestinian terrorists. They leave an explosive package in a satchel outside a bank's entrance to get onto a local bus. In the ensuing explosion several civilians are killed and the Israeli security forces are mobilised. The terrorists are ambushed in their hideout where two of them are killed and another one is arrested. Kassem looks on helplessly from a crowd at his compatriot Hakim (Khaled Akashi) is taken away.

[3.33]

The third vignette finds Vincent Manzon (Bruno Cremer) in his expensive Parisian apartment with his elegant and loving wife Blanche (Anne Marie Deschodt). She is editing the memoirs of a retired Foreign Legion officer Colonel Etienne De Bray. On preparing to leave, Manzon cynically suggests that the book is work of another 'soldier-poet'. Blanche counters 'More poet than soldier'. As he looks into his distorted reflection in the gilded bathroom mirror, she continues to reads out to him the officer's decision to kill a female civilian in the French Colonies. Upon hearing that the Legionnaire has issued the order, Manzon concludes that he was 'just a soldier'. Blanche responds that 'no one is *just* anything'. Victor then discovers a tenth anniversary gift on the bathroom shelf. He opens the box which contains an expensive watch with an engraved dedication and thanks her for the present.

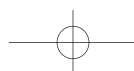
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However, all is not well. Manzon is accused of fraud at the French Stock Exchange by its officers led by Leferve (Jacques Francois). As the chief executive of his father in-laws' investment bank Preville and Fils, Manzon has borrowed fifteen million francs to cover his losses on the stock market. He negotiates a twenty-four hour reprieve by appealing to the officials' better nature in protecting the company's historic good name. Upon meeting his brother-in-law and partner in the crime, Pascal (Jean Luc Bideau), Manzon insists that his accomplice should lobby for financial support from his father – the Count de Preville. While lunching with his wife and a friend at a high-class Parisian restaurant (wherein it is revealed that Victor is the working class son of a fisherman from Brittany) Manzon learns from Pascal that the Count has refused to provide any help. On urging Pascal to try again, he hears a shot in the car park and discovers that his partner has taken his life. Subsequently, he evades his wife, looks at his watch and flees.

[3.35]

In the last back story, an Irish-American gang including the lead-off man Donnelly (Gerard Murphy) and the getaway driver Jackie Scanlon (Roy Scheider) rob a Catholic Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey of its Bingo money. A number of priests and accountants are tallying up the cash taken in

[3.36]



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from the Diocese's sanctioned gambling outlets. Simultaneously a lavish wedding is taking place in the main chapel. To emphasise the institutional hypocrisy, it is shown that the bride has received a black eye from the groom.⁶ As the gang breaks into the counting room one of priests incredulously asks, 'Do you know whose Parish this is?' to which Donnelly replies, 'Up you and the horse you rode in'. He berates one of the gang members to leave the change, and when Father Ricci (Nick Discenza) attempts to grab Donnelly, he shoots him.

[3.37] The gang celebrates their haul of \$67,000 in the getaway car driven by Scanlon. However, they are soon engaged in a bitter argument as one of the hoods berates Donnelly for the sin of shooting the priest. As they bicker, a gun is pulled and Scanlon loses concentration. The car collides with a tractor trailer, shears a fire hydrant, flips over and throws the bodies onto the street. One of the gang members briefly escapes, but dies covered in blood and the change he foolishly stole. Everyone else is killed immediately, apart from the badly injured Jackie who on being awoken by a tramp manages to hobble away just before the police arrive.

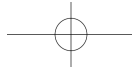
[3.38] Yet, the authorities are the least of Scanlon's worries. The wounded priest is the brother of Carlos Ricci (Cosmo Allegretti), a powerful Mafioso who controls the flow of gambling money within the church. The crime lord puts a price on Jackie's head during a meeting with two mob enforcers, Ben (Ray Dietrich) and Marty (Frank Gio). Subsequently, Scanlon meets up with his friend Vinnie (Randy Jurgensen) who reveals his fate outside the flop house for transients he has been hiding out in Queens, New York City. He tells him to put together \$2000, take the train to Baltimore and go to Pier 47 to ask for 'Nat Glick', who will be able to find him suitable

[3.39] passage.⁷ When Jackie asks Vinnie where he will be going, the hood comments that he neither knows nor wants to know. Vinnie has reciprocated an unnamed favour that he had owed him and Scanlon has no other option but to agree.

[3.40]

EXISTENCE IN PORVENIR

[3.41] It is dawn in Porvenir – a backwater village which is located in an unnamed Latin American Fascist dictatorship. As the shanty town comes to life, the squalor becomes evident. The buildings are little more than tin huts festooned with tarnished posters and graffiti calling for 'Unidos Hacia el Futuro' (United Toward the Future) in support of the local dictator. Finally, from its dominant Black Eagle insignia it is made apparent that the town is run by a mercenary American oil company – the Compania de Recursos Petroles S.A. (COREPET).



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A lizard climbs up a Mosquito net attached to a bed whose occupant is Scanlon. The getaway driver wakes bolt upright in a sweat to the imaginary sounds of a car crashing and an animal being slaughtered. Jackie realises that he had woken back into his living nightmare of the rancid flop house which he is sharing with thirty other itinerant men. Scanlon's unshaven face is haggard, his eyes are sunken and his unwashed skin sallow. He walks out to the basic washroom, washes his face in water from a tin bowl and catches his haunted features in the reflection of the mirror. Scanlon looks across from the terrace and spots a 'Nazi' German war veteran 'Marquez' (Karl John) who returns his gaze with one of suspicion and menace. No one is to be trusted and no identity is to be believed. Scanlon, himself, is going under the pseudonym of 'Juan Dominquez'.

[3.42]

Fully dressed and wearing a trilby hat Scanlon/Dominquez lights a cigarette and goes to work as an airport delivery driver. As the other oil workers take up their shift, Manzon is sitting at a table in Corsario bar smoking a cigarette. He is now 'Serrano' and he lives in one of the rented rooms at the back. Manzon/Serrano is being served breakfast by the owner – a German who is oddly called 'Carlos' (Friedrich von Lebedur). To retain a sense of civility, Victor asks for eggs and is poured coffee by the weather battered woman from the opening montage who is named Agrippa (Rosario Almontes). They exchange glances and she smiles at him.

[3.43]

Subsequently, he reports to work at the oil refinery along with Marquez. In the filthy conditions Manzon/Serrano spots the two oil-men who run the plant project manager Charles Corlette (Ramon Bieri) and his superior Pierre Lartigue (Peter Capell). Elsewhere, Kassem has become 'Martinez'. He is working as a member of construction crew that is putting together the oil pipeline across a river. The work is led by an incompetent foreman and a heavy metal tube is dropped onto one of the labourers whose leg is crushed.

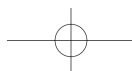
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A plane flies across the village and lands on the runway of the primitive airport. The passengers including a priest and blind boy get off, along with Nilo who does not have a passport. He claims that he is transit to Managua, says he is very thirsty and bribes the corrupt customs officer so he can stay. He buys a drink from the airport concession, takes a broken down taxi to the town and rents a room at the Corsario. Through the blinds in his room, Victor spies upon Nilo and treats his arrival with suspicion. Simultaneously, Scanlon and Spider (Joe Spinell) unload the plane. On glancing at the empty fuselage, Spider tells him to forget about stowing away on the plane. Elsewhere, Manzon tries to arrange passage by selling the watch his wife gave him for the tenth wedding anniversary but he is informed that he requires more money to leave.

[3.45]

Kassem has befriended Marquez. They discuss the impossibility of getting away from Porvenir and meet in the evening at the Corsario. Sitting alongside them, Jackie looks longingly at a beautiful girl's image on a fading

[3.46]



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cheesecake Coca-Cola advert which is placed above the bar. On receiving his evening meal, he quips to Manzon/Serrano that Carlos is an ex Reichsmarshall and the bar-owner gives a steely stare. He buys Manzon a drink and asks him whether he was in banking. Victor remains cautious, but when Scanlon asks him whether Porvenir was what he had anticipated, he responds by saying 'it was exactly what I expected'.

[3.47]

Two policemen arrive in the Corsario to arrest Scanlon as he is carrying fake identity papers and does not speak Spanish. He is taken to the police station where two naked male bodies are laid out on the jail's floor. There he is subject to a shakedown and told that he will give over most of his meagre daily wages to ensure his freedom. All the men are stateless, have no rights, are living in abject poverty, being paid a pittance and are working in appalling conditions. Despite wanting out, their savings are non-existent and they have to bribe the corrupt police so they will not arrest them. Only Nilo appears to have any funds and he remains on the run. For all of the protagonists they are living in limbo in the hellish Porvenir which is at the end of the road.

[3.48]

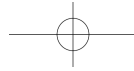
THE EXPLOSION OF THE OIL REFINERY, THE RIOT,
RECRUITMENT OF THE DRIVERS, AND
THE PREPARATION FOR THE TRIP

[3.49]

In the meantime, the remote jungle oil well at Poza Rica explodes, killing many of the local workers and leaving a devastating fire in its wake. Corlette angrily discovers that the explosion has been caused by local guerrillas. He complains to Lartigue that the Junta had been paid off by the oil company so that no such sabotage could occur. However, Lartigue informs Corlette that the dictatorship will not help them as 'El Presidente cannot risk his liberal image by sending troops to chase patriots'. More urgently, he has received a telex from the head office stating that they are only concerned by the commercial implications of fire. Lartigue reminds Corlette that he is obliged to deliver 160,000 barrels per month or the company will shut down production.

[3.50]

Back in Porvenir, two trucks arrive containing the mutilated corpses of the local workers who were killed in the tragedy at Poza Rica. A large crowd assembles around the lorries and expresses its shock. However, on the discovery of a number of charred bodies that have been hidden under blankets, the crowd goes quiet as the carbonised, horrific corpses are removed. The mood rapidly changes from despair to anger as the crowd attacks the soldiers who are dispatching the corpses. As the soldiers start shooting to clear the crowd, a full-scale riot occurs. The local populace stones the soldiers, denounces the dictatorial regime and sets fire to the trucks. The peasant riot is



brutally subjugated by armed officers on horseback who charge into the crowd. In the evening, a candle led procession takes place for the victims accompanied by the cries and screams of the widows.

Corlette seeks the help of an explosives expert Bobby Del Rios (Chico Martinez). On inspecting the fire from the air Del Rios informs Corlette, 'I have seen worse'. The best method to blow the fire out is with dynamite. Yet, since the only available explosives have been improperly stored in a remote depot, the nitroglycerin has leaked from the sticks to become a volatile liquid. While Del Rios tells Corlette that the poorly kept explosives could be used, he also shows him that the faintest vibration can cause an explosion. The oil executive asks his helicopter pilot Billy White (Richard Holley) whether the dynamite could be transported by the air. Billy informs him the vibrations would be too great and that only a 'suicide jockey' would get into a helicopter 'with that shit'. The only way to transport the unstable nitroglycerin over the 200 miles is by truck.

[3.51]

Corlette is driven around Porvenir and over a megaphone calls for experienced and brave drivers to move the explosives. He tells the villagers, 'This job must be done before we bring back full employment to you people' and is offering them, if chosen, the exceptional wages of 8000 pesos. Despite the odds, this is more than enough to escape from the hellish locale and Scanlon, Manzon, Kassem, Nilo and Marquez apply to make the drive. In a short montage of often humorous scenes, several Porvenir inhabitants are shown either negotiating the driving test or abjectly failing.

[3.52]

Despite Nilo's skill as a hitman, he is a poor driver and loses control of the truck. Conversely, when Corlette asks Jackie whether he has been a 'Teamster' he quips back that he used to drive for 'Greyhound'. Kassem also demonstrates that he nerveless when he drives through a group of children who flee just before he will hit them. On the basis of the test runs, 'Serrano', 'Dominquez', 'Martinez' and 'Marquez' are chosen to drive the trucks. Nilo has been passed over and he eyes each of the successful candidates to weigh up who might be the easiest to remove.

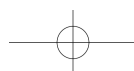
[3.53]

The drivers partner up into two teams (Scanlon and Marquez, and Manzon and Kassem) to assemble their trucks from the scrapped chasses of a range of derelict trucks. In a series of shots, the teams are shown fixing up the engines from the available scrap. Once they have rebuilt the trucks, the drivers paint the names 'Lazaro; and 'Sorcerer' on them. The montage is intercut with several extreme close ups of the fire and one of Nilo as he is contemplating who to kill. The wordless sequence is accompanied by Tangerine Dream's haunting score.

[3.54]

Along with Corlette and Del Rios, the drivers' winch six boxes of dynamite from the storage hut and place them onto the sand covered platforms of the two trucks. In carrying out the delicate task, they realise that only one box of explosives is required to blow out the fire. Scanlon informs Corlette that

[3.55]



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one of the trucks is there for backup and Manzon demands that they should receive double pay and legal proof of their residence. Otherwise the drivers will refuse to undertake the journey. Corlette reluctantly agrees to their demands by concluding, 'You leave in four hours'.

[3.56]

THE JOURNEY BEGINS AND THE JUNGLE STARTS TO TAKE ITS TOLL

[3.57]

Scanlon, Manzon and Kassem meet Corlette at the appointed hour to sign off on their mandates and begin the journey. Agrippa arrives and insists on giving a religious pendent to Manzon. When Jackie asks what she has given him, the Frenchman gives a knowing wink. However, Marquez is strangely absent. Kassem, on spotting Nilo in a doorway, becomes suspicious. He runs down the street to Marquez's dwelling and smashes the door open to discover that the German has had his throat cut. In a rage, he accuses Nilo of murdering Marquez and attacks him with a knife but the assassin is too agile for him. In response, Corlette calls for the police. Instantly, Scanlon shouts 'no police' and suggests that as they are one driver short that the hitman replaces Marquez.

[3.58]

Scanlon and Nilo wipe off the morning dew from the front windows of their truck 'Lazaro'. Jackie chalks '218' onto the dashboard to indicate to them the total distance to be travelled in miles. He proceeds to drive the vehicle out of Porvenir onto the mountainous jungle roads while Nilo rides as shotgun. Fifteen minutes later, Manzon and Kassem are ready to leave in 'Sorcelero'. Victor asks Corlette to send a letter to Paris that he has written to his wife and they shake hands. Subsequently, in a series of shots, including several extreme close ups on the sweaty men, both trucks are shown to be negotiating what are little more than muddy tracks which are accompanied by sheer drops. Every bump and pothole in the road is treated with mortal fear from the drivers.

[3.59]

As the trucks make their way, the ubiquitous oil pipeline can be seen to be attached the limpet-like to the landscape along with a carving of a Pazuzu like demon in the mountain rock. The feeling that the drivers have unleashed a series of primeval forces that are greater than them is exacerbated when Scanlon and Nilo come across a family of quizzical Native Indians walking along the road. The father, who appears to be a tribal warrior, strips off to a loin cloth to show off his muscular torso. He baits the drivers by running in front of the truck and along the accompanying oil pipeline. He jumps off the tubing of the pipe and disappears behind the vehicle, only for Jackie to see his ominous reflection in the rear-view mirrors.

[3.60]

At a rotten wooden platform which is designed to enable the trucks to turn a tight corner, Manzon finds a note from Scanlon wishing him good luck. He



crumbles it up and throws it away in disgust. Victor checks to see whether the wood can hold up the weight of the truck and argues with Kassem about who should drive the truck. In the event, Manzon persuades Kassem to drive the lorry over the dilapidated structure while he will provide the guidance. The tension escalates when the truck is positioned halfway across the platform as one of the rotten beams snaps jolting the vehicle and its deadly cargo. A terrified Kassem angrily shouts out that he can go no further but after some considerable effort is able to accelerate away to negotiate the vehicle off the fragile platform.

The odometer shows that the trucks have covered 58 miles of the treacherous journey. However the tropical rain has become a torrential storm and Scanlon stops the truck as the jungle road divides into two. He checks the map and spots a wizened old tribesman in the sodden foliage. Jackie and Nilo ask the peasant for the directions to the Poza Rica oil field, but the man obliquely replies 'Poza Rica is dead'. Scanlon decides to take the higher road; however, when Manzon arrives he argues that they must follow the map. In the event, the road becomes no more than a track and they are confronted by a decrepit rope bridge which is the only way to cross a raging river.

[3.61]

CROSSING THE RICKETY ROPE BRIDGE AND DESTROYING THE KOABA TREE

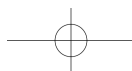
[3.62]

On Jackie's inspection of the rickety rope bridge, Nilo flees. However, Scanlon grabs him telling him that he must help him direct the truck across the rain sodden bridge. With great hesitation, the assassin guides Jackie over the ramshackle wooden tracks. At various points of the crossing, the slats snap and the crossing is painstakingly slow as Scanlon manoeuvres Lazaro inch-by-inch over the swaying structure. On several occasions, the truck nearly goes over the side and Nilo grabs onto the ropes to hang on for dear life. Through sheer fortitude, Jackie manages to get the truck onto the other side of the riverbank. On making the crossing, the ecstatic and crazed Scanlon informs the haunted hitman that the fate of Manzon and Kassem is sealed, 'They've had it. We're sitting on double shares'.

[3.63]

Indeed, Manzon and Kassem's crossing of the river in Sorcero is far worse. The bridge has already withstood the battering from the first truck and the conditions have become even more untenable. Kassem guides Manzon in the truck, but as the wood becomes more slippery, rotten and treacherous, one of the joints snaps under his foot. For one brief, horrific moment he appears to have been dragged into the raging river. Kassem re-emerges just before the truck could crush him and he is able to guide Manzon who checks that his compatriot is okay.

[3.64]



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[3.65]

Suddenly, and from nowhere, an adjacent tree collapses into Victor's side trapping him on the side of the vehicle. In agony, the Frenchmen eventually hacks away at the intruding branches with a machete. However, as he gets back into the cab he cannot get the sufficient traction to clear the bridge. Fortunately, Kassem attaches a winch from the front of the truck onto a firmer stump as Manzon continues to hack away at the obstacle. At this point, the tension becomes unbearable as the ropes holding the bridge up begin to snap and the truck can only inch along. Finally, Manzon finds enough grip on the wheels to accelerate away as the bridge collapses into the river.

[3.66]

Scanlon and Nilo discover that a giant Koaba tree has fallen across the jungle road and it blocks the path. As it appears impossible to remove the heavy obstacle, Nilo begins to laugh hysterically as a distraught Jackie pummels the ground. He goes back to the truck and manically grabs a machete in a futile effort to clear the undergrowth. Nilo observes 'you're crazy' to which Scanlon throws another machete at him and orders him to start cutting down the foliage. The hitman pulls his gun, takes aim and tells him to 'make your move'. He fires three shots at the stunned Scanlon.

[3.67]

However, their stand-off is interrupted by the arrival of Manzon and Kassem. The hobbling Kassem initially appears to be taking aim at Nilo, but he walks past the hitman to observe the blockage caused by the fallen tree. Scanlon suggest to Manzon that the only option is to go around the obstacle and cut out eight other trees. Victor responds that it would be impossible to remove these trees and store them. In a vain effort, Jackie attempts to clear the path with his machete. In the meantime, Kassem with his knowledge of explosives checks out the Koaba tree. He returns and tells the others, 'I think I can clear it'.

[3.68]

For once united in a common purpose, the four men prepare to blow up the tree. They begin by cutting and whittling away at branches drawn the surrounding undergrowth. In tandem, Kassem makes a hole in the tree with an axe. They work together in finding the appropriate rock from a jungle stream upon which Kassem can improvise an explosion by using a case of the nitroglycerin. Kassem assembles a makeshift pulley from the branches and ties a string to another rock which he will use to manufacture the explosion. He cuts out the fabric from Nilo's trouser pocket and fills it with grit so it can be used as a timer for the devise. Subsequently, the men unload one of the boxes of dynamite and carefully place it on the tree. Kassem whittles a stick and pierces the covering so that the liquid nitro spreads across the rock on the tree.

[3.69]

Presently, the others flee to either reverse the trucks or find positions of safety. The Palestinian then cuts into the makeshift timer and the grit starts to pour out enabling the rock to hit the volatile explosives. He then runs off to take a safe position. The devise sets off an enormous explosion and the tree



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disintegrates. In the fallout, Manzon, Kassem, Scanlon and Nilo observe that the track has been cleared and that they are free to recommence their journey. Yet, throughout the scene, a buzzard is seen flying ominously over head to remind the audience that the fateful adventure is far from over.

THE INEVITABILITY OF FATE, THE BANDITS,
AND THE DELIVERY OF THE EXPLOSIVES

[3.70]

After clearing these obstacles, the men's instinct is to be almost euphoric. In Sorcero, Manzon and Kassem conduct a conversation about Victor's wife and his previous life in Paris. The Frenchman looks at the watch his wife presented to him and declares that it 'five minutes before nine in Paris'. Suddenly and without any warning, the left-side front wheel's tyre on Sorcero fatefully explodes dragging the truck off the road and crashing it into the steep banking. The vehicle is incinerated in an apocalyptic inferno which instantly kills the two men. Several miles behind, the fireball is seen by Scanlon and Nilo who are fixing their truck.

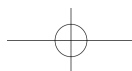
[3.71]

Jackie and Nilo arrive at the scene of the recent accident. Scanlon inspects the rubble from the rockslide and debris that is left from the explosion. The oil pipeline had held but they are confronted by another problem – the appearance of four local bandits who have circled the area like sharks.⁸ The leader addresses Jackie who tells them that they are carrying supplies. In response, the main bandit says that is all that they want and they will leave the drivers alive. However, in Spanish, it is made apparent that it is the intention of the guerrillas to steal the load and kill Scanlon and Nilo. When the leader looks inside the truck he sees the boxes of explosives and he shouts out. Nilo, who has been pretending that he is ill, pulls out his gun and shoots three of the bandits. Jackie kills the leader with a shovel, but discovers that Nilo has been fatally wounded in the gunfire. Moreover, as one of the bandits shot at the truck in the crossfire, Lazaro's engine has been severely damaged.

[3.72]

In the evening, Jackie and the dying Nilo enter a canyon which contains a lunar-like landscape. As he weaves the truck throughout the surreal locale, Scanlon begins to hallucinate as his memories fuse with together from the New Jersey heist and the epic journey (see Chapter Four). As the truck breaks down, Scanlon discovers that Nilo has died from the gunshot wound and he drags his corpse out from the truck. In the meantime, the lorry's engine has stopped turning over as the fuel has run out. It seems fate has turned against him once more, but on checking the odometer Jackie realises he is just over a mile away from the oil field. He carries the crate of the perspiring dynamite to the well, is greeted by the oil workers and collapses from exhaustion. The gruelling journey has been completed.

[3.73]



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[3.74]

EPILOGUE: THE RETURN TO PORVENIR

[3.75]

Scanlon is transported back in a helicopter to Porvenir by Corlette and greeted by the local children as a returning hero. At the Corsario, Corlette signs a bankers 'cheque for 40,000 pesos and gives Scanlon a passport under the name of 'Juan Dominquez'. Scanlon says the deal was for cash, but Corlette assures him he will be able to cash the check. He buys Jackie a drink and suggests that he goes to Managua where he might join him. Scanlon sarcastically asks Corlette how he could give up all he has accumulated in Porvenir. The oilman replies he might well have to leave if the company decides to pull out of its operations. Not only has Jackie's drive and the men's death been an act of potentially futility, but as Corlette indicates everyone else's position may be similarly untenable.

[3.76]

To add to the note of futility, he also asks if Jackie can post Manzon's letter to his wife in France. A haunted looking Scanlon agrees but before he goes he asks Corlette to hold the helicopter as he decides to ask for a last dance with Agrippa. As the two dance awkwardly together across the bar-room floor to the tune of Charlie Parker's 'I'll remember April', a taxi pulls up outside and two men step out. The first is one of Ricci's mob enforcers who is there to make good on the vendetta against Jackie. The second is the treacherous Vinnie who will act as his backup. As they enter the Corsario, a man carrying a bull's head upon his bloodied back passes the bar and then a truck carrying soldiers drives through the shot. Either its engine backfires or a shot can be heard vaguely in the background (Maron 2014). Friedkin then employs Tangerine Dream's electronic theme of 'Betrayal' as the screen goes dark and the end credits are shown (Kermode 2015).

[3.77]

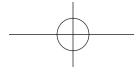
THE OPENING UP OF THE NARRATIVE AND THE VISCERAL TONE OF *SORCERER*; 'NO ONE IS JUST ANYTHING'

[3.78]

In setting out the plot for *Sorcerer* it can be shown that Friedkin and Green employed the basic structure of the book and the narrative of Clouzot's version of the tale. Like Clouzot they took what was an essentially pulp fiction or high concept movie seriously and developed the film to play with the audience's genre expectations. Within the screenplay and the preferred American release version of the film (see Chapter Five), they both expanded upon the conceit of the four disparate men being forced by circumstances to overcome their hostility to work together and minimised it by focusing on Scanlon's interior monologues.

[3.79]

The vignettes indicate that these men could not achieve their goals in the 'real world' and through their failings have reached their inevitable destination in the hellish Porvenir. Friedkin and Green internationalised the backsto-



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ries and provided an equitable amount of time to each one of the protagonists. In part, this was done to ensure that audiences would not be able to work out who survives the journey (Djoumi 2014). However, by providing the multiple viewpoints, Friedkin refused to give the audiences one definable moral position to be attached to the leading characters. He commented:

At the time I made *Sorcerer* , I thought I was moving the boundaries as to who you could feature in an action film as a protagonist, although I never thought I was taking the audience any farther than they were prepared to go in terms of entertainment value. But in hindsight, I know it was almost suicidal to make one of the lead characters an Arab terrorist, even 25 years ago. You can imagine the reception that this character would get today in most parts of the world (Ryan 2002).

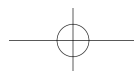
[3.81]

Therefore, it is shown that the terrorist Kassem has his own legitimate and ideologically driven motivations for the bombing of the Israeli bank and killing civilians. The incident is shot in a cinema-verite style which is reminiscent of Gillo Pontecarvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1966) (see Chapter Four). Manzon, who enjoys the trappings of respectability and would initially appear to be developed in the mould of the traditional romantic hero sent to abroad to foreign climbs. In truth, he is a fraudster driven no more than by remaining one step ahead of the authorities. The cost for him is that he must desert his beloved wife. Similarly, Scanlon's motivations are contradictory. He actively engages in the violent robbery of the albeit corrupt church without any compunction. Yet, on learning that he has a price on his head, he protests to Vinnie that he has never pulled a gun in his life. Only Nilo remains an unambiguous, if mysterious, figure whose behaviour is defined by his profession as an assassin. For Green, they were a vital part of the film's construction:

[3.83]

Most important, I feel, is the underpinning which the prologues give to our characters. Having seen them for brief glimpses in their lives, the audience can adjust themselves to the moral dilemma of each of them. They can feel that some deserve a fate like death and others deserve redemption and salvation. They will automatically pick favourites and root their heroes' home, and the shifts that occur on the trek which bring all the men into somewhat heroic postures will force changes in their attitude. When Kassem has taken out the tree, he will have evolved. People who only moments before would have gladly seen him die will have second thoughts about their emotions. I believe very strongly that great adventure is made out of the alteration of character by duress and to accomplish this the personalities must carry something a past life and we must be able to imagine for them a future. The drive is the payment of enormous dues. I feel, therefore we must know how the debt was incurred (Green 1975a).

[3.85]



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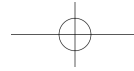
[3.87] In constructing the opening vignettes, Friedkin and Green give *Sorcerer* a film noir like quality in which these four desperate and, indeed, bad men have made poor choices driven as much by accident as by design. For instance, Scanlon's car crash is caused by a violent argument within the gang about shooting of albeit corrupt priest and the bad odour associated with the incident. According to Green everybody should have in their past something that was completely unforgivable (Zippel 2018). Therefore, his protagonists are shown to be trying to escape from a defined past in which their disparate lives are drawn together in Porvenir:

[3.89] Those characters who had power previously . . . cannot even display this skill in this hostile and foreign country, because they do not master the environment and also because they do not own any money (Dejean 2016, 36).

[3.91] Theirs is essentially a double life in which each character, with the exception of the barely sketched assassin Nilo, has had to become necessity their own 'doppelganger' as they have swapped and exchanged identities to remain free. Moreover, Kassem had swapped his identity from being a Palestinian to that of an Israeli Jew when secreting and planting the bomb. The key moment which brings this duality together, is when Manzon looks at his split reflection in the bathroom mirror as his wife gently chides him, 'No one is *just* anything'. Indeed, Victor has already subsumed his working-class identity into becoming a sophisticated banker even before his makes his escape. For Friedkin this exchange was crucial to the film's philosophy about the choices people make and their implications in the face of potential futility. As Gloria Heifetz notes:

[3.92] We could reduce the film to this maxim, but Friedkin's compassionate but unsentimental realization of the film prevents the phrase from diverting us from the true vividness of their fight against despair. . . . All societies are two societies operating side by side, the innocent and the dark (Heifetz 1979).

[3.93] Friedkin and his editors, however, do not leave the audience with anytime to reflect upon such musings. Jackie learns his fate the screeching sound of an El Train can be heard on the soundtrack to reinforce his mental turmoil. Immediately, Friedkin employs a stunning match cut to completely resituate the film within the tropical jungles of an unnamed Fascist state in Central or Latin America. This dramatic change in locale is accompanied by a series of establishing shots which demonstrate the desperate nature of the village and the oppressive power of the oil corporation replete with the Black Eagle insignia. In this respect John Box's production design comes into its own as it portrays the cesspit of institutionalised poverty and reflects the sense of desperation which entraps the men.



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Moreover, Friedkin employs his induced documentary style through the blocking of the scenes, claustrophobic composition of visuals, use of lenses, fluid camera movements in the interior and exterior sequences, handheld shots and close ups of his sweat-drenched characters in his visualisation of the life in Porvenir. Throughout the village sequences, the shanty town is subjected to the varying peaks and troughs in the humidity of its climate. This results in the roads becoming muddy tracks and the ramshackle nature of the occupancy The Corsario Bar is even more downbeat than its namesake in Clouzot's picture with far more disreputable characters and an owner Carlos who it is insinuated to be an ex-Nazi fugitive. In contrast to the attractive Linda in *Wages of Fear*, the only female character in the bar is the silent, weather beaten peasant woman Agrippa who may (or may not) be having affair with Manzon.

[3.94]

In the post-production, the editors worked to minimise much of the exposition which appears in the screenplay preferring a kinetic filmic style with an intricate sound design which works at a subconscious level. Friedkin's love of process of 'how something works', which was apparent in *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist*, is shown during the long montage of the men rebuilding their trucks from spare parts of the derelict vehicles. The technical skills become even more apparent in the unbearably tense action sequences when the men take to the road.

[3.95]

In the film's central action sequence wherein the huge trucks inch their way across the decrepit rope bridge in the middle of a terrible storm, Friedkin uses all his of cinematic prowess to ensure that the audience holds its breath. The gruelling sequence is made even more nail-biting as the sound effects multiple to indicate that the bridge is straining under the weight of the respective trucks. As Kent Jones comments:

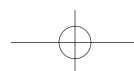
[3.96]

The image of the massive, beaten-up truck swaying on the bridge in the centre of the frame amidst a swirl of trees and water, the human figures almost disappearing in the vary-coloured tangle of mist, jungle fauna, earth and sky, is held to the point where it becomes a real *vision*, like something out of J.M.W. Turner but with a demoniacal power (Jones 2007, 181).

[3.98]

While, the sequence of the trucks defying nature is thrilling and tense Friedkin only allows for a minimal amount of relief. The film leaves the scene on a knife-edge as he immediately cuts to the next obstacle of the fallen Koaba tree. This sequence demonstrates Friedkin's other main contention that even those characters who are contemptuous of one another can work together when the odds of stacked against them. This is made most obvious between Nilo and Kassem who have to subsume their hatred for each other so that they can blow up the tree. The sequence is almost wordless and demonstrates that the main characters are men of action rather than of discussion.

[3.100]



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[3.101]

The scene is most obviously modelled on the removal of the huge boulder in Clouzot's film, but in tone owes more to Jules Dassin's famously silent jewellery robbery in *Riffifi* (1955). Every step is accounted for as each character has a specific role to play in the disposal of the enormous tree and they have to operate effectively as a team. It here that Friedkin's metaphor of the film being an allegory for warring nations to come together to offset any further catastrophe is most evident:

[3.103]

Once the opportunity of this suicide mission comes to them, their know-how turns out efficient for the continuation. Also, the characters have to team up, which was not the case in the village. . . . They are going from solitude to teamwork. It is risky, as trust is needed to complete the task and to work in the best conditions (Dejean 2016, 36).

[3.105]

Despite their success Friedkin does not allow his protagonists to engage in any form of the male camaraderie. This had occurred in Clouzot's version wherein his drivers enjoyed a moment of celebration by collectively urinating over the rubble left by the destroyed boulder. *Sorcerer's* vision is far bleaker and it does not proffer friendship as a means through which to judge the meaning of life. Moreover, throughout the scene, *Sorcerer* includes shots detailing the primeval environment in which characters are placed, often juxtaposing them with the grandness of the spectacle. The circling buzzards are reminiscent of David Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1956) and it reminds us that the mystical jungle terrain is a living and complex organism (Clagett 2002, 176) (see Chapter Four).

[3.106]

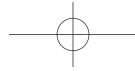
THE CROOKED TIMBER OF HUMANITY: *SORCERER'S* POSITION IN FRIEDKIN'S CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

[3.107]

In his examination of the fateful tale in *Sorcerer*, it is Friedkin's contention that his film was not a remake but a 'reimagining' of the material in much the same way that there have been numerous productions of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In reinterpreting the story and taking the action-adventure genre seriously, the filmmaker wanted to explore what the philosopher Isaiah Berlin drew from Immanuel Kant described as the 'crooked timber of humanity' in which 'no straight thing was ever made' (Friedkin2012a).⁹ As Scout Tafoya comments, '*Sorcerer* was a cracked mirror held up to the demons of the world' (Tafoya 2014).

[3.108]

For Friedkin, in his cinematic universe, no one is perfect, motivations are muddled and while attempting to not harm one another, people often inadvertently cause pain and misery to others. For instance, in the US vignette, a bride's black eye in the church wedding which is occurring at the same time as the robbery suggests that no-one gets a moment of relief in this squalid



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environment. In turn, Friedkin further humanises the existential despair by entrapping his protagonists within the vicissitudes of fate. As Green has commented, the director intended to make ‘a cynical movie where fate turns the corner for the people before they turn it themselves’ (Segaloff 1993, 156).

In this respect, the director acknowledged the importance of John Huston’s version of B. Traven’s book *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) on his thinking. Huston’s film which focuses on gold and betrayal, shows how a dissolute group of good men, led by Fred C. Dobbs (Humphrey Bogart), become psychologically broken down by the lure of the ‘golden fleece’ of greed. Friedkin has commented that this influence even applied to his decision to use Tangerine Dream to provide the score. The soundtrack provides a deliberately distancing effect and the director comments:

[3.109]

If *Sorcerer* does bring to mind other films, the closest is *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. That had a wonderful orchestral score by Max Steiner . . . and had I made the film in the 1940s or 1950s I would have used a Max Steiner type score. . . . I liked the Tangerine Dream style music and I shoe-horned it into the film. It stands apart from the film and yet drives it. It provides its hard-edge tone and the pulsating rhythm that I wanted to be going on behind some of these sequences where you see the guys driving the trucks over the dangerous terrain (Friedkin quoted from Kermodé 2015).

[3.111]

Further, he and Green used the Mexican set adventure as a ‘road map’ in their intention to ‘write a real movie about what we thought was the reality of Latin America and the presence of foreigners there today’ (Segaloff, 156) (See Chapter Four).

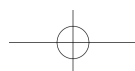
[3.113]

In particular, Friedkin would consciously refer to Huston’s film in the characterisation of Scanlon in which Scheider’s portrayal pays direct homage to Bogart’s Dobbs, not least in his wearing of the same style of beaten down trilby hat. As Jackie finally emerges as the film’s central character, his obsessive behaviour in driving the truck, battling with nature and his descent into paranoia further reflects Dobbs’ fall from grace. With Dobbs’ like glee, Scanlon declares to Nilo after crossing the rope bridge that Manzon and Kassem are doomed and that they are on ‘double shares’. In a further nod to Huston’s film, one of the bandits takes Scanlon’s hat and wears it for himself when attempting to hijack the truck akin to the Mexican bandits taking Dobbs’ hat. Green describes him as ‘believable, gutsy, and desperately human’ whose characteristics ‘reflect the self-image of the spectator’ (Clagett 1990, 166–67).

[3.114]

In deploying Scheider as Scanlon to be the audiences’ ‘everyman’ surrogate, Friedkin often cuts to close-ups of his leading man’s gaunt and haunted features to convey the weathered dread or despondency within his thousand-yards stare. Most especially, Scanlon is endlessly frustrated by the cruel

[3.115]





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jungle conditions. This is evident in his desperate response to dealing with the fallen Koaba tree. Scheider's character repeatedly punches the ground and fruitlessly attempts to clear the foliage with a machete. It is only when Kassem arrives and informs the men he has the explosive skills to remove the obstacle, the physically and mentally exhausted Scanlon can calm down.

[3.116]

However, even at this point, when it appears that the cause of his leading man's despair has been alleviated, Friedkin is not prepared to leave the audience off the hook. Thus, his principal theme emerges upon how the cosmic inequities of fate can be seen to be arbitrary in discarding human endeavour and effort. Just as Manzon and Kassem tentatively bond after the destruction of the Koaba tree, their truck suffers from a fatal puncture resulting in their untimely deaths. In this respect, Friedkin's film is undoubtedly influenced by the French-Algerian existential writer Albert Camus, who argued that we live in an absurdity which cannot escape and are condemned to never fully comprehend the ultimate nature of our existence (Adams, 2014; Draper, 2019).

[3.117]

Even, if 'no one is *just* anything', the director commented that 'somebody can walk out of their front door and a hurricane can take them away, an earthquake or something falling through the roof'. He continued 'the idea that we don't really have control over our own fates, neither our births nor our deaths, it's something that has haunted me since I was intelligent enough to contemplate something like it' (Friedkin 2002). For Friedkin, the film is an exercise in futility in which his protagonists are operating in Camus's version of a living death. Consequently, he leaves it to the audience to determine its meaning, most especially with regard to Scanlon's cold, dead stare into the camera indicating his sense of purgatory and to fate as to whether he survives or not (Smithson 2011; Friedkin 2014):

[3.119]

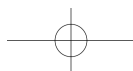
A central feature of *Sorcerer* . . . [is the] 'almost physical sense of inconsequential action, of pointlessness and uselessness: stances which [. . .] speak of a radical scepticism about American virtues of ambition, vision, drive'. (Conrad 2009, 10) Not only is heroism and forward-driving momentum avoided in the film, but a purely existential attitude is adopted (Bat 2014).

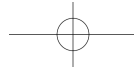
[3.120]

CONCLUSION

[3.121]

It has been shown that Friedkin and his screenwriter Green took the basic premise of Arnaud's novel and H.G. Clouzot's film version of *The Wages of Fear*. They extended the nihilistic focus of the story of the four desperate men driving the volatile explosives across the jungle. The director claimed that in *The Exorcist* he was dealing with the mysteries of faith while in *Sorcerer* he was attempting to consider the mysteries of fate. Such an exploration begins when Manzon's wife tells her husband 'No one is *just* any-





thing'. This ambiguous statement questions the entire meaning of the film by bringing into view its perspectives on the notions of inanity and futility:

The characters are doomed to keep on trying to survive, despite their past acts, and they will always be caught up by death. Whatever we do, we never master the consequences of our deeds (Dejean 2016, 44).

[3.122]

Therefore, Friedkin's vision is defined by Kant and Berlin's conception of the 'crooked timber of humanity' (Berlin, 2013). This construct refers to the essential duality in people and how suffering may occur through inadvertent actions. As Jean Baptiste Thoret has argued for Friedkin 'the unthinkable is just the part of ourselves we haven't dared look in the eye' (Thoret 2018, 43). These concerns are reinforced within the cynical narrative, the brooding and dark images, and the muscular tone of the film. In such a manner, the director employs the claustrophobic composition of visuals; selections of long shots and close ups; the production and sound design; the blocking of the tense and gruelling action sequences; the kinetic editing and the spare use of Tangerine Dream's hypnotic score to affect his vision.

[3.123]

In Friedkin's version, the decision to 'open up' the film with backstories and the focus on their mechanical skills indicates his concern to demonstrate 'processes' within his films (e.g., the police procedural in *The French Connection* and the Catholic church's institutional response to Karras's call for an exorcism of Regan in *The Exorcist*). As Segaloff comments in its analysis of fate and betrayal *Sorcerer* represents many of the director's fascinations with men in secret societies who feel 'compelled to complete the job even at the expense of their own lives' (Segaloff 1990, 161).

[3.124]

It also illustrates how Friedkin was confident to take on the narrative conventions of the action-adventure genre and explore them from his position as a filmmaker who was concerned with moral ambiguities rather than flashy heroics. According to the director, 'no matter how difficult your struggle is, there's no guarantee of a successful outcome' (Friedkin 2013). For the filmmaker, he employs Camus' critique of humanity as his characters cannot control how they enter or exit the world. Consequently, they do not achieve redemption but only punishment (Adam, 2014). For Friedkin, human imperfection is a core philosophy. Therefore as Peter Bradshaw comments:

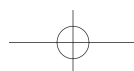
[3.125]

Sorcerer is a distinctive, gritty and gloomy movie – a determined slow-burner, resisting the traditional structure of narrative and central character. . . . A fierce, austere and intriguing film: a cinematic concerto of pessimism (Bradshaw 2017).

[3.127]

To this end, Friedkin decided to use Miles Davis's fateful jazz track 'Sorcerer' to provide his film's title (Friedkin, 2013). While this proved to be commercially problematic, not least in the light of *The Exorcist* (see Chapter

[3.129]





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Five), it provides many clues upon the picture's position within the director's cinematic universe:

[3.131] the perverse gambit of *Sorcerer*, and Friedkin's work generally, is to take a certain amount of joy in this cosmic pessimism. A maxim from the great Romanian poet-philosopher Emil Cioran could serve as the epigraph to Friedkin's filmography: 'The fact that life has no meaning is a reason to live – moreover, the only one'. (La Riviere 2014)

[3.133] In turn, Friedkin's use of the fatalistic storyline reflected his decision to establish within the subtext of the film's narrative design and in its mise-en-scene a range of underlying economic, political and cultural/ideological signposts. These provided a critique of the collapse of individual resistance as against exploitation, poverty and American economic power in the Global South's societal and political relations. Such matters will be explored in the following chapter.

[3.134]

NOTES

[3n1] 1. The 'High Concept' Hollywood film referred to the notion that a summer blockbuster could be described in a short phrase or one line. For instance, the notorious film producer Don Simpson (*Beverly Hills Cop* [1984], *Top Gun* [1986]) described Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) as 'shark attack'.

[3n2] 2. Vera Clouzot appeared in her husband's other great film *Les Diaboliques* (1955) and he named his production company Vera Films after her. Friedkin has commented that this film has been one of favourites and source of great inspiration.

[3n3] 3. Lloyd has noted that this opening is similar to that of *The Wild Bunch* where a group of children torment a scorpion in an ant pit. However, according to several Peckinpah biographies, the idea for the sequence came from a conversation between the director and Emilio 'El Indio' Fernandez who remembered playing the game as a child and declaring it to be an allusion for the outlaws entering the trap set up by railroad bounty hunters. See Simmons 2019, 141 and Stratton 2019.

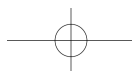
[3n4] 4. Clouzot's film was initially going to be shot in Spain. However, Montand refused to make the film there due to his left-wing convictions and criticisms of General Franco's dictatorship. Consequently, it was shot in the South of France.

[3n5] 5. The construct of the incoherent narrative may be seen to have been defined initially by the Marxist-Freudian critiques of popular US narratives provided in the journal *Movie* by the late Robin Wood and Andrew Britton. In particular, see Wood (Winter 1980/Spring 1981), pp. 24–42.

[3n6] 6. The actor who played the groom is Frank Pesce, a good friend of Sylvester Stallone. Friedkin remembers that the actress Therese Leopoldi who played the Bride was his girlfriend and the black eye was created by makeup. However, he noted that 'while it looks really incongruous today, that sort of thing wasn't uncommon back in the mid-70s. Today it would be called an "abusive relationship", but back then, there wasn't even a name for it'. See Simon 2017.

[3n7] 7. 'Nat Glick' became a running joke between Jurgensen and Friedkin for many years in their communications with one another. See Segaloff, 1990.

[3n8] 8. Green's screenplay makes it evident that these are the same bandits or guerrillas who were responsible for blowing up the oil well. This plot point was made apparent in the international version of the film which was re-edited by CIC (see Chapter Five). Further, in the script, Manzon and Kassem's truck has its front tyre shot out by the bandits rather than exploding as





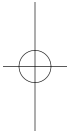
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an act of fate as it appears in the final cut. The screenplay also contains several sequences that were filmed and then were subsequently cut. For instance, Nilo drives the truck erratically over the 'washboard' and Scanlon has to intervene, although this is briefly shown in one of the flashback during Jackie's hallucinations at the end the film (see Chapter Four). It was also reinstated in the international cut (see Chapter Five). In the script, Jackie also insinuates that he believes that Nilo had been hired as assassin to execute him, but the hitman denies the charge and the decision to cut this plot point may have been decided due to its potential for over-contrivance. There is a greater amount of dialogue, most especially between Serrano and Kassem wherein the Frenchman refers to his time in Algerian war and the Palestinian about his terrorist background. Moreover, there is a virulent anti-Zionist discourse between Palestinian Kassem and 'Nazi' Marquez. Friedkin's decision to keep the film at a length of 121 minutes and his previous experience of removing the 'scaffolding' of his motion pictures may well have accounted for these deletions either at the script or editing stages. See Green, 1975.

9. The phrase is from Kant, and Berlin seized upon it many times as a stick with which to beat those who would try to build heaven on earth, or fit humanity into a straitjacket of their own design. In 1917, Berlin saw a policeman being dragged away to be killed by a mob of revolutionaries. This instilled in Berlin a horror of such violent solutions to humanity's problems.

[3n9]



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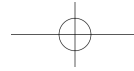
Chapter Four

***Sorcerer* – Sub-Textual Disorder, Global Economics, Geopolitics and Magical Realism**

[4.0] The chapter will analyse, assess and explain the subtext of William Friedkin's film *Sorcerer*. In this respect, it will consider the underlying economic, political and cultural factors that shaped Friedkin and his scriptwriter Walon Green's adaptation of Arnaud's novel. In particular, the movie makes reference to the appalling working rights and living conditions that have prevailed in the Latin American states. It demonstrates how the indigenous peoples' lives have been blighted due to the malfeasance of American corporate interests and the United States' support of military dictatorships.

[4.1] Friedkin and Green drew upon their interests and experiences in defining a critique of the geopolitical conditions that have prevailed in South America. Friedkin told the screenwriter that he was the right man to script the film as he knew the locale after living and working in Mexico for several years before entering the Hollywood film industry (Djoumi 2014). In working with Green, the director told him about the themes that he was interested in developing:

[4.2] The idea of the exploitation of the smaller Latin America countries by America – the oil companies and the United Fruit Company which was exploiting Latin American workers and when they would protest for more money they would kill them. I was thinking about that and . . . the Vietnam War which was going on then. . . . And I said these are ideas that I would like to find a way to put into a film. And he said, 'Well that *The Wages of Fear* – that's what's it's about' and I started to think and I said. 'Yes, let's do our own version of that story'. (Friedkin 2014b)¹



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In the chapter's opening section there will be a discussion of how *Sorcerer* related to those European films which challenged the conventional economic, political and ideological tropes. During the French, German and Italian post-war film renaissance, filmmakers such as Jean Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, Werner Herzog, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Michelangelo Antonioni, Pier-Paul Pasolini, Gillo Pontecorvo and Bernardo Bertolucci made avant-garde and radical movies which reflected a period of social turmoil (Cowie 2004). Within the Italian cinema, both politically radical and popular genre films proclaimed an anti-imperialist agenda. In turn, American movie-makers, like Coppola, Peckinpah and Friedkin, absorbed the lessons from their European counterparts on how to deconstruct Hollywood's genre films.

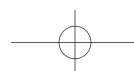
[4.3]

There will be a consideration of *Sorcerer's* critique of the US 'sphere of influence' in Central and Latin America. There will be a structuralist critique to demonstrate the power relations which exist within the film's narrative. Friedkin's film makes the case for how freedoms and liberties have been subsumed by an inevitable and inescapable repetition of a combination of greed and corruption. This begins in the opening vignettes wherein a variety of institutions including banks, financial houses, and the church are placed under scrutiny. When the film relocates to Porvenir, it is made apparent that the shanty town is owned by the exploitative oil corporation and that it has paid for the corrupt officialdom. In particular, the US oil company the Compania de Recursos Petroles S.A. (COREPET) has a clientelist relationship with the corrupt Presidential Junta and local officialdom. It mirrors the geopolitical and academic debates about dependency; de-colonialisation and cultural imperialism.

[4.4]

Finally, Friedkin and Green took a 'Magical Realist' approach to the material which was drawn from several Latin American and 'Third World' literary traditions. Most especially, Friedkin has claimed that he was profoundly influenced by Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). So as the director and screenwriter placed fantastical elements into the realistic narrative, the apparent 'reality' of the situation is brought into question. This is evidenced by the mystical nature of the journey; the Pazuzu style gargoyle cut into the jungle rocks; a native warrior's taunting dance aimed against Lazaro; and the mysterious peasant who informs Scanlon and Nilo that 'Poza Rica is dead. 'Further, Friedkin uses Magical Realism as a means through which to investigate Scanlon's interior psyche. This occurs in his dream sequence as he awakes in Porvenir and during his hallucinatory breakdown at the end of the jungle odyssey. Finally, the jungle setting becomes another character within the film as it unleashes the forces of nature upon the heavy shoulders of the drivers.

[4.5]



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[4.6] THE US 'SPHERE OF INFLUENCE': THE SEVENTIES' FILM, THE US CULTURAL FERMENT AND THE REPRESENTATION OF AMERICAN ECONOMIC CONTROL OVER CENTRAL AND LATIN AMERICA IN POLITICAL FILMS

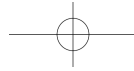
[4.7] Clouzot's version of *The Wages of Fear* was critical of the US's involvement in South America. The American oil company is shown to be uncaring and financially rapacious. With the exception of O'Brien (whose business logic is offset by his humanity), it is composed from cynical executives who see the fire as another opportunity to exploit the workforce. Contemporary critics of Friedkin's *Sorcerer* chose to ignore these subtexts of power, politics and culture (Canby 1977; Sarris 1977). In part, this may have referred to Clouzot's more explicit approach to de-colonialisation (which led to the French film being censored in the United States [Lloyd 2007, 97]); while Friedkin's version was more ostensibly concerned with the existential dynamics of fate (see Chapter Three).

[4.8] Yet, there was an implicit value judgment that only the French film could deploy the necessary pessimism toward the global rise of capitalism, whereas an American production would be less interested US power in Latin America (Lloyd 2007, 175). However, Friedkin commented that his 1970s films reflected his moral ambivalence about the economic, political and ideological forms of capital which defined the US system. Although, this meant that some critics interpreted his films as being reactionary, in reality, Friedkin's cinematic universe has illustrated a more nuanced vision about the crisis of action (Thoret 2014, 42) (see Chapters One and Three). His pictures belong to what Jonathan Kirshner has dubbed the 'seventies' film which was born in an era of moral uncertainty and deeply enmeshed in the social and cultural politics of the period:

[4.9] The era of the seventies film reflected a shift away from the pristine exposition of linear stories with unambiguous moral grounding, and toward self-consciously gritty explorations of complex episodes that challenged the received normative structure of society (Kirshner 2012, 2).

[4.10] Moreover, by the time *Sorcerer* was made the debates over American imperialism had become prevalent in the mainstream popular culture. As Green commented:

[4.11] We set out also to write a real movie about what we thought was the reality about Latin America and the presence of foreigner there today. Because of the kind of guy he (Friedkin) is that had to be tested. He was always saying. 'I talked to somebody about oil companies in Latin America and they say it's bullshit; these towns are great; the fucking people live better than they used to live before you know? Are you sure about this?' So we would go and look at



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one – I can't remember the name of it, it was on the coast of Ecuador ---- and it is more of a toilet than the one in the movie (Green 1988).

These developments in US films mirrored the growing radicalisation of many European filmmakers. Led by Godard, Truffaut and Alain Resnais, many 'Nouvelle Vague' ('New Wave') French filmmakers made political treatises such as *Sympathy for the Devil/One Plus One* (1968) which was influenced Chairman Mao's (in) famous Little Red Book. They refused to enter their films into the Cannes Film Festival competition leading to Roman Polanski and Monica Vitti withdrawing from the Jury. In turn, this was followed by a full-scale boycott of the Festival and it was closed during the May 1968 Student Uprising (Cowie 2004, 202–7).

[4.12]

In 1968, in the UK the director Lindsey Anderson moved away from his previous Kitchen Sink realism within the 'Free Cinema' Movement. This had resulted in his debut feature *This Sporting Life* (1962). Instead, he concentrated on the British class system in elite public schools with the revolutionary *If* (1969). Anderson's magnum opus celebrated the spirit of youthful rebellion as his protagonist Mick Travis (Malcolm McDowell) leads a bloody machine gun revolt on the school's prize giving day. Within the resulting battle, the various figures of the establishment – the Headmaster, the Chaplain, the Matron and the dreaded 'Gods' or prefects – are brutally slaughtered. Subsequently, Anderson won the Palme D'Or at the reinstated 1969 Cannes Festival.

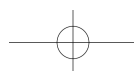
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The Greek filmmaker Costa-Gavras directed the political thriller *Z* (1969) which investigated the assassination of the democratic politician Grigoris Lambrikis (Yves Montand) during the Colonel's dictatorship. Elsewhere, Antonioni brought a haunting perspective to his Italian films including *L'Avventura* (1960) and *La Notte* (1961). Moreover, his ambivalence was evident in his UK film *Blow Up* (1966) and in the United States within his surreal version of the American counterculture with *Zabriskie Point* (1970). Similarly in Italy, the films of Bertolucci, a member of the Italian Communist Party, proved to be potent both in terms of content and style. His use of Marxist and Freudian forms of analysis in his searing critique of Italian Fascism in *The Conformist* (1970), along with outstanding cinematography of Vittorio Storaro, proved extremely influential on members of the US New Wave. Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese and Paul Schrader all employed the Italian filmmaker's conceits and visuals in their films.

[4.14]

When Coppola adapted Mario Puzo's novel of *The Godfather* (1972) he conceived it as being less of a gangster movie and more as an indictment of American capitalism (Evans 1994). Elsewhere, the cinematographer Haskell Wexler (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* [1966]; *In the Heat of the Night* [1967]) made the agit prop drama-documentary *Medium Cool* (1969) about a news cameraman John Cassellis (Robert Forster) who is caught up in the

[4.15]



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1968 Chicago Riots. Other films focused on maverick loners such as ‘Captain America’ (Peter Fonda) and ‘Billy the Kid’ (Dennis Hopper) in Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969), along with Bobby Dupree (Jack Nicholson) in Bob Rafelson’s *Five Easy Pieces* (1970). As Peter Cowie notes:

[4.16]

The spirit of rebellion against social structures and political platitudes gathered momentum . . . as the decade wore on. . . . The United States had to run hard to catch the Europeans during the late sixties and early seventies. Indeed, the most engaging achievement of Hollywood and off-Hollywood in the post-*Godfather* era revealed the influence of Europe’s great directors (Cowie, 224–26).

[4.17]

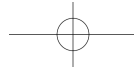
European directors made films which critically engaged with contemporary issues such as colonialism; de-colonialisation, national liberation and self-determination. The Italian Marxist Gillo Pontecorvo directed *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) which depicted the Algerian National Liberation Front’s (FLN) struggle against French colonialism in the 1950s. In the film, Pontecorvo restaged a series of riots, terrorist attacks and assassinations made against French officials within the Souk of Algiers. He cast many real-life liberation fighters including the FLN leader Saadi Yacef who appeared as a version of himself – El-Hadi Jaffar – along with a stage actor Jean Martin who played the French Paratrooper Colonel Mathieu. Pontecorvo demonstrated that while the FLN’s insurgency was defeated through the French military’s unjust use of torture, it ignited a revolutionary spirit within the Algerian people.

[4.18]

Having enjoyed a spectacular international success with *The Battle of Algiers*, in which he won the Golden Lion at the 1966 Venice Film Festival, the Italian filmmaker entered into a deal with Paramount to co-write and direct *Queimada!* This focused upon an eighteenth-century slave revolt on an island in the Caribbean. Consequently, he cast a major film star Marlon Brando as Sir William Walker who brutally put down the uprising, along with non-actors such as the former Afro-Columbia herdsman Evaristo Marquez as the slave’s leader Jose Doleres. While *Queimada!* was an intriguing film, due to Pontecorvo’s difficulties with the studio and his star, it proved to be a costly failure.

[4.19]

However, due to the influential presence of Pontecorvo’s cowriter and another Communist Franco Solinas, the struggle against colonial oppression appeared in many of the ‘political’ variations of the popular Italian ‘Spaghetti’ Westerns (Frayling 2000, 231). Solinas worked on films like *The Bullet for the General* (1966) directed by Damiano Damiani, Sergio Sollima’s *The Big Gundown* (1966) and Sergio Corbucci’s *A Professional Gun* (1967). These films often focused on how an illiterate bandit becomes politicised by an American or European revolutionary. Invariably, the plots would demonstrate how these apparently ‘civilised’ characters would betray the



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cause by becoming tyrants themselves (*Face to Face* [1967]) or by being co-opted by the Mexican Military Junta led by the reactionary General Victoriano Huerta.

The ‘filioni’ maestro Sergio Leone, who ultimately transcended the genre, made *Once Upon a Time in Revolution (Duck You Sucker)* (1971) with Rod Steiger as the politicised Mexican Bandit Juan and James Coburn as the Irish Revolutionary Sean. Austin Fisher comments that by setting these films during the 1910–1920 Mexican Revolution they operated in a ‘historical crossroads, replete with signifiers pertaining to Western Imperialism and US intervention in the Third World’ (Fisher 2011, 132).²

[4.20]

Such films would have an impact on Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch* (1969) which has been described as the ‘Citizen Kane of New Hollywood’ (Thoret 2018, 36). This was due to Peckinpah’s innovative film techniques which revived the aesthetics of Hollywood action films. These included the explicit use of graphic slow motion violence, brilliant cinematography, an explosive editing style and the deployment of multi-camera set ups. Peckinpah’s film (coscripted by Green) reflected his vision of his outlaw anti-heroes existing beyond their time. Therefore, they are confronted with the ‘civilising’ forces of capital who ‘tamed the frontier’ (the railway; banks; Pinkerton agents; bounty hunters).

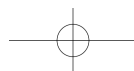
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For Christopher Sharret, *The Wild Bunch*, which was situated in 1913 at the height of the Mexican Revolution replete with Huerta’s reactionary forces being supported by German Military Advisors, established a more political response to the Vietnam War that was raging in South East Asia. Most especially, with its graphically violent finale in the Mexican village of Agua Verde, Peckinpah sought to remind US audiences of the contemporary wartime atrocities such as the My Lai massacre led by Lieutenant William L. Calley Junior. To this end, this western masterpiece sought to ‘debunk the basic assumption that US interventionism is selfless and benign’ (Sharrett 1997, 100).

[4.22]

As the Spaghetti westerns provided the framework through which Peckinpah could revise the genre in *The Wild Bunch* (1969), another European filmmaker Werner Herzog had a profound impact on the New Hollywood filmmakers. In 1972, the ‘New German Cinema’ auteur made his influential film *Aguirre, The Wrath of God* with its distinctive view on greed, corruption and the absurd. It told the tale of the doomed and demented attempts of a Spanish soldier Lope de Aguirre (Klaus Kinski) to lead his conquistadores along the Amazon to discover El Dorado – the mythical city of gold. Herzog made the then novel decision to make the film in the South American rainforest (see Chapter Two) in order to create a hellish vision of colonial exploitation, folly, greed and insanity. Both on film and in reality, his production, this was counterpointed by the lush but unforgiving Amazonian jungle.

[4.23]





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[4.24]

The influence of Herzog's film was evident on Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and Friedkin's *Sorcerer*. In seeking to pursue their respective versions of the 'Hearts of Darkness' these films dealt with questions of poverty, inequality, injustice and conflict that plagued the development of the Southern societies. Like Herzog's picture, Friedkin's *Sorcerer* is in many ways the kind of film [an] anthropologist [would have] admired; very little exposition, the viewer thrust into unusual locations and situations, observational and free-flowing' (Pelan 2019). Moreover, *Sorcerer's* representation of a reactionary Latin American state made conspicuous the exploitation of the local population and the itinerant work-force composed of foreign workers, along with the raping of the environment:

[4.25]

Sorcerer and Aguirre each stand out for their ability to create a truly threatening atmosphere out of a lush jungle location, and for asking the dubiously pertinent question of what greed and crazy determination might bring to men (in *Sorcerer's* case, four expatriate criminals, including an intense Roy Scheider) who pit themselves against (nature) (Peterson 2013).

[4.26]

A STRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS: WILL WRIGHT, WESTERNS, AND THE 'PROFESSIONAL PLOT'

[4.27]

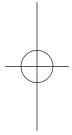
Sorcerer's plot has many similarities to those drawn from the American Western genre. It contains a symbolic battle between the forces of the Civilisation and the Wilderness wherein the modern world as represented by machinery (the trucks, the oil well drills, helicopters) is battling against the assorted vicissitudes of nature. Moreover, Friedkin's film is set in a remote shanty town in which the precarious balances of Law and Order are in a constant state of disruption. In accordance, to the Western themes concerning the landowners and cattle-barons' 'taming of the Frontier', COREPET is seeking to extract from the jungle of its basic raw materials.

[4.28]

In this respect, it can be compared to the US sociologist Will Wright's structuralist critique of Westerns in his seminal study *Six Guns and Society* (1975). Wright employs the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss's (1966) arguments that the fundamental relationships between the people and institutions could be represented through myths (Wright, 26–28). Therefore, Wright argued that Western films should be firmly located within the context of their economic, political and cultural milieu to address how ideologies are conveyed in mythologies. In such a way, he argued by placing the genre within a such a form of social objectivity, a structuralist analysis would not only provide an insight into the Western films themselves but facilitate a greater understanding of the wider society (Harvey 2011, 8).³

[4.29]

On this basis, Wright deconstructed the most financially successful Western films from 1930–1970 to demonstrate how their meanings could be en-





coded through their ‘denotative’ signifiers. In his deconstruction of the Western genre, Wright described four basic plots – classical; vengeance; transition; and professional. The professional plot which refers to *Rio Bravo* (1959), *The Professionals* (1966), *True Grit* (1969), *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid* (1969). It involves a group of fighters who have specific skills, take the jobs for money, owe their loyalty to one another as members of a team, and are anti-heroes who exist on the margins of society:

They are not wandering adventurers . . . they are professionals, men doing a job. They are specialists who possess the unique skills in the profession. No longer is the fighting ability of hero the lucky attribute of a man. . . . Now it is a profitable skill . . . (which) *explains* why they are in that particular place at that particular time (Wright 1975, 97).

[4.30]

SORCERER: THE ‘PROFESSIONAL PLOT’ AND ITS DENOTATIVE REPRESENTATION OF LATIN AMERICAN ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION AND US GEOPOLITICAL POWER

[4.31]

In deconstructing *Sorcerer* into its salient plot points, the film conforms to many aspects of the Wright’s ‘professional’ style of Western. Therefore, the four men take on the dangerous truck driving jobs for money; they each have special abilities (driving, engineering skills, explosives and weaponry) and they are operating independently from the society. Through their fateful circumstances they have become outsiders who are contracted to the oil company because of their driving skills. They do not engage in the venture to protect the rights of the oppressed citizens of a society corrupted by the ‘civilising’ forces of international capital but for their own self-interests.

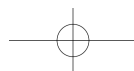
[4.32]

Their conditions in Porvenir are so desperate that they must embrace the opportunity to ‘escape’ on the terms offered by the techno-economic-political structure of the US Oil Corporation. Due to their overwhelming need to survive, they begrudgingly have to owe their fragile loyalty to each other as members of a group who must work together for their common good. However, unlike Clouzot’s film this bond is not forged out of any previous friendship (or indeed enmity) but emerges due to the necessity of dealing with the appalling jungle conditions that they have to overcome.

[4.33]

In this respect, Friedkin and Green expertly designed *Sorcerer* to bring the audience’s attention to the relationships between the institutions of capital and the exploitation of the public. This is made apparent within the opening vignettes in which a variety of powerful organisations (e.g., banks, financing, crime) and the church’s values are brought into question. Therefore, Nilo engages in a hit for unnamed criminal associates; Kassem and his Palestinian terrorist cohorts bomb an Israeli bank, while Scanlon’s Irish-American

[4.34]



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gang engages in the robbery of the monies drawn from gambling within the corrupt, mob run New Jersey Catholic church. The rights of Mammon are reinforced by the sequence's ironic introductory shot which zooms out from a sign promoting 'Bingo-Every Friday Nite' above the church's entrance.

[4.35]

Manzon's fraud demonstrates the hypocrisy of the French Stock Exchange whose officers initially succumb to his overtures to protect Preville & Fils' good name rather than risk a scandal. Moreover, France's colonial history (which inextricably forged by its financial institutions) comes to the fore as his wife Blanche is editing the memoirs of a French Foreign Legionnaire Colonel Etienne De Bray. She reads out the passage concerning the officer's moral dilemma by ordering the massacre of the local population to enforce France's rule. Within these unsettling sequences the message is clear – there is no community or institutional stability. Rather, there is only selfishness and a race to the bottom.

[4.36]

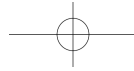
Further, within its mise-en-scene and detailed production design, *Sorcerer* provides a potent representation of the hellish Porvenir. From the opening shots, it is made obvious that it is a 'company town' in which all aspects of life are controlled by COREPET. Throughout, these sequences, Friedkin cuts to extreme close-ups of the inhabitant's gnarled faces and shows a man suffering from dysentery, while maintaining a sense of general unease within the village. In the Corsario, Scanlon looks longingly at the cheesecake picture above the bar of a WASP girl drinking from a bottle of Coca Cola – America's most successful and internationally potent soft-drink. This is mirrored in the following sequence when Scanlon is subject to the shakedown by the local police – one of whom opens a Coke bottle while taunting the American. And throughout the film the ubiquitous signs of US cultural domination can be seen impacting on the inhabitants, officials and itinerant workers alike.

[4.37]

For all of the film's main expats their opportunities are limited to the poorly paid work offered by the oil company and the accompanying menial jobs designed to support its interests. Therefore, they are found working on the oil platforms, baggage handling jobs at the local airport or engaging in manual labouring. When Manzon tries to sell his expensive watch to bargain his passage with a people trafficker, he is informed that he will need an additional 1000 pesos to escape. The corrupt police take sadistic pleasure in 'humiliating undocumented, obviously troubled aliens, particularly Scanlon, a defenceless Yankee, to grind under their heels' (Heath 2015).

[4.38]

Kassem's involvement in the work gang constructing the oil pipeline is shown as being chaotic, badly organised and poorly supervised. This negligence results in a severe injury to one of the workers whose leg is smashed apart meaning his future chances are non-existent. Thus, Friedkin emphasises how the political oppression of the dictatorship has become the personal experience of the workforce. As Friedkin commented:



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Showing the exploitation of the Latin American countries by big American corporations like United Crude and the oil companies that were exploiting the workers, when safety conditions meant nothing . . . drove me to make the movie (Fleming Jr. 2015).

[4.39]

Sorcerer demonstrates the absolute forms of poverty which exist in the Global South and the devastating effect the oil corporation has on the countryside. Through its ubiquitous pipeline COREPET is literally draining the precious raw materials out of the lush jungle. When the oil well is attacked by the guerrillas, Friedkin shows in a brilliantly coordinated scene, the devastating chaos and panic caused by the apocalyptic explosions. In graphic detail, the audience is shown the burnt and dismembered bodies the raging fire leaves in its wake. This was defined in a memo to the director from the art department:

[4.40]

The main oil fire should be heralded by an extraordinary sound as if from the bowels of the earth. This is caused by the pressure of the gasses and the oil. They burst up to meet the atmosphere to be ignited into a roaring flame that billows up, higher even than the rig itself. The heat is intense. . . . It is now the full holocaust of exploding fuel tanks, burning shed (Friedkin1977a).

[4.41]

Following this cataclysmic disaster, the workers' charred bodies are wrapped up in plastic bags and brought back to the village. Subsequently, the stunned silence of the crowd turns into an outright rebellion against the army and the military oppressors of the corrupt government. The riot sequence is shot with handheld cameras to emphasize a reportage style urgency that is reminiscent of Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*. The anguished mob call the soldiers 'Putas' (whores), while demanding the subjugation of the Junta, burning the trucks and defacing posters of El Presidente. The mob can be heard chanting 'Fuck the Americans! Down with the Americans!' (Clagett 2002, 202) According to Phil Mucci, 'this is a world [that] has been pushed to the brink' (Smithson 2011). As Kent Jones notes:

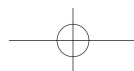
[4.42]

Friedkin . . . is capable . . . of some of the more remarkable passages in contemporary Hollywood moviemaking, crossing into emotional/psychic territory that . . . harbours sentiments and notions about the world (that are) too dark . . . and so powerful they can't be elaborated or enlarged, only *happened upon* – [as they contain] . . . a . . . collection of moments containing intimations of unfathomable dread (Jones 2005, 181).

[4.43]

These disturbing sequences are central to another one of the film's key themes of how the paradise is corrupted by corporate interest. Although Corlette shows some signs of humanity, his superior Lartigue reminds him that for the head office the bottom-line counts for the most. If the fire undermines production, the company will close down its operations at Poza Rica.

[4.44]



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Moreover, while Corlette shows Lartigue the evidence that the explosion was caused by local insurgents, the senior manager reminds him of the geopolitical realities. To support the regime and maintain the required order, the oil company has been complicit in the pretence that the explosion was caused by an accident and not by any local ‘patriots. ‘Their conversation is accompanied throughout by a black and white picture of the venal oil corporation’s board and a portrait of the unnamed dictator which hangs on the office walls to make evident the clientelist power relations.

[4.45]

However, in its attempt to transport the unstable nitroglycerin, the oil company discovers that Eden can bite back. Corlette and the explosives expert Bobby Del Rios discover the dynamite sticks have been improperly stored in boxes in a locked-up hut deep in the jungle. On inspecting the mouldy boxes, Del Rios finds the nitro has leaked out to become a volatile liquid which he has to painstakingly remove from his fingers. While he agrees with Corlette that the dynamite can still be used to clear the oil well fire, he explains how unstable the TNT has become. Moreover, the oilman is informed by his helicopter pilot that the deadly load cannot be lifted by air due to the vibrations of the helicopter’s blades.

[4.46]

Instead, the company is forced to employ the drivers to transport the volatile explosives by trucks to put out the raging fire. When making the call for brave men to volunteer for the suicide mission, Corlette reminds Porvenir’s locals that their livelihoods are on hold. Moreover, once Scanlon, Manzón, Kassim and initially Marquez have been chosen, they must rebuild and resurrect their vehicles from a scrap-heap of derelict trucks. For Phil Mucci, ‘The trucks become more than modes of transportation; they embody the discarded dregs of society called upon to do a corporation’s dirty work . . . (and) have faces as furrowed with meaning as the desperate men who drive them’ (Smithson 2011).

[4.47]

In this respect, the four men are the ultimate ‘zero-contract’ workers who are no more than ‘items’ on a balance sheet to be accounted for by the rapacious oil company (Gilliatt 1977, 71). They are reduced to using poor equipment, have little or no training, non-existent rights and their employment can literally be terminated without any notice! *Sorcerer* defines its protagonists as ‘pawns bribed with a larger-than-usual reward for a larger-than-usual risk that’s still the cheapest option for their paymasters (Daniel 2017)’. According to J. Hoberman:

[4.48]

Friedkin’s *Sorcerer* . . . has characters even sleazier, driving vehicles more dangerously decrepit, for an oil company even more rapacious than in *The Wages of Fear*. Third World specificity is here archetypal. The natives are no longer displaced workers but restive primitives; nature is not indifferent but malevolent, the trees and vines seeming to reach out of the rainforest to snare the trucks (Hoberman 2017).



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Therefore, Friedkin sought to expose the connecting tissue of economic and political inequalities which had contributed to the cultural ‘zeitgeist’ of moral uncertainty in a 1970s America that had been traumatised by Vietnam and Watergate.

[4.49]

SORCERER: THE CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS FOR THE GLOBAL ECONOMY, THE GEOPOLITICS, AND THE CULTURAL IMPRISONMENT OF LATIN AMERICA

[4.50]

Consequently, in deconstructing the denotative aspects of *Sorcerer’s* narrative, it becomes apparent how Friedkin employs the basic premise of *The Wages of Fear* to investigate the economic and political conditions that had prevailed in Latin America. Therefore, at a connotative level, the film is reflective of how the advanced economies had plundered the raw materials of developing states. Most especially, *Sorcerer* indicates that the US form of imperialism, in which there is an ‘empire without frontiers’, has been responsible for the problems associated with the extraction and manufacturing of oil:

[4.51]

Friedkin himself spoke more than once on the subject of American foreign policy, saying he had wanted to make ‘a real movie about what we thought was the reality of Latin America and the presence of foreigners there today’. Later, he even referred to the film as political allegory: ‘a metaphor for the current state of foreign affairs’. . . . *Sorcerer* does seem to contain elements of anti-imperialism (Bat 2014).

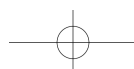
[4.52]

In an era of post-World War Two US economic growth, cheap oil had sustained what John Kenneth Galbraith called the ‘Affluent Society’ (Galbraith 1958). Therefore, as American standards of living had continually risen, the US population had enjoyed an unprecedented access to a range of consumer durables and cities such as Los Angeles were designed for the needs of the car. This led to the US price-fixing the cost of oil as well as deploying the Bretton Wood’s agreement in its favour by making the dollar the international reserve currency.

[4.53]

However, in 1973, the predominantly Middle Eastern Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) led by the Saudi Arabia challenged this dominance. OPEC created a geopolitical crisis by placing an embargo on the sale of oil to the United States and other leading economies. This led to changes in energy supplies, reformed the American car market and had a psychological effect on the ambitions of US foreign policymakers. Simultaneously, the 1959 Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara facilitated a range of national liberation struggles. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was also a considerable fall-out from the May 1968

[4.54]



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revolutions in Europe and the US's zero-sum game Cold War foreign policies against the Soviet Union.

[4.55]

American containment policies had led to the toppling of many legitimate Socialist regimes. In particular, the US backed the military coup against Chile's Salvador Allende's government by the dictator General Augusto Pinochet in 1973 saw a mass violation of human rights and many unlawful killings of any political dissidents.⁴ Further, with the massive escalation of the US's military involvement in the Vietnam War during the late 1960s, the international community seriously questioned the US's sanctity as a 'World Policeman' wherein it sought to protect the rights of international citizens as well of its own.

[4.56]

In this respect, *Sorcerer's* narrative is reflective of the polemical and academic debates of the era. Most especially, it can be seen to be influenced by the German-American intellectual Andre Gunder Frank who employed a set of Marxist political economic concepts in his construction of 'dependency' theory. In Frank's book *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967) he argued that natural resources flowed inequitably from poor or 'peripheral states' to wealthy advanced 'core' or 'metropolitan' nations at the expense of the local people. The dependent Global Southern states remained deliberately impoverished so they could be plundered for their raw materials or produce at an artificially low rate. In turn, to ensure that these price controls were maintained, such 'Banana Republics' were governed by corrupt regimes supported and financed by the security agencies of the core societies. Therefore, Frank:

[4.57]

lays to rest the myth of Latin American feudalism, demonstrating in the process the impossibility of a bourgeois revolution in a part of the world which is already part and parcel of the capitalist system (Frank 1967).

[4.58]

Consequently, in its depiction of an unnamed military Junta which professes a superficial notion of post-colonial independence, *Sorcerer* indicates how such a state operates in relation to American economic dominance, exploitation and clientelism. Further, with respect to the representation of the bandits who encircle Scanlon and Nilos' truck Lazaro after the explosion of Sorcero, the film indicates both their criminal and insurgent intent. In their desire to kill Scanlon and Nilo for their wares, the guerrillas' attitudes are framed in relation to the Mexican bandits who appear in *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* (1948) and whose leader (in) famously declares, 'We do not need no stinking badges'. Further, as Green noted, the filmmakers were aware the role of financial benefactors in the region:

[4.59]

We were aware of Gulf and Western's interests in Latin America. All I have to say is they were a little more benign than many other places. As we went writing the script we travelled around and we actually went to every single



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place that was written about into the script. Or an equivalent thereof (Green, 1988).

However, their resort into violence is underpinned by a coherent political and social philosophy. Their response reflects the arguments of the French-West Indian psychologist, political philosopher and anti-imperialist Frantz Fanon who believed in the necessity of violence to deliver a fully formed version of de-colonialisation. In works such as *Black Skin, White Mask* (1951) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon contended that a new form of civilisation could only occur through the complete separation of the colonised from colonisers:

[4.60]

National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon . . . (it) is quite simply the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men (Fanon 1961, 27)

[4.61]

In turn, this would break the pre-existing and continuing chains of economic imperialism and ideological exploitation. Fanon concluded that colonial power had been reinforced by a psychological imposition of ‘inferiority’ by the ‘First World’ oppressors. Most especially, indigenous people had been ‘infantilised’ by their ‘masters’ for several hundred years. These hierarchical relationships had been used to justify the apparent superiority of the western history, culture, civilisation and racial superiority. Therefore, Fanon’s critique related to a form of cultural imperialism.

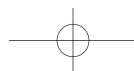
[4.62]

This meant the global economic and geopolitical power structures were rooted in ideological as well as economic controls. These criticisms were articulated by Edward Said with reference to his notion of ‘Orientalism’ concerning the West’s belittling or stereotyping of Middle Eastern and Global Southern cultures. Through the manufacture of traditions, rituals and ceremonies, colonial empires established a set of hegemonic values. These patronising attitudes shaped the conceptual frameworks through which the advanced nations justified their ‘claims to be ethnically, ethically and morally superior over the peripheral societies (Fanon, 16–17). Said states:

[4.63]

The main battle in imperialism is over land of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. . . . The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming or emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them (Said 1993, xv).

[4.64]



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[4.65]

Thus, at a sub-textual level both Friedkin and Green sought to challenge many of the prevailing imperialistic ideological norms within *Sorcerer*. They used the film to provide a commentary about the pervasive and pernicious effects of post-colonialism on Latin American societies. As such they had absorbed the economic, political and cultural lessons provided by Frank, Fanon and Said. These arguments provided the means through which to challenge the perceived stereotypes through which Hollywood had represented the Global South.

[4.66]

Subsequently, Friedkin had identified Green as his writer for the project for a number of reasons. In part, the director chose his scriptwriter as he had not written a feature film since *The Wild Bunch* and he had an agnostic perspective toward faith and fate which was pitched in his extensive knowledge of bio-politics. More pertinently, however, Friedkin perceived Green to be a 'leftist' who had become accustomed to the cultural norms which existed in Latin America.

[4.67]

Green remembered that Friedkin wanted to do a real movie about foreigners in a dependent society (Green 1988). To this end, he shared the director's dark vision of an oppressed 'backyard' in which the American multinational corporations have manipulated the local populations' life chances without them even knowing it (Clagett 2002, 175–76). Thus, the filmmaker proved prescient as the writer commented that during his schooling:

[4.68]

A teacher asked 'Where is and describe the capital of Honduras? [Its Tegucigalpa in the highlands] Nobody knew. There was a Honduran kid in the class, so the teacher asked him to tell us. He answered, '2562 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts'. That was the headquarters address of the United Fruit Company (Green quoted from Clagett, 176).

[4.69]

MAGICAL REALISM: A LATIN-AMERICAN LITERARY GENRE AND THE PRESENTATION OF A SUBVERSIVE POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

[4.70]

In responding to the dominant aspects of the US's cultural imperialism, Friedkin and Green were keen to take a 'Magical Realist' approach to the film drawn from Latin American literature. Magical Realism shows how apparently 'mundane' matters may be understood as being 'surreal' or extraordinary by a culture that has been defined by another or an alternative set of norms. Friedkin commented that in Garcia Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the magician's name:

[4.71]

is Melquiades. And Melquiades is the first one to bring a brick of ice to this South American village, Macondo. And the people have never seen ice before; it's a miracle to them. There is this clear brick that is cold! It's actually below



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zero, and they can take off pieces of it and make a drink cold. Or they can put it on their skin and feel the cold. And it becomes a miracle, but it's real. It's real and it's a miracle to people who don't understand it, because there are more things in heaven and Earth, than are dreamt of in our philosophies. (Ibid)

Therefore, Magical Realism brings fables, folk tales, and myths into the contemporary social spotlight. These alternative forms of consciousness exist within those inharmonious spaces which operate between the urban and rural, and the western and the local. This means that these books have gained a political relevance by promoting indigenous and traditional cultural practices as against imposed western ones. As the fantastical elements within the texts are presented as being normal; the standard structures of 'reality' and, by implication, the societal norms are brought into question. From this logic, the approach facilitates the opportunities for Global Southern authors to demonstrate an alternative to the accepted reality. And as such it becomes a powerful metaphor against the claims of 'normalcy' conducted by repressive political regimes.

[4.72]

Thus, Latin American authors described the Magical Realist literary genre as one of political subversion. For instance, the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier contended it 'fitted the Americas' as indigenous communities rejected the notion that there was a fixed line between the natural and the supernatural. This belief system contrasted with the 'scientific' traditions brought to South America by the European colonialists. Further, it proclaimed the sentiment that South American societies had their own autonomous cultures and values. Thus, for Garcia Márquez, Magical Realism paradoxically is derived from the 'reality of Latin America' (McKinney 2014).

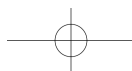
[4.73]

Moreover, the author explicitly links Magical Realism to the exploitation of the Global South. The novel demonstrates how the voracious capitalism of the imperialist fruit companies brutally oppresses the workers in the village of Macondo. To this end, the foreign companies are aided and abetted by the corrupt government they have installed to do their bidding. After a strike occurs to protest against the inhumane working conditions, martial law is imposed in Macondo. This leads to the workforce sabotaging the plantations. Therefore, in unexpected response, the corrupt government provides an apparent olive branch by inviting the provincial workers to resolve their differences. Under this assumption, 3000 members of the rebellious labour force arrive in the town only to find out their meeting is a deceit and they are to be massacred by the army with machine guns:

[4.74]

They were penned in, swirling about in a gigantic whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicentre as the edges were systematically being cut off all around like an onion being peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine gun (Garcia Márquez 1968, 311).

[4.75]



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[4.76] After their corpses are loaded up on trains and unceremoniously dumped in the sea, all traces of the workforce are eliminated by the elements so the population loses its collective memory of the massacre.

[4.77] SORCERER AND MAGICAL REALISM

[4.78] Friedkin claimed that he ‘was profoundly influenced by the novel . . . Márquez wrote (and) . . . what is now known as magic realism. . . . That’s the style that I adopted for the film’ (Digital Didascalia 2014). As Nat Segaloff commented the director ‘would call that “providing textures” to the film which can then provide the audience with different interpretations’ (Segaloff 2019). Therefore, the director placed several subtle but apparently fantastical elements into the film’s realistic narrative. This is initially evidenced in the mystical nature of the journey as represented by the Pazuzu style gargoyle cut into the jungle stone which appears behind the opening titles:

[4.79] Friedkin recalls that was the idea of production designer John Box, and carved by art director Roy Walker, ‘a kind of warning or harbinger of what is to come – the mystery of fate in some guise’ (Baker 2017).

[4.80] Elsewhere, when Manzon tries to negotiate his passage away from Porvenir, he enters the people trafficker’s garishly decorated hut which is replete with pink walls, porcelain kittens and fake flowers. Manzon cannot help but notice the ersatz kitsch paintings of a mother and her baby and of a parrot accompanied by three kittens that are placed ceremoniously on the walls. While his relationship with the peasant woman Agrippina is never made fully clear, she presents Manzon with a shamanic charm when wishing him good luck on undertaking the journey. When Scanlon enquires about the quasi-occult chain she has given him, Manzon gives him a knowing wink.

[4.81] The face of the gargoyle is seen once more as Sorcero passes a rock face in the jungle during a montage of the trucks negotiating the treacherous and vertiginous mountain roads. While no further commentary is provided in true Magical Realism style, the image remains a symbol of fear, paranoia, irrationality and foreboding doom. It immediately precedes the sequence in which Scanlon and Nilo are confronted by a native warrior who engages in a playful, but taunting, dance in front, around and behind Lazaro, on the dirt road and upon the oil pipeline. Here the mundane is made magical as the warrior looks on incredulously toward what he perceives to be a mechanical monster.

[4.82] Indeed, Box’s designs of both of the trucks make them look beastly demons that will take the protagonists to their various demises. The vehicles’ lights and grills were made to look like demonic eyes and teeth, while the exhausts were mounted at the front, so that they breathe smoke. Moreover,



the confrontation throws into relief the puny strength of the western civilisation's technological advancements in the face of the almighty, primeval forces emanating from the jungle (Canby 1977).

Further, when Scanlon and Nilo are confronted with a fork in the road and try to find out which jungle track will take them to Poza Rico, a mysterious peasant emerges from the undergrowth. When asked for directions, the unnamed man responds, 'Do you want to go home?' On further questioning, he ominously replies, 'Poza Rico is dead' and the angry Nilo accuses the old man of being 'Loco' or mad. This peculiar exchange of cultures, values and evasive meanings reinforces the film's tone of strange malevolence (Bradshaw 2017).

[4.83]

SORCERER: THE INNER PSYCHE OF JACKIE SCANLON AND THE POWER OF NATURE

[4.84]

Friedkin employs Magical Realist techniques to investigate the psyche and mental landscape of his main protagonist Scanlon. These are briefly alluded to during the nightmare that Scanlon awakes from in the Porvenir flop house. The director uses a set of brief, subliminal shots which are combined with the images of a fiercely focused eye rooster and the screeching of a slaughtered pig. Gloria Heifetz has noted that several short cuts are followed up with fifteen one-frame length shots:

[4.85]

' – Scanlon's hand on sheet – 24 frames of a dead hood on the street – Scanlon's hand – 24 frames of bars, before a white wall – (Frames 1–5) The rooster moving right, ducking its head in normal movement. (6) A white frame. (7) The rooster. (8) The rooster with its head ducked. (9) White, faintly negative, of 8. (10) Rooster, head ducked. (11) White, faintly negative, of 10. (12) Rooster's head ducked. (13) The same shot as 12, printed negative. (14) The same shot as 12, but white/ (15) Scanlon's hand again (Heifetz 1979).

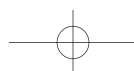
[4.86]

As the images flicker across the audience's eyes, Friedkin invests Scanlon's nightmare with a jolting quality which builds to a short crescendo. This reflects his inner demons about his responsibilities in getaway crash and his fears of being chased by the authorities and the mobsters alike.

[4.87]

In this respect, Friedkin built upon the employment of surrealist ideas that he had incorporated in *The French Connection* (e.g., the off-screen sound of the gunshot at the end; the dialogue of the heroine tester Howard [Patrick McDermott] who employs a range of metaphors to describe the drug's chemical purity raging from 'blast off 180', '200 Good Household sealing of approval', '210 US government certified', '220 lunar trajectory; Junk of the Month Club; Sirloin Steak', '230 Grade A Poison', 'Absolute Dynamite') and within *The Exorcist* (e.g., Father Merrin's arrival to the Georgetown

[4.88]



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House as his silhouette is bathed in a shaft of demonic light coming from Regan's bedroom, the possessed girl's levitation and the 360 degree turning round of her head) (Emery 1997). He used editing techniques he had deployed in Father Karras's similarly guilt-ridden dream about the death of his mother in *The Exorcist*. Friedkin deploys not only images of Karras failing to connect with his elderly mother as she emerges from and returns back to a New York subway station, but uses other images seen from across the film. These include a combination of a falling St Joseph medal, snarling desert dogs, a pendulum clock that stops, and the flash cutting to the face of the demon. According to Mark Kermode, they create a 'seamless, surreal montage whose visual power . . . subliminal imagery plays . . . (a role) . . . in conjuring its magical atmosphere' (Kermode 2003, 48).⁵

[4.89]

In a similar manner, Friedkin employed a range of images drawn from across *Sorcerer* during Scanlon's climatic lysergic breakdown in the moon-like canyons of the final valley leading to the oil well. As he weaves the truck through the surreal locale, Scanlon once again begins to hallucinate about his memories of the New Jersey heist. However, in his mind's eye, he is now confronted with the more recent horrors he has witnessed on the jungle roads. In addition, this montage includes an unseen sequence wherein he has to take the steering wheel from Nilo when he is driving the truck along the steep banking of the 'washboard' (see Chapter Five).

[4.90]

Within his disturbed mind he hears Nilo's crazed laughter and he sees a trail of blood seep down a hill to engulf Manzon's prized watch. His distress is made especially poignant as his dust caked face takes on the appearance of a ghost which the cinematographer Stanley Cortez compared with 'Hamlet' (Cortez 1977). Moreover, his psychological demons have become as one with the nightmarish lunar-style landscape:

[4.92]

Late in the film . . . (Scanlon's) inner struggle is depicted through an aggressive superimposition sequence. In it, his forlorn visage, intercut with flashbacks from his recent ordeal, appears against anthropomorphic desert rock formations. . . . At the same time, his overdubbed voice can be heard exclaiming, "Where am I going?" It is the very inconsistency of this 'other worldly' terrain, along with the supportive voiceover content, that affirms the psychological mobilisation of the landscape in this sequence (Melbye 2016, 121).

[4.94]

Therefore, instead of the lushness of the jungle, Friedkin uses the location's dusty canyons to emphasise the purples of the sky as it bruises. He employs flash cuts of thunder bolts and freeze frames to reinforce the confused state of Scanlon's mind. In focusing on Scanlon's internal monologue Friedkin, his cinematographers, his sound recorders and his editors extended their artistic palate from realism to Magical Realism.

[4.95]

The visuals are accompanied by the combined 'musical architecture' (Mann 2017) of Tangerine Dream's score with Jarrett's pipe organ and a



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range of sound effects. These are designed to further dislocate the audience so that real-space effectively becomes dream-space. In this scene, *Sorcerer* is reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

I am trying to tell you a dream . . . [that] sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams . . . to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence – that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence. (Conrad 1899)

[4.97]

This is followed by a short sequence of Scanlon delivering the box of nitro on foot at the bottom of exploding oil well. He is mesmerised by the flames of the tower-like fire, staggers toward them and collapses from exhaustion as he is both physically and mentally spent. For Katherine Herbert, in her letter to Friedkin (see Chapter Two), the journey was a descent into the pits of hell and 'the burning flame that's so prominent when Roy Scheider finally delivers the dynamite seems so clearly a symbol of the lowest point of hell' She continued:

[4.99]

With his successful delivery Scheider/Scanlon paid his dues. He's then led (as was Dante in the 'Inferno') out (by the oil company representative). But, like the pictures of hell in which the punished nearly reach the top of the pit only to be tossed down by the devil, the film's final irony makes this interpretation complete (Herbert 1978).

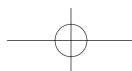
[4.101]

In the same vein, Friedkin employs the colours of the jungle to conjure up a 'variegated, hyper-saturated existential nightmare' (Cwik 2018). Within this dense, ubiquitous greens, the jungle of *Sorcerer* becomes 'a verdant maw that appears to be swallowing up the characters' (Cwik). Eventually, it will spit them out and betray them. In this respect, Friedkin's film parallels Herzog's *Aguirre: Wrath of God* (1972) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) in which the jungle becomes the harbinger for despair which will foment the madness of his protagonists played with manic glee by Klaus Kinski (Bradshaw 2017). As Herzog declared:

[4.103]

Kinski says [the jungle] is full of erotic elements. It's not so much erotic, but full of obscenity. Nature here is vile and base. I wouldn't see anything erotic here. I see fornication and asphyxiation and choking, fighting for survival and growing and just rotting away. Of course there's a lot of misery, but it's the same misery that's all around us. The trees are in misery, and the birds are in misery. I don't think they sing; they just screech in pain. Taking a close look at what's around us, there is some sort of harmony. It's the harmony of overwhelming and collective murder. But when I say this, I say this all full of

[4.105]





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admiration for the jungle. It's not that I hate it. I love it. I love it very much. But I love it against my better judgment (Herzog 1982).

[4.107]

Like Coppola with *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Friedkin makes significant use of the tropical weather as another form of entrapment that his characters have to overcome (Dejean 2016). Upon the journey itself, Scanlon and the others are constantly battling with the intense jungle heat along with the tropical rainstorms that batter the trucks and leave enormous pot holes that make the roads impassable. Further, akin to Coppola, Friedkin uses aerial shots which reinforce the scale of jungle, the rape of the land by the oil company and makes conspicuous the puny nature of the First World men who are trying to conquer it. Therefore, *Sorcerer* employs Magical Realism to reinforce a sense of preordained doom. This brooding quality demonstrates that forces between the civilisation and the wilderness have been disrupted, and the jungle will take its revenge.

[4.108]

CONCLUSION

[4.109]

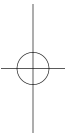
The chapter has considered the subtext of *Sorcerer* by looking at the film's underlying commentary about post-colonialism, economic exploitation and cultural imperialism. It provides a critical account of the first-world footprints left by corporate interests across the developing world. The film demonstrates how Global Southern lives have been blighted, brutalised and cut short by US economic power and its support of military dictatorships. These concerns were evident in the arguments for de-colonialisation and national liberation struggles associated with Marxist-Freudian figures including Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth* [1961]), Andre Gunder-Frank on Dependency Theory and Edward Said on Culture and Imperialism.

[4.110]

This analysis has employed a structuralist methodology to deconstruct Friedkin's motion picture at both a denotative and connotative level. It has related *Sorcerer*'s plot to Will Wright's description of the Professional Western in which a group of independent figures are brought together through a unique set of circumstances. In dealing with the obstacles and challenges thrown at them, Scanlon, Nilo, Manzon and Kassim have to overcome their dislike of one another to forge a common goal of survival. This means that are required to rely upon each other in the face of the appalling living and working conditions they share with the local population:

[4.111]

These men all find themselves in Porvenir, a filthy scab on the backside of nowhere, where none of the profits from the rapacious American Petroleum company filter down to the locals. There, they drift in a fugue state, sweating in swamps fitting oil pipelines, and nursing beers in the shanty town's bar. . . . The four men are trapped in an economic uncertainty now referred to as the





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'gig economy'. They exist from pay cheque to pay cheque, breaking their backs for rice and beans in a local dive bar (Daniel 2017).

The all-powerful COREPET maintains the exploitative order through its clientelist relationship with the corrupt Junta. *Sorcerer* makes it evident that the oil well explosion resulted from a guerrilla style attack on the jungle plant. However, despite demonstrating the sabotage, the oilman Corlette is reminded by his superior Lartigue of the political realities that are required to sustain the Junta's power. Within this context, Friedkin amplifies the inhumane conditions in which the collapsing pipelines sever limbs and oil rig's explosion leaves the local workers burnt to a crisp. When their charred corpses are returned to Porvenir, a bloody riot erupts which is shot in a cinema verite style that is reminiscent of Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*. Thus, *Sorcerer* portrays a 'Third World' society that has been pushed to the brink by the forces of capitalism and political repression. As Nat Segaloff comments:

[4.112]

With the Vietnam War and the critiques of the 1960s, a lot of us realised that the corporations had taken a dictatorial control over people's lives even though many other did not recognize that this was the case. The film is blatantly critical of the oil corporation which is exploiting the local population and the environment (Segaloff 2019).

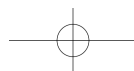
[4.113]

Consequently, Friedkin's film provides a narrative which reflects upon the geopolitical and financial debates about de-colonialisation and cultural imperialism. Most especially, there has been recognition of the growing rights of post-colonial states in Africa, Asia and South America. Within these polemical debates, notions such as dependency theories and critiques of the economic exploitation of Global Southern societies have become vital. They indicated how a new sensibility had emerged about the historical and contemporary relations between advanced and developing economies. Moreover, the destructive nature of the US military intervention in the Vietnam War and the spectacular failure of that colossal effort divided opinion of the merit (or not) of American exceptionalism.

[4.114]

Subsequently, these arguments were to be found in the avant-garde or revolutionary narratives a range of European and Third World films. Therefore, French, German and Italian filmmakers' were drawn to the topics of social and political injustice, and to making films which questioned the dominant ideologies of advanced capitalist societies. In turn, these movies were to have a profound influence on the New Hollywood filmmakers including Coppola, Scorsese and Friedkin. Throughout his films, Friedkin brought into question the social, political and cultural norms that define US institutions, traditions and values (Thoret 2018).

[4.115]





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[4.116]

Yet, to offset the ‘chains of imperialism’ (Lenin 1917) Friedkin and Green turned to the tropes of Magical Realism. Throughout the film, they employ a series of fantastical elements to bring into doubt the norms of the post-colonial power relations. This is indicated in the mystical opening of the movie replete with the Pazuzu style gargoyle cut into the jungle rocks. This demonic symbol briefly reappears as the trucks make their way into verdant undergrowth of the jungle. In tandem, a sense of malevolence accompanies the native warrior’s playful dance aimed against Scanlon and Nilo, along with their mysterious interaction with the elderly peasant who tells them that ‘Poza Rica is dead’.

[4.117]

The sense of anticipatory doom becomes truly evident when Friedkin uses Magical Realism to investigate Scanlon’s growing paranoia. His descent into despair is accompanied by a set of visual and aural representations of his persistent fears which will precede his complete psychological emptiness by the end of the film. Scanlon’s and Lazaro’s breakdown in the extraordinary canyons of the Navajo badlands of Bisti/De-Na-Zin (see Chapter Two), questions the apparent ‘reality’ of the jungle based odyssey. As Friedkin recalled, ‘everywhere we pointed the camera . . . beautiful images in unique natural light seemed to appear as if by magic, the landscape of dreams’ (Digital Didiscalia, 2014).

[4.118]

In this respect, the director indicates his willingness to place the film’s emotional climax within the mind of his main protagonist. Friedkin has noted to be an effective director that it is necessary to work in terms of metaphor in relation to actors, crew members and the audience (Kermode 2019). Further, it serves to reinforce the notion that the fundamental forces of nature have been irrevocably disturbed and as such will now seek out their revenge. This means that *Sorcerer* ultimately suggests that for all of its economic and technological advantages western capitalism will always be tamed by the brutal forces of a vengeful Eden. Thus, as Green comments:

[4.119]

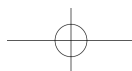
I look at the films I’ve liked the most, not in terms of shtick but in terms of story and the whole film, and they are apocalyptic films. *Hellstrom* is an apocalyptic film; *Wild Bunch* is an apocalyptic film. *Sorcerer* is *definitely* apocalyptic (Segaloff 1993b).

[4.120]

NOTES

[4n1]

1. The United Fruit Company (UFC) was an American corporation founded in 1899. It dealt with the exporting of tropical fruits, especially bananas, which were grown on Central and South American plantations and sold in the United States and Europe. By maintaining a monopoly in certain countries it could fix the price of the produce to keep the local population in poverty while extracting surplus profits. The UFC had a long-lasting impact on the economy and the internal politics of many Latin American countries which was led it to be accused of neo-colonialism. As these states were dependent on their crop of tropical fruits, they became





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known as ‘Banana Republics’. The UFC would be a responsible party for the ‘Banana Massacre’ in 1928 (see note 7).

2. There was also the Third Cinema which was a Latin American film collective that began in the 1960s. Within its 1969 manifesto *Hacia un tercer cine* (Toward a Third Cinema) written by the Argentinean filmmakers Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, along with the Grupo Cine Liberación, it decried neo-colonialism, capitalism, and the Hollywood entertainment model for producing films for profit:

[4n2]

Third cinema is, in our opinion, the cinema that recognizes in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point – in a word, the decolonisation of culture (Getanio and Solinas 1969, 107).

3. Wright has been accused of being too instrumentalist in his use of semiotics and seen to have ignored the ‘pleasures’ of the cinematic narrative. For instance, see Place 1978. The structuralist approaches to popular culture were significantly challenged by post-structuralist and post-modernist critiques in Cultural, Media and Film Studies in the 1980s and 1990s. For the purposes of this analysis, which considers a film created in the mid-1970s, it is more appropriate to employ a semiotic analysis rooted in the principles and methodologies of structuralism. This facilitates a review of the denotative and connotative level factors concerning the film’s attitudes to the issues of dependency, de-colonialisation and cultural imperialism.

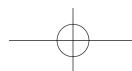
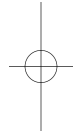
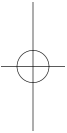
[4n3]

4. Walon Green had first-hand experience of Latin American dictatorships when he had gone undercover to document fugitive Nazi officials in South America for the TV series *Time Marches On*. For a segment entitled ‘Searching for Vengeance’, he followed a lead on Martin Bormann, the head of Hitler’s Party Chancellery who was rumoured to have surfaced in Argentina. However, Green made a larger discovery. While posing as a filmmaker documenting German farming compounds, he found that Josef Mengele, the Auschwitz ‘Angel of Death’, was alive and living in Paraguay. When he drew suspicion from his sources, Green had to escape by hitching a ride on a crop duster across the Paraguay River to Brazil. This may also help to explain why Porvenir is populated by on the run Nazis such as Marquez and Carlos, the owner of the Corsario bar See Tompkins 2012 and Green 2018.

[4n4]

5. García Márquez based the fictional massacre on the infamous 1928 Columbian ‘Banana Massacre’ where at least 3,000 United Fruit Company workers were killed from the 5th–6th December in Ciénaga. The strike started on the 12th November, when the workers protested against the dreadful working conditions. After several weeks with no agreement and with the UFC suffering from severe financial losses, the Conservative government sent in troops to take arms up against the strikers, resulting in the massacre. This occurred as American officials in Colombia and UFC representatives portrayed the workers as ‘communists’ in telegrams to the US Secretary of State, leading to the American government threatening to invade if the Colombian government did not protect the UFC’s interests. The clientelist government feared the UFC could cut off the trade of bananas in significant markets such as the United States and Great Britain.

[4n5]



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Chapter Five

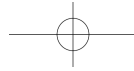
A Commercial and Critical Failure

The Impact on William Friedkin and New Hollywood

[5.0] *Sorcerer* was a major commercial and critical failure on its release in 1977. William Friedkin was accused of directorial hubris, irresponsible behaviour with his cast and crew, and for esoterically fusing together US and European filmmaking sensibilities (Schickel 1977; Biskind 1998, 338). In tandem, the timing of the film's release in the summer of 1977 proved to be significant as major changes were occurring within the tectonic plates of the Hollywood film industry. Most especially, the film was to reap the whirlwind as it appeared within the wake of the tremendous success of George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977).

[5.1] In this respect, Friedkin's morally ambivalent vision of criminal inhumanity stood in stark contrast with the prevailing sentiment amongst American audiences and its critical community. Consequently, the type of film that Friedkin made which engaged in narrative challenges, characterisation and ennui of US power structures and institutions was replaced by generic blockbusters with standard motivations, expensive special effects and 'B' movie heroics. It meant the director's connection to the film-going public would be irrevocably changed. *Sorcerer* was unceremoniously dumped at the US box office and appeared in a truncated version during its international release wherein it was retitled *Wages of Fear*.

[5.2] The film was largely reviled by the American Film critics on its release. Many attacked Friedkin for daring to remake Clouzot's classic and even dedicating his film to the French filmmaker, while Andrew Sarris claimed it was a pointless exercise which demonstrated everything that was wrong with contemporary Hollywood filmmaking (Sarris 1977, 37). The other charge aimed at *Sorcerer* referred to the film's soaring costs. The *New York Times*



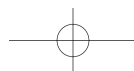
reviewer Vincent Canby argued this financial recklessness was part of the New Hollywood trend to venerate ‘auteur’ filmmakers and to allow them to become producers of their own films (Canby 1977b, Biskind 1998).

Therefore, Friedkin’s work was castigated both in terms of its content and filmmaking. It was accused of being an example of how an egotistic ‘New Hollywood’ filmmaker had been allowed to behave in irresponsible manner when flushed with the enormous success of his two previous films, *The French Connection* (1971) and *The Exorcist* (1973). Subsequently, the director’s reputation and career would suffer from the film’s rejection by critics and audiences alike (Cook, 2000, 106). While he would continue to make studio backed and independently financed films, Friedkin’s fortunes would fluctuate dramatically reaching a critical and commercial nadir with *Cruising* (1980) starring Al Pacino. Moreover, his industrial stock in Hollywood dropped significantly in the following two decades with a series of largely financial disappointments.

Further, *Sorcerer’s* failure was seen as the beginning of the end of the ‘New Hollywood’ era in which directorial autonomy had become all-powerful.¹ Ironically, the filmmakers who had contributed to Hollywood’s financial rebirth in the 1960s and 1970s lost many of their freedoms in the fallout from the industry’s new phase of profitability. In part, this occurred due to their excesses and, along with Friedkin, other directors including Martin Scorsese (*New York, New York* [1977]), and later Steven Spielberg (1941 [1979]) and Francis Ford Coppola (*One from the Heart* [1981]) would be castigated for producing expensive flops. This trend culminated in Michael Cimino’s *Heaven’s Gate* (1980); an epic western whose \$35 million budget and disastrous box office returns brought about the sale of UA to MGM in 1981 (Bach 1985). However, this collapse in creative independence also showed how the studios had realised their films could be mass marketed in summer blockbusters to ensure their profitability (Goldman 2016).

THE DOMESTIC RELEASE AND RECEPTION OF SORCERER

Sorcerer was released domestically on 24 June 1977 and it had been booked in at the prestigious Grauman’s (then Mann) Chinese Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard. Friedkin’s name would appear prominently in the advertising and marketing of the film. While, he did not claim the possessive ‘film by’ credit on the picture itself, preferring to be billed as the Director and Producer (neither David Salven nor the Cinema International Corporation [CIC] representative Ian Lewis received credit), on all other promotional materials it would be referred to as ‘A William Friedkin film *Sorcerer*’. His name stood ‘above the title’ on the film posters which used the iconic image of one of the truck’s swinging across the precarious rope bridge. The poster also name-



checked Walon Green as the screenwriter and notably John Box as the Production Designer, along with Scheider and the principal actors.

[5.7] Moreover, the trailer made explicit reference to Friedkin's previous successes and to his unique vision in creating an 'unusual action-adventure' that he had spent 'two years to produce across four continents' (Sorcerer Press Book 1977). Two weeks before the release, Bud Smith went to the cinema to check out how the trailer he had cut played in front of an audience. After it faded into black, Smith describes how he decided to wait and see what was playing at the theatre. When the feature started, for Smith, the screen's curtains opened and then appeared to keep going back and back until a giant space ship came up over his shoulder (Kermode 2015). This was the famous opening shot from *Star Wars* which was initially being shown as a limited release.

[5.8] As Smith recounts the space opera made the *Sorcerer* trailer look like a little 'amateurish piece of shit' (Biskind 1998, 337). He told Friedkin to go to the theatre and the director duly noted the 'Tsunami' effect of Lucas's movie. He was informed by the cinema manager that it was doing terrific business and his film would have to perform similarly otherwise *Star Wars* would be brought back to play to the packed houses. A bemused Friedkin found the straightforward black and white heroics in Lucas's space opera naïve and he incredulously commented, 'Jesus! . . . I dunno, little sweet robots and stuff, maybe we're on the wrong horse' (Biskind, 337). Alternatively, Friedkin's film conceived the American character as being fearful, psychotic and dangerous.

[5.9] Subsequently, for the first week of *Sorcerer*'s release across several hundred theatres, there were large queues at Mann's due to the anticipation of a new film from Friedkin. However, in its second week, *Sorcerer* went 'soft' at the US box office as audiences dwindled to almost nothing so in the director's words it was 'lower than whale shit!' (Segaloff 2017) This meant that it was quickly pulled from the Mann Chinese Theatre and other first-run cinemas. In its place, the Mann Chinese and the other theatres rebooked *Star Wars* on a saturation release pattern (following the example of *Jaws*) which meant that it became the summer box office phenomenon of 1977. Indeed, it would blow everything else away including Scorsese's highly anticipated *New York, New York* (1977) and Sam Peckinpah's *Cross of Iron* (1977) on its way to becoming the then highest grossing movie of all-time.

[5.10] A shell-shocked Friedkin informed Smith and Green that *Sorcerer* was a financial disaster. Friedkin along with Green felt that they had produced a career-topping masterpiece. As Green commented, 'We thought the movie was excellent. . . . Admittedly, it was a film that required some effort on the part of the public, which was (very much part) of the era of time' (Djoumi 2014). However, the director was forced to reflect upon his vision which



appeared to no longer accord to the public's taste with its emphasis on ostensibly unsympathetic characters.

Moreover, the downbeat ending has been accused of creating an overriding sense of nihilism as Scanlon had survived the trip but would ultimately appear to be murdered by the mafia hit men. Friedkin contemplated why his film had failed and if he had lost the magic touch he felt that he had established in his previous two blockbusters. In correspondence to Katherine Herbert, the film critic of *The Scotsdale Progress*, the director believed 'It either wasn't good enough or it wasn't what people wanted. . . . This is not the fault of the actors who played the leading roles, but must be laid at my doorstep for not having done the proper work on their characters' (Friedkin 1978). He would later continue to express his disappointment, 'It hurt me very deeply . . . it was deep wound from which I have only recovered very recently' (Emery 1997). According to Nat Segaloff:

[5.11]

It may be that *Sorcerer* is a film that is out of its own time. Begun during that brief period of self-examination that followed American involvement in Vietnam, it was finally released at a point in history when audiences, having examined themselves and not liked what they found, were opting for pure escapism (Segaloff 1990, 171).

[5.12]

In turn, Friedkin blamed many of its problems to connect with audiences because he had been unable to secure Steve McQueen in the lead role. Friedkin maintained that the film has been originally written as a star vehicle and he really needed a superstar on the level of McQueen to sell the picture. Therefore, he commented while Scheider was fine actor he was not enough of a star to attract cinemagoers. This claim was repudiated by the actor who criticised the director for making a film that was far too dark for most people to care (Kachmar 2002):

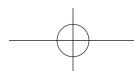
[5.13]

It was exciting as an adventure piece, but the way it was edited didn't allow the audience to participate in the adventure, and they never felt that they had a personal interest in these guys. . . . In any film that you do, it makes no difference whether your audience loves the characters or hates them, but they're gotta care about them one way or the other. Well, the way this picture was set up, there was no way they could care about them at all. They came out of the theatre without a fulfilling experience, and consequently they didn't recommend to their friends to see it (Scheider, 1977a).

[5.14]

During *Sorcerer's* short US theatrical release, Friedkin further discovered that Paramount and Universal had decided to cut their losses on his film (O'Connell 2017). Initially, Paramount's head of distribution Frank Mancuso had been positive about the film and the New York representative Nat Stern informed Friedkin he would be proud to sell the picture to US audiences.

[5.15]



However, the director had been fearful that the studios would fail to get behind the release. He believed that the two companies' corporate machinery would be too cumbersome 'to protect the investment of blood, sweat, tears and dollars that have gone into this film' (Friedkin 1977).

[5.16] As the film critics Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel would comment the picture had fallen between the two sets of studio executives who had only half-heartedly backed it in terms of a marketing campaign. Ebert blamed Universal and Paramount for their lack-lustre support of the film and contended that 'you could (have) [made] more than . . . (*Sorcerer's* disappointing box office receipts) . . . just by opening in the first week, [wherein] people (would have) [stumbled] into a wrong theatre looking for Bruce Lee'. Siskel argued that each company thought the other one would handle the film's promotion as nobody perceived it to be a 'sole project of their own, [so] it was dropped in-between them' (Siskel and Ebert 1979).

[5.17] As Segaloff explains the film became a 'football' in the film partnership between Paramount and Universal, who had created a joint production company Film Partners International N.V. to make it under the auspices of their international distribution arm C.I.C. (Segaloff 1990, 171) (see Chapter Two). Accordingly, it was 'distributed by one company in America and another abroad, yet with revenues shared . . . (meaning) (that) (it) [remained] caught in the corporate cracks' (Segaloff, 171)

[5.18] Others such as the critic Richard Cuskelly of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* argued that the audience's confusion over the film's title had accounted for its box office failure (Cuskelly 1977). For instance, due to its mystical title and Friedkin's reputation for *The Exorcist* cinemagoers were expecting a horror film rather than an action-adventure truck odyssey and had walked out. This led to the distributors taking out adverts stating that *Sorcerer* was 'NOT A FILM ABOUT THE SUPERNATURAL' (Lamar 2009). Further, the studios demonstrated their continued lack of confidence in the movie by issuing several posters which tried to explain it to the public. In particular, as the opening sixteen minutes contained no lines of English language, one informed audiences that despite the subtitled scenes at the beginning of the movie:

[5.19] YOU'RE ATTENTION, PLEASE. To dramatize the diverse backgrounds of the principal characters in '*Sorcerer*', two of the opening sequences were filmed in the appropriate foreign languages – with sub-titles in English. Other than these opening scenes, '*Sorcerer*' is an English language film (Lamar).

[5.20] When the film had played out its brief domestic theatrical run it had made a mere \$5.9 million in rentals and would only accumulate \$12 million in tickets sold. This was hardly enough for it to recoup its costs which Ebert estimated would have required a box-office of \$45–\$50 million and *Sorcerer*



was deemed to be a commercial disaster (Siskel and Ebert 1979). Ironically, the only financial success associated with the film proved to be Tangerine Dream's soundtrack album. Their acclaimed record reached No. 25 in the UK album chart where it stayed in a run for seven weeks.

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SORCERER

[5.21]

In tandem, with some rare exceptions, the film took a critical drubbing in the major American city newspapers. On 8 June 1977 *Variety* announced that there would be no advance screenings for the press, prior to its 24 June 1977 opening. As Segaloff explains:

[5.22]

When the film opened, there were no press screenings. This meant that the studios were afraid of the film and could not do much about as Billy had final cut in the North American Markets. You would do the press screenings on a Friday so they would appear in the Saturday newspapers when newspapers mattered. I was a Friedkin partisan and went to see the film in Boston when there were only twenty people in a theatre which could hold 700 (Segaloff 2019).

[5.23]

Friedkin quickly realised the picture had been badly received when one of his critical champions Charles Champlin of the *Los Angeles Times* began his review of *Sorcerer* with 'What went wrong?' (Friedkin 2013, 346; Kermode 2017, 39)

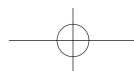
[5.24]

Subsequently, most of the American film critics agreed with Champlin when he called *Sorcerer*, 'a swollen, leaden and almost totally uninvolved disappointment' (Champlin 1977, 1). *Variety* called the film 'painstaking, admirable but mostly distant and uninvolved' (*Variety* 1977). As Nat Segaloff comments, 'there was a sense that Friedkin, having had the two enormous critical and financial successes, was due to have a fall with the third great film in a row in the 1970s. . . . It was his turn to be taken down' (Segaloff 2019).

[5.25]

Elsewhere, Jon Marlowe in *The Miami News* accused Friedkin of 'using his camera like a mop – soaking up the grime and filth and sweltering heat of the South American town where our four 'heroes' flee to and meet' (Marlowe 1977). *Films Illustrated* summarized *Sorcerer* as an inferior sequel (sic) which was 'below the usual par' in spite of the involvement of a reputable lead actor Scheider and a 'top notch director' Friedkin (*Films Illustrated* 1977). Robert C. Cumbow's review in *Movietone News* criticised Friedkin's 'faulty' camera placements and editing which he contended led to the sub-standard exposition and lack of characterisation (Cumbow 1977). Gene Siskel of *The Chicago Tribune* while praising the special effects and the technique felt that the characters remained cold as they were overwhelmed by the

[5.26]





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film's technical prowess so that the audience cared more about the trucks than the people (Siskel and Ebert 1979).

[5.27] Many critics attacked Friedkin for daring to remake Clouzot's French classic and even dedicating his film to the French filmmaker (Sarris 1977, 37; Holm 2006). In a *Village Voice* review which spent more time talking about Clouzot's *Wages of Fear* and *The Exorcist*, Andrew Sarris was dismissive of *Sorcerer*, unfavourably compared Friedkin to John Huston and David Lean, and claimed it was a pointless exercise which demonstrated everything that was wrong with contemporary Hollywood filmmaking (Ibid, 37). Sarris was particularly scornful:

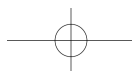
[5.28] What Friedkin has managed to fabricate with all of his enormous resources is a visual and aural textbook on everything that is wrong with current movies: no narrative flow, no psychological development of characters, no interaction of performers, no true unity of locale amid all the exotic locations, no build up, no pay offs, no structure, not a single line of resonant dialogue, not a single scene of dramatic tension (Sarris 1977, 37).

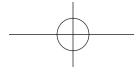
[5.29] Invariably the contemporary critics questioned his decision to include the characters' backstories which was seen to be a sign of directorial self-indulgence. However, as most of them had not seen the Clouzot film for many years in an era before video, DVD and online streaming, they had largely forgotten that the original movie had only focused on the perilous journey in the second half of its 153 minute running time. Friedkin was condemned for only getting to the main action of the story an hour into the film.

[5.30] In particular, Sarris complained that the opening sections were disjointed. Vincent Canby, while providing a more favourable review in the *New York Times*, argued that the film was 'a good little melodrama surrounded by pulp and should have been much, much tighter and less cinematically grand' (Canby 1977, 73). Richard Schickel of *Time Magazine* stated that while the film was impressively shot and crispy edited he found that he respected rather than liked it. He concluded:

[5.31] One hates to be hard on a director who is so earnestly trying to reform, who wanted to make something that feels suspiciously like an art film so badly that he spent as much as \$21 million-worth of two studios' money in the attempt, has issued directives to theatre managers insisting that the houselights be dimmed while an overture, for god sake, which he ordered up, plays us into a mood suitable for his work. Friedkin's pretensions do not entirely defeat the film, and his craftsmanship often rescues him from self-betrayal. But *Sorcerer* lacks the kind of low cunning – the sorcery – that is Friedkin's strong suit (Schickel 1977).

[5.32] The critical reception appeared to foreshadow the end of New Hollywood era filmmaking and a critical revulsion directed at the 'director as superstar'





that was led by Sarris and Canby. Although his review of the film had been more favourable than that of Sarris, Canby wrote a lengthy denouncement of *Sorcerer* and *New York, New York* entitled 'Let's Call It 'the Accountant's Theory' of Filmmaking'. The article was critical of Hollywood's reverence of Friedkin and Scorsese in their respective auteurial positions and the size of the budgets (Canby 1977a, 78).²

While maintaining that he was a good director, Canby argued that Friedkin was not the 'financial God' that *The Exorcist's* box office returns had appeared to indicate. This had led to the Hollywood executives engaging in what Canby describes as the '*Politiques des Comptables*' or an accountant theory 'that you are only as good as your last picture Sam'. By giving Friedkin carte-blanc for his follow-up they had enabled him to enjoy the artistic freedom to 'stretch the material' when according to Canby:

[5.33]

To make a good suspense-action adventure film . . . one compresses it so that it becomes a dangerously explosive element. Somebody must have been aware of this but Friedkin, riding the crest of *The Exorcist* wave, was out of reach (Canby, 78).

[5.34]

This critical narrative was further exacerbated by *Sorcerer's* reception in the various film guides. Leslie Halliwell's reactionary tome *The Halliwell Film Guide* rated Friedkin's movie with no stars. He complained that it was an expensive flop which adding that it was a poor remake of French classic in which the results were dire. In Leonard Maltin's *Movie Guide* the picture was rated at two and half stars. In a slightly more sympathetic capsule review, Maltin noted that despite the technical skills on offer there was a general lack of characterisation. In his book *America Film Now* James Monaco while praising the technical skills and stunt-work, maintained that such a remake was entirely unnecessary (Monaco 1979, 149).

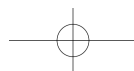
[5.35]

Moreover, as the film essentially disappeared after its theatrical run it was to be forgotten in the next two decades. For instance, it would only receive an extremely limited video release in the 1980s and 1990s (see Chapter Six). Consequently, if *Sorcerer* was remembered at all, most film-goers would have been influenced by Peter Biskind's entertaining but gossipy *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (1998). In this popular account, Biskind portrayed a controversial, tyrannical and self-obsessed version of Friedkin. His hubris would be rewarded by his fall from grace and for the author the resulting film was:

[5.36]

Fatally trapped between America and Europe, commerce and art, (so) Friedkin had finally achieved the worst of both worlds, an American remake of a French classic that was too episodic, dark and star challenged for a late '70s American audience that was very different from the audience who flocked to *The French Connection*. Like many Hollywood directors of the '70s, he wanted to be Godard, Bergman or Antonioni, but he was never able to find an

[5.37]



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idiom that melded American subjects with a European sensibility (Biskind 1998, 338).

[5.38] Conversely, during its first run and by the end of the 1970s, *Sorcerer* received a few favourable reviews. For instance Jack Kroll, writing in 4 July 1977 *Newsweek*, felt that ‘this lean, hard, ruggedly acted film is hardly ingratiating, but its clenched power has a cruel and compelling beauty’ (Kroll 1977, p, 77). The *New York Daily News* film critic Rex Reed, who argued that the remake was unnecessary, however conceded ‘*Sorcerer* is extremely well-made, filled with tension, suspense, steamy atmosphere and first-rate acting and production values’ but noted that ‘I don’t know if there’s an audience for this kind of gruelling, depressing experience (Reed 1977). Others who praised the film included Nat Segaloff, who was a reviewer for the Boston Evening Show and would later become Friedkin’s biographer. Most especially, Roger Ebert gave the film a rave review and four stars in his *Chicago Sun-Times*’ review:

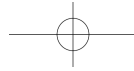
[5.39] William Friedkin’s ‘*Sorcerer*’ is a great work of storytelling: It takes a basically simple tale about ancient human qualities – courage, greed, fear and daring – and relates it so powerfully that we feel real exhilaration. In its narrative strength, it’s the most involving thriller since ‘*Jaws*’. . . . *Sorcerer* is a magnificent adventure (Ebert 1977, p.47).

[5.40] In 1979, Gloria Heifetz in a review article in *Cinemonkey* argued that Friedkin’s film was both superior to Arnaud’s novel and Clouzot’s film. She called the film ‘bleak, harsh and uncompromising’ and argued the director was the ‘poet of frustration’ (Heifetz 1979). Further, she commented:

[5.41] A certain conformity seized even the lowliest writer, and only the . . . brave voice of *Newsweek*’s Jack Kroll rose to defend the film. It is amazing how attitudes sweep through the press, but considering the financial failure of the film, perhaps the sociological indifference of audiences merely found feeble articulation in the media (Heifetz).

[5.42] Friedkin’s film was continually championed by Ebert who considered *Sorcerer* as his one of the top ten films of 1977 along with *Annie Hall*, *3 Women*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Star Wars*. Subsequently, in a 29 November 1979 *Sneak Preview* episode with Gene Siskel, Ebert argued that *Sorcerer* was an ‘overlooked classic’ and that he had been shocked it had been so overlooked despite starring Scheider and being directed by the Academy Award winning Friedkin.

[5.43] Ebert maintained that *Sorcerer* was ‘on a level way above most action pictures . . . (which) had been a labour of love for director William Friedkin (with) . . . jungle scenes, the rain and flood, the fire catastrophe are among



the most exciting scenes I've ever seen' (Siskel and Ebert 1979). Further, he commented that Friedkin had intended to 'show human behaviour at its extremes; men in torment to complete a life-or-death mission against all odds and discovering their own limits at the same time'. He argued that the film was 'lots of fun' and praised the bridge scene as 'the most astonishing . . . combination of desperation, suspense and great special effects as Roy Scheider and his partners try to manoeuvre a giant truck filled with nitro glycerine through the heart of this jungle'. He wrote to Friedkin on 23 August 1977:

Dear Billy

When I walked out of the theatre I felt so strongly about 'Sorcerer' that only some residual critical objectivity prevented me from calling you up. Christine Neiland of the Daily News was so affected by the picture she sat through it twice. I really think it's a film you can be very proud of, and I can't understand how the public missed such an involving thriller. Maybe the title was wrong, as a lot of people have said, or may be there should be a longer period before the actual opening for pre-selling, instead of opening cold. Who can say? But the film, in my opinion, is your best.

Best regards

Roger Ebert. (Ebert 1977a)

[5.44]

[5.45]

[5.46]

[5.47]

THE INTERNATIONAL RELEASE OF *SORCERER* AS '*WAGES OF FEAR*'

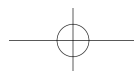
[5.48]

In most regions of the world *Sorcerer* was retitled *Wages of Fear* and was distributed by CIC. While Friedkin had final cut rights in the US, France and Sweden (where he sued CIC after the fact in terms of his *droit moral* or moral rights for creative ownership [Ryan 2002]), he did not negotiate them for other overseas territories. According to the director, this enabled CIC's Pedro Teitelbaum to insist on an initial international cut which shortened the film from 121 to 92 minutes so it could play as part of a double bill and upon this reasoning increase its commercial potential (Stratton 2002; Fraser 2013).

[5.49]

The international version of the film was substantially recut by the British film editor Jim Clark. The editor had worked with John Schlesinger (*Midnight Cowboy* [1969], *Sunday Bloody Sunday* [1971], *Marathon Man* [1976]) and would later combine with Roland Joffe to win an Academy Award for *The Killing Fields* (1984) and be nominated for an Oscar for his work on *The Mission* (1986). With great reluctance and on the orders of the former editor and Universal Executive Verna Fields (*American Graffiti*, *Jaws*) Clark sought to reedit the film (Clark 2010). Clark had been told by Fields that Friedkin had permitted changes, but remained suspicious about the authenticity of her claims. Consequently, he insisted that there would be an indemnity in his contract which prevented the director from interfering on the international cut. The editor believed that Friedkin's close association to several

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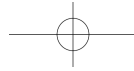
underworld figures meant that it would be in his interest to ensure such protections for his personal safety along with maintaining his reputation (Clark, 139).

[5.51] Clark could not use the original negative which had been locked down and he did not have access to a work print, so he worked from a combined print and a transfer of the existing soundtrack. He sought to shorten and restructure the film with Ken Levison, a television script editor and writer who had provided an un-credited rewrite on *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971) and would write new dialogue to be dubbed in the international version. Throughout this process, Clark's attitude to Friedkin's cut of the film was contemptuous and accorded with the studio executives, most particularly Universal's Ned Tanen:

[5.52] I agreed to look at the film and see if I could come up with any suggestions. This was a dismaying experience and I could see why it had fared so badly at the box office. It was a very poorly structured version of the story. In the first place, Friedkin engaged a number of foreign actors and for the first twenty minutes, he indulged in scenes, expensively shot in different parts of the world to give the characters some background and explain why they had ended up in Mexico (sic) driving trucks filled with nitro glycerine. The device was both confusing and boring. It took ages before the story actually began (Clark, 139).

[5.53] Clark reedited the film with one of the original editors Cynthia Scheider, wife of the star Roy Scheider who also offered his cooperation.³ Along with Scheider, he ordered up the miles of jungle footage that had been shot from the studio vaults to be transferred from Hollywood to London. This was used to rearrange certain scenes with alternative shots (e.g., different takes are employed in relation to the native tribesman's taunting dance) and to reorder whole sections of the film. Eventually a new version was readied and re-mixed for the international release.

[5.54] Most especially, this version of the film removed most of the back stories which the studio executives and critics such as Canby had objected to. Instead, Clark and Scheider employed three minutes of helicopter shots over the jungle oil well to create a new opening in which the credits roll from the bottom to the top of the screen. This is accompanied by more of Tangerine Dream's music on the soundtrack. In the original film, outside of the title card the rest of the credits had appeared at the end of the picture. Within this new opening, Clark decided to employ shots of the oil well functioning effectively. In addition, Corlette was redubbed to explain to Del Rios that the COREPET has paid off the Junta to protect their assets but the rig might be subject to sabotage. He provides further expositional dialogue to indicate how any nitro-glycerine could be ferried into the site to blow out any potential fire.



Chapter 5

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What remained of the four introductory vignettes appeared later in the international cut in a series of flashbacks. Clark reordered these sequences as he believed it would enhance the continuity and bring the main story to the fore. As a consequence, much of the explanatory detail was removed, the characters' motivations become unclear and inadvertently the film's narrative became much more confused. Most especially, there was the complete removal of the opening sequences including Nilo and Kassem, and major truncations concerning Manzon's Paris scenes which only briefly appeared in second half of the film as a flashback.

[5.55]

This meant the key dialogue with his wife was eliminated and means that one of the film's major themes ('No one is *just* anything') is removed, along with the significance of the watch that Manzon receives from Blanche. Clark also sliced the scene when Manzon receives an ultimatum from the French Stock Exchange officials; removed the heated clash with the fraudster's his brother-in-law and criminal partner Pascal, and for no apparent reason deleted the background music from Mozart that is playing in the expensive restaurant where he is lunching with Blanche and her friend.

[5.56]

Further, Scanlon's involvement in the Irish gang's robbery of the Church was only briefly alluded to with the priest being shot, along with cuts from the argument between Donnelly and other gang member. There was the complete deletion of the wedding with the bride with the black eye. Most especially, the international edit makes nonsense of Jackie being on the run from the Italian mob. There is the elimination of the scene in which the mobster Carlos Ricci issues the order to take out the hit on Scanlon, along with the sequence of Jackie receiving the favour from Vinnie outside the Queen's flophouse. This means that this ending excises the final scene of Vinnie and the hit man entering the Corsario Bar to apparently execute Scanlon. Instead, Jackie receives the cheque from Corlette to be then whisked away to his freedom in a helicopter.

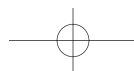
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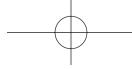
Confusingly, the international cut removes a number of small scenes and changes some passages of dialogue. Therefore, for no discernible purpose the conversation between Corlette and Lartigue is altered, with the latter being dubbed into a heavy Spanish accent. Several shots of Nilo entering the town by taxi and sitting by the candlelight are omitted, along with the shot of Corlette and Del Rios viewing the oil fire from the helicopter vantage point. Some of these adjustments provided an inadvertent humour in furthering the discussion about the Nazi background of the Corsario owner Carlos. Moreover, it is suggested that Manzon believes his wife may come to Porvenir to find him.

[5.58]

Most notably, Clark introduced some sixteen minutes of additional scenes which were taken from the outtakes that had been absent from the American cut. Therefore, this version includes more of a focus on terrorism and the saboteurs (who are the same bandits who will later attempt to hijack Lazaro)

[5.59]





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are shown to be dispassionately watching the oil well before the explosion. In another a cut scene, Corlette and Del Rios seek out the good explosives held by the company only to discover it has been stolen by the bandits.

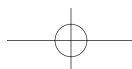
[5.60] In particular, several crucial sequences between Scanlon and Nilo were reinstalled. In the first of the missing scenes Jackie tells Nilo to adjust the rear-view mirror and then asked him why he had killed Marquez. The hit man tells him had made his decision by tossing a coin and on that basis Scanlon should have died, but he decided to kill Marquez instead as he liked the look of Jackie. The second concerned Nilo being forced to check out the depth of a river crossing and being called ‘Pancho’. The last one referred to Scanlon ordering Nilo to drive at sufficient speed over the washboard. Like Jo in the French film, Nilo demonstrates his cowardice and Scanlon has to help him drive the truck as he loses control driving down a steep precipice. A small section of this scene had been previously included in Scanlon’s living nightmare toward to the end of American cut of the film (see Chapter Four).

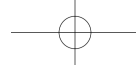
[5.61] In spite of Field’s assurances to Clark, Friedkin significantly objected to the foreign territories cut. On 15 February 1978, *Variety* published a statement from Friedkin in which he objected to the removal of some twenty-nine minutes of the picture from its international release. He labelled the film as being ‘mutilated’ and complained that this version was ‘no longer representative of the film I have made’. In Italy he considered suing CIC for showing the European version of the film on Italian screens (Menozzi 1978). Further, in his correspondence Friedkin’s business manager Edgar Gross a Swedish lawyer Svank Bergstrom noted with reference to issues concerning droit moral:

[5.62] For the time being I will confine myself to listing some changes which may seriously hurt the feelings of Friedkin for this work and in the same manner the feelings of a director in a similar situation as Friedkin: The whole introductory part establishing the four main characters of the film has been deleted. The only substitute consists of two flashbacks. . . . The new cut may have changes the film in such a way that Friedkin finds many of his visual or other ideas more or less lost for the public (Bergstrom 1978).

[5.63] Subsequently it was shown in this truncated form with little fanfare from 24 February 1978 in a short UK engagement. At the final moment, CIC’s executives decided to change the title of international version back to the *Wages of Fear*. In this form it at least played in a London West End first run cinema Empire Leicester Square and was marketed under the tagline ‘Wanted: Four men willing to drive a cargo of death to escape a life in Hell’. Invariably, however, it played on a double bill with the Japanese-American King Kong rip-off *The Last Dinosaur* (1977) (Olsen 2018, 221).

[5.64] In another *Los Angeles Times* article on the 14 March 1978, it was reported that the film had been trimmed down by a further forty-eight minutes.





In 1979, in Melbourne, Australia *Sorcerer* in this form played along with another MGM flop entitled *Sweet Revenge* (1976) directed by Jerry Schatzberg and starring Stockard Channing. Thus, the international version of the film fared little better financially and only made a small contribution to its paltry worldwide gross of \$9 million. In his memoirs, Clark admitted that his work had only been passable at best, the change in the title proved pointless and he apologised to the film's main editor Bud Smith for his involvement in reediting *Sorcerer* to little or no affect (Clark 2010, 141).⁴

In turn, the truncated international version of the film received little praise and was condemned in most of the reviews. The London Time Out reviewer referred to it as having a 'generally tedious, relentlessly grimy realism' (Time Out 1978). In the British Film Institute's (BFI) *Monthly Film Bulletin*, the reviewer David Badder argued that even if the picture had been truncated, its quality had not been much improved. Badder accused *Wages of Fear* (*Sorcerer*) of being 'remarkably lacklustre' and suggested that the movie was 'impenetrably obscure' (Badder 1978, 78). In addition, he maintained that Scheider's role of Scanlon had been underdeveloped and largely 'consisted of meaningful stares off camera and mournful grimaces' (Badder, 78). Gordon Gow in the UK's *Films and Filming* observed that the 'remake' tended to remind the viewer of the original film, but noted that it contained some 'breath-taking' adventure scenes. However, he criticised the film for showing onscreen the explosion of Manzon and Kassem's truck. Further he commented:

[5.65]

The continuity is oddly disrupted too, by snippety flashbacks that tell us a modicum about the troubled lives that drivers have been living. Apparently, these bits were longer before the film was reduced to its present running time. . . . The director William Friedkin . . . is so displeased that he has disowned the work in the form in which we are seeing it; consequently I have reviewed it without mentioning him until now (Gow 1978, 25).

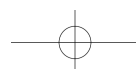
[5.66]

THE IMPACT OF *SORCERER*'S FAILURE ON FRIEDKIN'S REPUTATION AND HIS POSITION IN HOLLYWOOD

[5.67]

The film's disastrous reception would have a significant impact upon Friedkin's position within the US film industry as he went from being perceived as an A-List 'wunderkind' to a financially irresponsible *enfant terrible* (Garfield 1997). His work on *Sorcerer* was castigated as the latest example of directorial hubris as it was a notoriously difficult production which went wildly over-budget. Indeed as his business manager, Edgar Gross commented:

[5.68]





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[5.69]

Billy regards each one of his pictures, in a way, as his child, so that they entire being is consumed by whatever he's working on at the time so that he may spend a lot more time on something than he should. Now when you are do that, very often you're spending money; time is money. And most of the time the money he spends is not his own, and so production people get aggravated with his perfectionist inclination. It won't change what he's doing, and sometimes you'll find a situation where a picture will go over budget and studios don't like that (Gross 1988).

[5.70]

Many of the critical attacks were less about the film itself and focused on its expensive costs. As Friedkin noted, they were often more personally delivered condemnations aimed at him in relation to his previously callous behaviour to them (Friedkin 2013, 347). In particular, Friedkin had been extremely critical of Sarris in an interview in September 1974 with Gerald R. Barrett:

[5.71]

Well I don't respect Sarris . . . he writes for a *small* intellectual elite and he has misinterpreted everything I have ever done. *Totally* destroyed it. Sarris, you know bends everything through his own demi-consciousness and whoever reads him is *stuck* with him. . . . Sarris [takes] a film . . . and . . . [uses] it as a springboard for (his) own ideas on the film industry, the state of the world, the crisis in the sugarcane industry (Barrett 1975, 31–32).

[5.72]

In the short term, *Sorcerer's* failure would have immediate consequences for Friedkin as he would discover the old adage applied – a success has a thousand fathers, but a failure is an orphan. His agent Tony Fantozzi was informed by Lew Wasserman and Sid Sheinberg that his deal with Universal was cancelled. Although he had received a letter of support from Stein on 17 August 1977, it was tempered with the mogul's view on the bottom line:

[5.73]

Dear Billy,

[5.74]

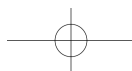
I was delighted to receive your letter of August 10 and as I said before, I still have the same faith in you and your ability and future as always, and while the losses sustained by Paramount and ourselves on your most recent picture will be substantial, and perhaps the largest one we have ever taken, we here realize this can always happen and should not change our feelings and respect for one who has done so well in the past as you. You did devote an awful lot of time and you tried your best but apparently things just went wrong and I cannot completely blame you. I will say you are little stubborn and want your way, and maybe this mistake will motivate your future actions and decisions.

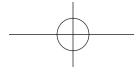
[5.75]

Taking blame yourself is a honourable way of handling the situation but I think you were smart in saying so instead of trying to pass the buck to someone else.

[5.76]

Our relationship will continue as it has in the past and I hope your next picture for us will more than make up for the losses sustained on 'The Sorcerer' (Stein 1977).





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Friedkin noted that he was never to hear from the MCA Chairman again until his death in 1981 (Friedkin, 2013). Elsewhere, Stein complained that Friedkin had wasted twenty million dollars of Universal's money (Biskind 1998, 338). However, as the director commented the studio had approved and signed off on the film's budget (Pfeffer 2014, 28).

[5.77]

For Wasserman, Sheinberg, Tanen and Barry Diller there was the perverse satisfaction that the upstart director had fallen flat on his face. In particular, Universal's Tanen complained to the *L.A. Times* journalist Joyce Haber that the director had been given 'carte blanche' and he had not shown the picture to the studio heads (Friedkin 2013, 346). This meant that they could reassert their corporate control in the wake of *Sorcerer's* poor reception by truncating its release and withdrawing support in its marketing. Moreover, Friedkin was unsurprised as he felt his autocratic attitude had alienated the two studio's senior executives and they had failed to support it:

[5.78]

Friedkin extensively clashed with (the Universal and) Paramount brass, sometimes reasonably (kicking executives off set after perceived interference), sometimes amusingly but questionably (the evil oil execs pictured in the film are actually Gulf & Western's executive board) and they repaid him by not promoting the film. (O'Connell 2017)

[5.79]

Moreover, they concluded that Friedkin's film was out of step with the contemporary zeitgeist amongst American audiences. Its vision of criminal inhumanity stood in stark contradiction with the prevailing sentiment of heroes to cheer for and villains to boo. This was reflected in the awards season as Lucas's film garnered several Oscars and nominations including Best Picture and Best Director. By contrast, Friedkin's movie would only receive one nomination for Best Sound which it lost to *Star Wars*. As Eleanor Coppola noted in 1977:

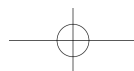
[5.80]

A photographer has just called Francis (Coppola) downstairs to have his picture taken with George Lucas and Steve Spielberg as the three hotshot directors. A few years ago, Francis had his picture taken with Peter Bogdanovich and Billy Friedkin as the three hotshot directors (Coppola 1991, 223).

[5.81]

The disappointed director left for South of France with his then wife the French 'Nouvelle Vague' actress Jeanne Moreau to take stock. During his international hiatus, wherein he had to be treated for the malaria he had contracted during the *Sorcerer* shoot, Friedkin continued to receive letters of support from industry colleagues including the cinematographer Stanley Cortez, producer Irwin Winkler, Rastar Executive Steve Deutsch and his property master Barry Bedig praising his work on *Sorcerer* (Friedkin Papers 1977). However, he believed that his directorial reputation and career path had been significantly undermined by the film's poor box office and measly critical

[5.82]



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reception. Infamously this led to shouting match argument between Friedkin and the volatile science-fiction writer Harlan Ellison (*A Boy and His Dog* [1975]) at a dinner at an opening of a bistro in Versailles which Moreau had been invited to officiate

[5.83] Billy had seen the film as a failure. In fact there is a famous story of when he was working with Harlan and had the rights to make *The Whimper of Whipped Dogs* that he had a huge row when Ellison said that *Sorcerer* was his masterpiece. They were having dinner with Billy's then wife Jeanne Moreau in Versailles and Billy argued that the film had been a complete failure. It descended into a shouting match and Harlan and Billy fell out so the film was never made (Segaloff 2019).⁵

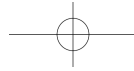
[5.84] Therefore, while Friedkin continued to make studio backed and independently financed films, he would never again enjoy the budgets, artistic freedoms and directorial autonomy that he had achieved during the production and making of *Sorcerer* (Cook 2000, 106):

[5.85] My sudden success in Hollywood after years of failure had convinced me that I was the centre of the universe. Many were waiting for me to crash, and I obliged them in spades. I had flown too close to the sun and my wings melted (Friedkin 2013, 347).

[5.86] FRIEDKIN'S CAREER PATH INTO THE END
OF THE 1970'S, THE 1980'S, AND THE 1990'S

[5.87] In the short term, Friedkin was offered by the producer-personal manager Martin Bregman to direct *Born on the Fourth of July* based on the memoirs of the Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic. Bregman and his main client Al Pacino (*The Godfather* [1972], *Serpico* [1973], *The Godfather Part II* [1974] and *Dog Day Afternoon* [1975]) had been impressed by *Sorcerer* and wanted Friedkin to work with the screenwriter and Vietnam vet Oliver Stone (*Midnight Express* [1978]). However, despite Pacino's position as a major star, Bregman could not secure the financial support of the Hollywood studios to make a film about Vietnam. Ultimately, Stone would write and direct the project in 1989 after his success with *Platoon* (1986) and *Wall Street* (1988) with Tom Cruise playing Kovic.

[5.88] Instead, Friedkin inherited a project from the director John Frankenheimer who had recently made *French Connection II* (1975) and *Black Sunday* (1977). This was entitled *The Brinks Job* which was made for the veteran Italian producer Dino De Laurentiis (*La Strada* [1954], *The Bible* [1966], *Serpico*, *Death Wish* [1974], *King Kong* [1976]) and distributed by Universal in 1978. The plot was based on the real-life 'Great Brinks' Job in Boston in 1950 and based on a book by Noel Behn. Friedkin again asked Green to



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script the project as a caper movie/comedy to accord to the light-hearted tone of the Italian crime movie *Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958). Green, however, noted that Friedkin was less confident and took the advice of the Italian film mogul in cutting sequences with the actress Gena Rowlands:

Billy was anxious. He'd been beaten around by 'Sorcerer' pretty badly. And Dino's got a pretty heavy hand. Dino said, 'Thees-a sequence, you don't-a need thees, Beely' (Green, 1988)

[5.89]

During the shooting of the movie on location in Boston, it became best known for the hijack by robbers of the work-print which led to Friedkin calling a press conference which made the national news. The resulting film starred Peter Falk (*Columbo* [1968–1978, 1989–2003]) along with an outstanding supporting cast including Warren Oates, Allen Garfield, Rowlands and Paul Sorvino. However, the period piece proved to be another box office failure for Friedkin only making \$5 million against an expensive negative cost of \$12.5 million (Cook 2002, 106).

[5.90]

While *The Brinks Job* had barely registered with the public, the same however could not be said for Friedkin's final production of the 1970s – *Cruising* which starred Pacino and was independently produced by Jerry Weintraub for Lorimar Pictures and distributed by United Artists (UA). The director adapted the screenplay from a book by Gerald Walker and it was a murder mystery of an undercover policeman Steve Burns (Pacino) trying to stalk a serial killer amongst the then contemporary New York's Sado-masochistic (S&M) Gay club scene. Yet the film made the news for all the wrong reasons. It was heavily and noisily protested by many homosexual groups while it was being made. Further, due to its depiction of the S&M Leather bars, when the film was released it was accused of being overtly homophobic and exploitative.

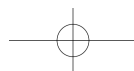
[5.91]

Undoubtedly, it proved to be one of the most controversial films in Friedkin's career and was subject to a heavy censorship battle to receive an 'R' rating from the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA) Classification and Ratings Board (CARA). On its release, the film was critically reviled and became subject to boycotts in many US cities. Therefore, despite opening strongly for its first two weeks, audiences were put off by the negative publicity and the bad word of mouth. Consequently, the film only made \$7 million in rentals against a production cost of \$11 million making it another financial disappointment. Moreover, as Friedkin and Pacino fell out, the star refused to provide publicity for the film and has never talked about it for the rest of his career.

[5.92]

While *Cruising* has been critically reappraised in recent years (see Chapter Six), at the time the debacle meant that Friedkin's position in Hollywood was further undermined. And, along with having a life-threatening heart

[5.93]





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attack in 1981, his reversal in fortune appeared to be complete into the 1980s and the 1990s. This led to his involvement in a series of films which failed to have much impact either commercially or critically. They included several studio backed features including a dire black comedy about arms dealers with Chevy Chase entitled *Deal of the Century* (1983) (Warner Brothers); a technically effective but mediocre horror film *The Guardian* (1990) (Universal); and a sports movie about college basketball called *Blue Chips* (1993) (Paramount).

[5.94]

In 1995, Friedkin made the \$50 million sex-thriller *Jade* for Paramount. It was produced by the legendary former Paramount Head of Production Robert Evans (*The Godfather*, *Chinatown* [1974]). The picture was designed to launch the film career of the television star David Caruso and make the actress Linda Fiorentino (*The Last Seduction* [1993]) into an ‘A’ list star. It was based on an expensive script purchased by Paramount Studios from the commercially successful screenwriter Joe Eszterhas (*Flash Dance* [1982], *Jagged Edge* [1985], *Basic Instinct* [1992], *Show Girls* [1995]). It contained Friedkin’s third car chase in a film which this time, akin to *Bullitt*, was staged on the steep hills of San Francisco.

[5.95]

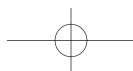
Jade proved to be a commercial and critical disaster, earning a paltry \$9 million at the North American Box Office and receiving poor reviews. The production had been acrimonious between the director and the writer with Eszterhas complaining that Friedkin had revised the script excessively. Moreover, it led to the filmmaker being unfairly written off by Eszterhas as a ‘has been’ who claimed that Friedkin had only got to make the picture as he was by now married to then Head of Production at Paramount Sherry Lansing (Aftab 2012). According to the actor Michael Biehn (*The Terminator* [1984], *Aliens* [1986] and *The Abyss* [1988]):

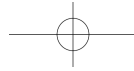
[5.96]

I don’t think anybody had any idea what they were doing. It was a Joe Eszterhas script. To me, none of it ever really made any sense. I didn’t realize until the read-through that I was the bad guy in it. It was like a jumbled mess. And the movie came out a mess, too. It had great people on it, though. It had William Friedkin directing, it had Chazz Palmenteri, who was nominated that year for an Academy Award, it had Linda Fiorentino, who had just come out with that famous movie she did [The Last Seduction], and it had David Caruso, who’s a fucking brilliant actor when given the right material, and a very smart guy. . . . So a great cast, great director . . . everything but a script (Harris 2012).

[5.97]

In between, the director had returned to television to make several shows including ‘Nightcrawlers’ which was an episode made during a revival of the *Twilight Zone* (1985). In an attempt to develop a television series in which he would be the Executive Producer, Friedkin directed two dramas about an elite ‘Black Ops’ unit – *C.A.T. Squad* (1986) and a sequel *C.A.T. Squad*:





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Python Wolf (1988). They were scripted by the former US Treasury Secret Service Agent Gerald Petievich (*To Live and Die in L.A.* [1985]) and were accompanied by music from Italian maestro Ennio Morricone (*The Battle of Algiers. The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* [1966], *Once Upon a Time in America* [1984]) including cues that appeared to be a dry run for his score for Brian DePalma's *The Untouchables* (1987).

[5.98]

The humbling of the auteur director was, in part, self-inflicted by some poor choices of often inadequate material, but it more profoundly demonstrated how far the film industry has changed in terms of content, product and audience expectation. This was most obviously shown in the reaction to his two best and most provocative films of the 1980s that had been independent productions – *To Live and Die in L.A.* and *Rampage* (1987). These pictures compared strongly with the work through which he had made his name with regard to features and documentaries. Yet, their fate demonstrated how out-of-step Friedkin appeared to be with reference to the contemporary public taste and the mores of the Hollywood film industry.

TO LIVE AND DIE IN L.A.

[5.99]

To Live and Die in L.A. was an action-crime thriller which drew favourable comparisons with *The French Connection*. Indeed, it was marketed as such under the tag-line 'The Director of *'The French Connection'* is back on the streets again'. The picture was based on book by Petievich who coscripted the film with Friedkin. It was coproduced by Bud Smith who also acted as the Second Unit Director and the Supervising Editor. The plot follows a reckless US Treasury Secret Service agent Richard Chance (William L. Peterson) in his obsessive pursuit of a mastermind criminal counterfeiter Eric 'Ric' Masters (Willem Defoe) who has murdered his partner Jimmy Hart (Michael Greene). Chance inveigles his new partner John Vukovich (John Pankow) into his relentless, often illegal and ultimately tragic attempt to take-down Masters.

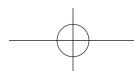
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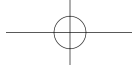
This results in a failed stake-out of the house of attorney Max Waxman (Christopher Allport) a duplicitous of associate of Masters who kills him while Vukovich falls asleep; an attempt to turn a courier Carl Cody (John Turturro) after his caught at Los Angeles Airport (LAX) transporting counterfeit currency and a meeting between the undercover agents with Masters to arrange the printing of \$1 million of fake banknotes as long as they can raise \$30,000 in front money. However, their chance to make the buy is undermined by their bureau chief Thomas Bateman (Robert Downey Senior) who informs them that maximum cash they can be given is \$10,000.

[5.101]

On learning from his informer/parolee girlfriend Ruth (Darlanne Fleugel) that a criminal called Thomas Ling (Michael Chong) is arriving on a train

[5.102]





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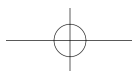
from San Francisco at Union Station with \$50,000 to purchase stolen diamonds, Chance persuades Vukovich to engage in a heist to rob the courier. This leads to a hair-raising car chase in which Ling is killed and the pair evade a large number of cover people by going the wrong way down a freeway. Later, in a daily briefing they find out Ling was actually an undercover FBI agent who was involved in a sting. However, by this point, Chance and Vukovich have made the deal with Masters and arrange a meeting with him at his gym.

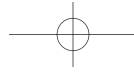
[5.103] On making the buy, they declare themselves as Secret Service Agents but events go awry. In the resulting shoot-out Chance is shot point blank in the face and killed by Masters' henchman Jack (Jack Hoar) who is similarly fatally wounded. In turn, the previously 'good cop' Vukovich tracks down Masters and in a moment of truth takes the law into his own hands when he shoots the criminal in the resulting fight. The counterfeiter is covered in the petrol he is using to blow up his warehouse and is self-immolated in a fiery inferno. By the end of the film, Vukovich has lost any vestige of his moral code and has, in effect, become Chance. In the final sequence he visits Ruth to renew the exploitative relationship she had shared with his deceased partner.

[5.104] The film demonstrated Friedkin's continuing concern to use the policier to dramatise the thin line between good and evil, existential dread and the mysteries of fate. Chance believes he is invulnerable and treats everyone with contempt including his bosses, his partner and his informer/lover Ruth. Alternatively, the supremely effective and sexually ambiguous Masters is plagued by doubts and self-loathing which he demonstrates by burning self-portraits of himself. Therefore, Friedkin indicated his willingness to create narcissistic and self-obsessed characters. Further, in the shock ending in which the director kills off both the unsympathetic protagonist and the complex antagonist he remained a narrative risk-taker when taking dramatic choices:

[5.105] Halfway through production, it occurred to me that Peterson's character, Chance, had to die. This was not in the script or the novel but I thought it was unexpected and justified, given that he lived constantly on the edge. He wasn't a superhero immune to danger (Friedkin 2013, 391).

[5.106] Technically, the film was excellent with brilliantly edited montages from regular Friedkin associate Smith and his son Scott (*Sorcerer*, *Cruising*, *C.A.T. Squad*). It combined cracking dialogue (e.g., 'Guess what? Uncle Sam don't give a shit about your expenses. You want bread, fuck a baker') with several well-staged action sequences. These included scenes in which the agents provide security for President Ronald Reagan's motorcade and fight off an Islamic fundamentalist suicide bomber on the roof of the Beverly Hills





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Hilton Hotel; the apprehension of Masters' mule Cody at LAX; a prison yard attack on Cody and the final gun battles in bloody showdown with Masters.

Most especially, Friedkin included a central car chase which ends with Chance driving the wrong way down a freeway. This exciting sequence compares with the chase in *The French Connection* and was expertly executed by a team of stuntmen led by Buddy Joe Hooker (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* [1977], *Hooper* [1978] and *Scarface* [1983]). It took three weeks to film on a closed down section of the Terminal Island Freeway and another three weeks along other locations such as L.A. River.

[5.107]

Further, the film contains one of Friedkin's most celebrated procedural scenes in which Masters utilises his expertise and artistry to produce the counterfeit money. This sequence contains many details upon how such fake currency could be made and Defoe was trained by a real-life counterfeiter who remained on the set to ensure its authenticity. While one million dollars was produced, the fake money contained three significant errors which meant that it could not be used in reality. However, some of money leaked out when one of the sons of a crew member was caught using it at a grocery store when trying to buy candy. This led to the State of California Attorney Robert Bonner contacting Friedkin who (on the advice of Petievich) informed him to provide a search warrant or 'go fuck himself' (Kermode 2019).

[5.108]

The film was shot by the Dutch cinematographer Robby Muller (*Repo Man* [1984], *Paris, Texas* [1984]) (apart from the chase which was photographed by the Second Unit Director of Photography [DoP] Robert D. Yeoman as Muller's predilection for natural lighting sources proved impossible) to extenuate the Tequila Sunrise vision of L.A. as against the dystopia of the city's wider urban decay. These touches were enhanced by Muller's employment of Fuji film stock to register the verdant orange glow of the Southern Californian sun. Consequently, Friedkin sought out fringe locations in Watts, South Central, the Terminal Island Freeway, the Vincent Thomas Bridge, the Wilmington power plant and the San Luis Obispo Prison.

[5.109]

Once again, the director commissioned a score from a contemporary source – the New Wave band Wang Chung (Yellow Bell) made up of the British musicians Jack Hues and Nick Feldman. Friedkin had heard two of their songs, 'Dance Hall Days' and 'Wait', from the band's album *Points on the Curve* (1983). Like Tangerine Dream for *Sorcerer*, Wang Chung did not see the film before they provided the music and produced a soundtrack album that made the top ten on the US Billboard chart.

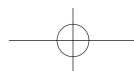
[5.110]

In particular, Friedkin showed he could make an excellent thriller which contained another version of his key themes between light and shade within a sprawling city.

[5.111]

The film received good reviews from Janet Maslin in the *New York Times* and from *Variety* along with one rave from his main critical advocate Ebert, *To Live and Die in L.A.*, who saw the film as a return to form:

[5.112]





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[5.113]

The direction is the key. Friedkin has made some good movies ('The French Connection', 'The Exorcist', 'Sorcerer') and some bad ones ('Cruising', 'Deal of the Century'). This is his comeback, showing the depth and skill of the early pictures. . . . The film isn't just about cops and robbers, but about two systems of doing business, and how one of the systems finds a way to change itself in order to defeat the other. (Ebert 1985).

[5.114]

Yet, it only achieved a moderate amount of success at the North American box office. While it turned a profit by making \$17 million in revenues against a modest \$6 million budget, it did not compare favourably in terms of the mega profits that were being drawn from the blockbusters produced by Spielberg and Lucas (*Raiders of the Lost Ark* [1981], *E.T.* [1982], *Return of the Jedi* [1983]). It also fared poorly alongside the other 'high concept' formulaic fare made by production teams such as Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer (*Beverly Hills Cop* [1984], *Top Gun* [1986]) at Paramount, Jon Peters and Peter Guber (*Batman* [1989]) at Warner Brothers and Joel Silver with his production partner Lawrence Gordon and later his Silver Productions (*Predator* [1987], *Lethal Weapon* [1987], *Die Hard* [1988]).

[5.115]

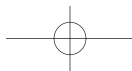
Friedkin's refusal to pacify his financiers by revising the film's downbeat but logical ending was partly blamed for its financial returns. Yet, it may also been seen that 1980s audiences did not want to see a complex movie in which the characters moved with feet of clay rather than followed the clichéd heroics of the era. Further, the picture's lack of star power (all the principles were new to feature films apart from the veteran actor Dean Stockwell who played the double-dealing lawyer Bob Grimes) was seen as being problematic in extending its chances at the US box office against other star-driven vehicles. Ironically, many of the lead actors – Peterson, Dafoe, Pankow and Turturro – would go on to have major film and television careers.

[5.116]

Moreover, the film had a troubled financial history even before it was released. It was meant to kick-start off a ten picture \$100 million deal between Friedkin and a company composed from three financiers Samuel Schulman, Irving H. Levin and Angelo Marquetti – SLM Productions. This group had been provisionally arranged the deal with 20th Century Fox which had then been bought out by media mogul Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. On the announcement of Fox's takeover by Murdoch, the film's producer Levin withdrew from the deal with Fox and SLM went into partnership with MGM/UA which was owned by CNN's Ted Turner. This meant that the budget was reduced, the cast was made up then largely unknown actors and the film was shot like an independent movie with a non-union crew. Further, MGM/UA did little to market the film. As Friedkin comments:

[5.117]

I'd long since fallen from the Hollywood A-list and was in the gray area. Word came back that [my agent] Tony Fantozi . . . told several people, 'Friedkin





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can't get a job in this town'. It was hurtful but true, so I left the Morris office and signed with a series of agents and managers who were no more effective for me (Friedkin, 394).

Therefore, Friedkin was to find that in his reduced industrial status that he would become increasingly subject to the vagaries of his investor's production finances. This would prove to be apposite in the case of his next feature *Rampage*. [5.118]

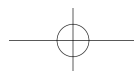
RAMPAGE [5.119]

Rampage was based on a book by William P. Wood which had been directly influenced by the killing spree of the so-called 'Vampire of Sacramento' Richard Chase in 1977. Friedkin not only directed the film, but wrote the screenplay and coproduced it with David Salven. It was financed by the Dino De Laurentiis Entertainment Group (DEG) on a relatively small budget of \$7.5 million. This meant the film had no stars and was shot on location in small town of Stockton, California. Friedkin employed several previous collaborators including Robert Yeoman who was promoted to DoP and it was edited by Jere Huggins who had been the assistant editor on *Sorcerer*, *Cruising* and *To Live and Die in L.A.* The film was scored by Ennio Morricone who provided a pensive soundtrack to underscore the tragedy of the murders. [5.120]

The film told the story of a serial killer Charles Reece (Alex McArthur who was best known at the time for playing Madonna's boyfriend and father of her baby in the pop video *Papa Don't Preach* [1986]) who kills random victims in a small town four days before Christmas. While the opening of the movie contained visceral sequences concerning Reece's murderous rampage and his paranoid delusions in which he could only cleanse himself from being infected by Satan by drinking his victims' blood, the majority of the film concerned the resulting court case his plea of legal insanity to avoid the death penalty. [5.121]

Friedkin cast Michael Biehn as a liberal District of Attorney Anthony Fraser who is required to prosecute the case to invoke the death penalty despite his own inclinations. Despite inept police work, Fraser on meeting the victims' families decides to prevent the killer from getting off on a technicality. His position is further complicated by his own personal tragedy in losing a daughter and the grief he suffers with his wife Kate (Deborah Van Valkenburgh [*The Warriors* (1979)], *C.A.T. Squad: Python Wolf*). In the end, Reece is found guilty in the court and sentenced to be executed. However, he is found to be clinically insane through a position emission tomography (PET) scan and sent to the state mental hospital. [5.122]

Therefore, this narrative returned Friedkin back to the moral dilemmas he had explored in his breakthrough documentary *The People vs. Paul Crump*. [5.123]





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A Commercial and Critical Failure

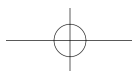
Most especially, his attitude to the immorality of the death penalty had changed over the years due to the assassinations of the Kennedys, John Lennon and Martin Luther King, along with other mass murders such as the Manson Family Killings. Under these circumstances, he had come to believe that certain crimes were so awful they deserved capital punishment. This meant that Friedkin produced two versions of the film with different endings. In the first edit, Reece is found dead in his cell as he had overdosed on the antipsychotic drugs he had stockpiled in secret. In the revised version, Reece survives and in a voice-over sends a letter to the husband and father of a wife and child he has killed inviting him to visit. Then a final title card reveals that he is scheduled to be paroled in six months. On reviewing the second edition Ebert commented:

[5.124] This is not a movie about murder so much as a movie about insanity – as it applies to murder in modern American criminal courts. . . . Friedkin[’s] message is clear: Those who commit heinous crimes should pay for them, sane or insane. You kill somebody, you fry – unless the verdict is murky or there were extenuating circumstances (Ebert 1992).

[5.125] The reason that Friedkin ended up with two different versions of the film referred to its distribution problems. Not least, shortly after releasing the film in parts of Europe, DEG went bankrupt and this meant the picture went unreleased in the US. Therefore, it remained in limbo as the negative, the processing laboratory and sound mix costs were tied up with DEG debtors. Eventually, Friedkin met up with the now disgraced mogul Harvey Weinstein who acquired the rights of *Rampage* for his independent company Miramax. On reviewing the five year old film, the director decided to make the changes to his final cut. However, on release the film failed to find an audience and only made a minuscule \$796,368 at the US Box Office. Friedkin felt that the film proved too serious and played as polemic rather than an effective feature to audiences.

[5.126] Once more Friedkin’s style of filmmaking which dealt with the many shades of grey concerning moral complexities proved to be odds with the contemporary zeitgeist. Essentially, within Hollywood Friedkin had gone from being an extremely bankable filmmaker to one who’s films, whatever their strengths and weaknesses, were perceived as being financial loss-makers (Cook 2002, 106). Although he continued to make movies, this lack of mass appeal meant that he went from making prestige productions to increasingly independently financed, inconsistent and lower budgeted fare. Further as Mark Johnson commented in the 1980s:

[5.127] There’s frankly a lot of studios here where it would be tough for Billy to make a movie for them. I’ve heard a studio head say that there are some directors where it’s not worth the aggravation, and Billy’s one of them. . . . Everybody





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would be a fool not to recognise his talent. What people would argue with is the films he chooses to make (Johnson 1988).

CONCLUSION

[5.128]

This chapter has shown that William Friedkin's *Sorcerer* proved to be a significant flop on its initial 1977 US release and upon its international engagement as the recut *Wages of Fear*. Due the poor box office returns, Friedkin was to quickly discover that both Paramount and Universal had decided to drop any financial support in marketing his film. Moreover, the studios' disregard for the film would be further apparent in the sorry tale of its international release which was handled by CIC's Pedro Teitelbaum. Although, the director believed it had been his best work he was to be disappointed by its reception both from audiences and critics. Notably, *Sorcerer* was a film that stood at odds with an America that wanted to forget about a decade of uncertainty and corruption.

[5.129]

Friedkin's reputation and career would irrevocably suffer from the film's rejection. While he continued to receive offers, his fortunes as a filmmaker would fluctuate dramatically throughout the remainder of the decade and into the 1980s and 1990s.

[5.130]

With a couple of major exceptions, his films were either castigated or more often treated with little or no interest. In part, some observers and the director himself suggested that he had been cursed after the tremendous success of *The Exorcist*. He felt that his success had come too young and that he was suffering from a form of a 'schadenfreude' in which the US film industry rejoiced in his failure. Friedkin would later compare his career path to that Orson Welles who had never been able to match *Citizen Kane* and to the famed writer-director-producer Billy Wilder (*Double Indemnity* [1944], *Sunset Boulevard* [1950], *Some Like it Hot* [1959]) who he remembered:

[5.132]

Meeting . . . and seeing, and talking to . . . and realizing, you know, this is genius, this is incredible. Smart, and . . . then that career stopped. He didn't stop being smart, and stop being creative, but because of the nature of money, and Hollywood, and profit, and that stopped. Here's what happens often. It's the nature of the zeitgeist . . . which is almost constantly in flux. And some of us are aware of it and others are not. (Kagan 2014)

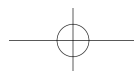
[5.133]

Friedkin's experience showed how the studios had realised their films could be mass marketed in summer blockbusters to ensure their profitability (Goldman 2016).

[5.134]

The success of the early 1970s blockbusters such as *The Godfather* and *The Exorcist* demonstrated to the corporations that studios could be lucrative once more. The wide release of movies with a higher built-in distribution

[5.135]



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A Commercial and Critical Failure

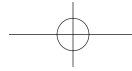
cost to be paid by exhibitors led to a massive increase in film rentals. This meant a smaller number of heavily marketed films were made to ensure the studios' profits.

[5.136] Yet, the revenues from the first set of blockbusters were dwarfed by the returns achieved by the saturation releases of Spielberg's *Jaws* and Lucas' *Star Wars*. These genre films provided B picture thrills on A picture budgets to a newly defined audience, ranging from 16–24 years in age, and were released in the summer to maximise their profits. Their success led to the development of high-concept features in which readily identifiable stories could be sold to the public. This led to an escalation in budgets for pictures such as Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, as the majors realised an expensive blockbuster, rather than a series of smaller films, could ensure their profitability. Moreover, as Friedkin lamented:

[5.137] You know Francis Coppola and I would sit around and argue about film and it was what was going to be of greater influence, was it the work of Godard or Fellini? What are the arguments you have today? ACE VENTURA versus Steven Seagal? (Friedkin 1993).

[5.138] The summer blockbusters were accompanied by distribution techniques associated with exploitation filmmaking, as event movies were blanket released across hundreds of US screens and marketed through television led advertising campaigns. As with exploitation films, the idea was to achieve as large an audience as possible within the film's first week, invariably before they had time to read the reviews. Further, they were supported through a range of merchandising including book tie-ins, games, clothing, bubble gum and magazines. With regard to *Star Wars*, the profits from these associated products exceeded the \$500 million in box office revenues made by the film itself.

[5.139] Thus, the phenomena generated higher returns and screens became dominated by sequels, remakes, and the culling of comic books and television shows to create lucrative franchises. However, for Friedkin along with several 'auteur' filmmakers including Coppola, Bogdanovich, Robert Altman, Michael Cimino, Hal Ashby, Sam Peckinpah and, to a lesser degree, Martin Scorsese these trends meant there was little place for them to make films which emphasised character over action and losers over the marquee heroism. Yet, the director remained tenacious and despite his career setbacks, his overall reputation and that of his film *Sorcerer* would be subject to a significant revival into the new millennium.



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NOTES

[5.140]

1. The auteur director would become a by-word in Hollywood for pretension and pomposity. For instance, Bogdanovich was parodied by the comedian Robert Klein when playing a hotshot director Roger Deal in Hal Needham's film *Hooper* (1978). This starred Burt Reynolds as the US film industry's top stunt man who was in reality based on Needham. Reynolds had recently appeared in two Bogdanovich flops *At Long Last Love* (1975) and *Nickelodeon* (1976) where Needham had been the stunt coordinator. A subplot in the movie shows how the veteran producer Max Berns (John Marley) is really powerless once the production has started as Deal holds all the cards. However, at the end of the film *Hooper* punches out the double-crossing Deal while giving a knowing wink to the camera. A fictionalised take on Reynolds relationship with Needham appeared in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood* (2019) between the characters of the fading television star Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his stuntman double Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt).

[5n1]

2. Canby would develop the argument against 'auteur' filmmakers further when reviewing Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*. The critic's damning account of the epic western in the *New York Times* proved to be instrumental in defining its disastrous reception on its release. See Canby 1980 and Bach 1986.

[5n2]

3. It would appear that Cynthia Scheider's attitude to the film had cooled. On the completion of the initial edit she wrote to Friedkin (Scheider 1976):

[5n3]

Dear Billy,

Just a note to say that 'movin on' won't be easy. I've felt like family here with Bud, Ned and Jere. Thanks for giving me the chance to prove that I could be more than Roy's 'old lady' who came along for the ride. Working with this film has been more rewarding than the 'Connection'. Very few days went by that you didn't contribute to my growth as an editor. You are one hell of a filmmaker and there never was any doubt in my mind that 'Sorcerer' would be anything less than great. For my money your one of the best-ever!! My love and support will remain with you.

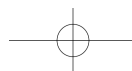
Thanks again, Love Cynthia.

4. The most interesting and, perhaps, successful factor of the international version of the film related to the variety of posters used to market the film in the France, Turkey and Poland. The 1981 Polish poster of the film by the designer Andrzej Pagowski is something of an extraordinary abstract masterpiece with an exploding head of driver who is wearing a T-Shirt of a \$100 bill replete with a portrait of Benjamin Franklin.

[5n4]

5. Harlan Ellison still maintained his close friendship with Friedkin and an admiration for his films. See Lee Hill, 2018.

[5n5]



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Chapter Six

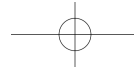
The Resurrection of *Sorcerer*

From a Lost Film to a Masterpiece

[6.0] William Friedkin's film *Sorcerer* (1977) has been subject to a remarkable reappraisal in recent years. While it had been a forgotten motion picture for many years, it has emerged in the popular and scholarly consciousness from enjoying a minor, cult status to becoming subject to a full-blown critical reevaluation. Although the film had its advocates during its initial showing and throughout the years (see Chapter Five), within the last decade, there was a significant level of interest in the film across the mainstream and social media. This has led to a growing consensus amongst critics and audiences that its dark vision had served to create a masterpiece of US filmmaking.

[6.1] In 2012, the filmmaker and cinephile Quentin Tarantino (*Reservoir Dogs* [1992], *Pulp Fiction* [1994], *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* [2019]) placed *Sorcerer* within his top ten films in the British Film Institute's (BFI) Greatest Ever Film poll. In turn, the best-selling horror writer Stephen King (*Carrie* [1974], *The Shining* [1977], *Dr. Sleep* [2013]) cited the film as his being his favourite when a new print of the movie was shown at the UK National Film Theatre (NFT) in 2017 (Kermode, 2017). The growing reputation of *Sorcerer* has seen it being revived at film festivals and special showings in which Friedkin has received awards in acknowledgement of his directorial achievements.

[6.2] This chapter will track the re-evaluation of the film as the interest in *Sorcerer* has coincided with an up-turn in Friedkin's reputation. This was initiated by the production of a well-received television version of Reginald Rose's *Twelve Angry Men* in 1997. In turn, there was an appreciation of Friedkin's position in the pantheon of New Hollywood filmmakers. The



director and his work has appeared in a range of books, studies and documentaries.

In their wake, there was a lucrative reissuing of a ‘director’s cut of *The Exorcist* in 1999 by Warner Brothers within theatres and on home video. This led to him directing two studio projects *The Rules of Engagement* (2000) and *The Hunted* (2002). More importantly, Friedkin regained his creative juices by directing two independently made features based on Tracy Letts’s (*August: Osage County* [2007]) plays *Bug* (2006) and *Killer Joe* (2012). In tandem, there was a renewed interest in his other features including *The Birthday Party*, *The Boys in the Band*, *The French Connection*, *Cruising* and *To Live and Die in L.A.* which were all rereleased on Blu-Ray.

[6.3]

Further, *Sorcerer* was praised by the screenwriter Josh Olson (*History of Violence* [2008]) and the director Bernard Rose (*Candyman* [1992]) on director Joe Dante’s *Trailers from Hell* website. Indeed, the picture garnered its own website and blog created by Toby Roan which contains many details on the film and interviews with the principal figures including Friedkin, Green and Scheider. This level of interest led to a showing of the film at the American Cinematheque in 2011 to a rapturous audience response. Elsewhere, it could be seen at a variety of European film festivals and showings in several revival houses. In turn, the Friedkin cooperated with the French film critic Samuel Blumenfeld on a monograph concerning the film’s production entitled *Sorcerer: Sur Le Toit Du Monde (At the top of the World)* (Blumenfeld 2018).

[6.4]

Finally, Friedkin produced his autobiography in 2013, *The Friedkin Connection: A Memoir*. This outlined his career and his approach to making his films. Subsequently, he became the subject a film biography entitled *Friedkin Uncut* (2018) directed by the Italian documentarian Francesco Zippel. This was premiered at the 2018 Venice Film Festival and has been shown on UK’s Sky Arts as well as being released as a DVD. Therefore, it would appear that Friedkin’s dark cinematic vision of the human condition when confronted with overwhelming odds was again in vogue.

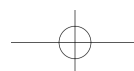
[6.5]

THE REAPPRAISAL OF FRIEDKIN AND HIS BODY OF WORK

[6.6]

Throughout the 1990s, several articles appeared on Friedkin in either film journals or in terms of newspaper interviews. In the December 1995 edition of the BFI’s *Sight and Sound* Larry Gross speculated on Friedkin’s career decline after the highs of *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist* (Gross 1995, pp. 14–15). While noting that *Sorcerer* was the best film that Friedkin made in the aftermath, the article focused on the many setbacks that had besieged the director in the 1980s and 1990s culminating in the debacle of *Jade*.

[6.7]





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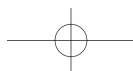
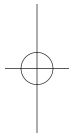
The Resurrection of Sorcerer

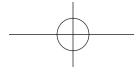
[6.8] In 1997 Friedkin returned to his roots in television by directing a well-received version of Reginald Rose's teleplay *Twelve Angry Men*. This drama focused on the arguments and tensions which emerge within a jury as they debate their decision upon the guilt or innocence of a suspect during a murder trial. It was produced by the Showtime Cable Network for a budget of \$1.75 million. Despite the limited costs, Friedkin was able cast two Hollywood giants Jack Lemmon (*Some Like it Hot* [1959], *The Apartment* [1960], *The Odd Couple* [1968], *The China Syndrome* [1979]) and George C. Scott (*The Hustler* [1961], *Dr Strangelove* [1964], *Patton* [1970], *Hardcore* [1979]) as the respective leads of Juror Number 8 and Number 3, along with other veteran actors such as Hume Cronyn (*Brute Force* [1947], *Cocoon* [1985]) and Armin Mueller-Stuel (*Veronika Voss* [1981], *Music Box* [1989]).

[6.9] The rest of the supporting cast included William L. Peterson, Edward James Olmos (*Blade Runner* [1982], *Miami Vice* [1984–1989], *Battlestar Galactica* [2004–2009]), Tony Danza (*Taxi* [1978–1983]) and James Gandolfini (*True Romance* [1992], *Get Shorty* [1994]) who was about to make his name playing mobster Tony Soprano in *The Sopranos* (1999–2008). In particular, Friedkin was concerned to cast several prominent African American actors as jurors in what was meant to be a tough inner-city court and in the light of the recent O.J. Simpson trial in 1995 (Friedkin 2013, 414–15). They included Courtney B. Vance (*Hamburger Hill* [1987], *The Hunt for the Red October* [1990]), Ossie Davis (*The Hill* [1965], *Do the Right Thing* [1989]), Dorian Harewood (*The Falcon and the Snowman* [1985], *Full Metal Jacket* [1987]), and Mykelti Williamson (*Forrest Gump* [1994], *Heat* [1995]).

[6.10] This high-quality ensemble demonstrated that Friedkin could still attract both well-respected and up and coming actors to work with. He staged the made for television film by using handheld cameras and shooting it from a range of angles to heighten the claustrophobic nature of the play. Further, he received an Emmy nomination for his work and the made-for-television play gathered several other Emmy and Golden Globe Nominations for Lemmon, Scott and Cronyn as well as Terrence A. Donnelly as the producer for Outstanding Production. In the event, Scott won an Emmy and a Golden Globe for his portrayal of Juror Number 3.

[6.11] Simultaneously, and with no little irony, Peter Biskind's *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (1998) renewed a more general interest in Friedkin. While making much of the filmmaker's private life and his idiosyncratic behaviour, Biskind's entertaining tome portrayed Friedkin as a charismatic if wilful force within New Hollywood. Not least, it contained several passages on Friedkin's early career successes and an, albeit, negative account of the production and reception of *Sorcerer*. The book increased the profile of the 1970s filmmakers and led to several documentaries being produced about them. One of these entitled *A Decade Under the Influence* (2002), directed





by Richard LaGravenese and Ted Demme, included interview material with Friedkin. This provided information about his films and upon his opinions on the ‘moral ambivalence’ that defined the 1970s era of filmmaking.

In 1998, the British Film critic Mark Kermode wrote a popular BFI Modern Classic Monograph on *The Exorcist*. Subsequently, he presented a BBC documentary *The Fear of God: 25 Years of the Exorcist*. The television programme was produced by Nick Fre and Jones and it contained many new interviews with Friedkin and Blatty, along with the film’s leads and members of the crew. It unearthed several previously unseen scenes including Regan’s ‘spider-walk’ which had been deemed unsuitable due to the obvious wire-work used in an attempt to realise the effect.

[6.12]

Subsequently, Friedkin recut the film and with the benefit of CGI made the ‘spider-walk’ usable. Most especially, he relented to Blatty who had wanted the reinstatement of some of the more theological sequences which had been excised in the 1973 version of the film (see Chapter One). The writer particularly called for the restoration of a dialogue scene between Merrin and Karras as they contemplate why the devil had possessed the soul of an innocent child. Further, Friedkin altered the ending to Blatty’s liking so that Kinderman would link up with Father Dyer to provide a stronger declaration of good’s triumph over evil. The Warner Brothers’ rerelease in 2000 also proved to be financially lucrative as the 140 minutes *The Exorcist – The Version You’ve Never Seen* took another \$112 million at the US and overseas box office.

[6.13]

Concurrently, Kermode with director Russell Leven made another BBC documentary featuring Friedkin, Philip D’Antoni, Gene Hackman, Roy Scheider, Richard D. Zanuck, David Brown, Sonny Grosso and Randy Jurgensen called *The Poughkeepsie Shuffle: Tracing ‘The French Connection’* (2000). Subsequently, the British film critic continued to champion the director through numerous articles, interviews and podcasts. In 2017 he would act as the cowriter of Friedkin’s documentary based on a real-life exorcist in *The Devil and Father Amouth*. This upturn in Friedkin’s reputation and the financial success of the reissued *The Exorcist*, led to him being chosen to direct two studio projects made at Paramount – *The Rules of Engagement* (2000) and *The Hunted* (2003).

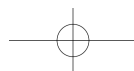
[6.14]

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AND THE HUNTED

[6.15]

The Rules of Engagement starred two of Hollywood’s highest profile leading men the Oscar winning Tommy Lee Jones (*JFK* [1991], *The Fugitive* [1993] *The Men in Black* [1997]) and the Oscar nominated Samuel L. Jackson (*Pulp Fiction* [1994], *Jackie Brown* [1997], *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* [1999]). It was coproduced by the former studio head turned producer Rich-

[6.16]





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The Resurrection of Sorcerer

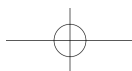
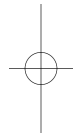
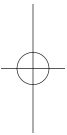
ard Zanuck (*The Sting* [1973], *Jaws* [1975]) (see Chapter One) and Scott Ruddin (*The Truman Show* [1998], *Bringing Out the Dead* [1999]) on a budget of \$60 million. The film was scripted by Stephen Gaghan (*Traffic* [2000], *Syriana* [2005]) from a story by James Webb III – a former soldier, the Secretary State to the Navy, Emmy-award winning journalist and Senator for Virginia.

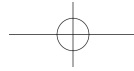
[6.17] The plot concerns a court-martial trial in which the Marine Colonel Terry Childers (Jackson) is accused of violating the ‘rules of engagement’ by order his troops to fire into a crowd demonstrating against the US Embassy in the Yemen. He is defended by old friend and comrade Colonel Hayes Hodges (Jones) who served with Childers in Vietnam and owes him his life. At the outset, it appears that all the evidence points to Childers overreacting and illegally issuing the order to fire into the crowd. In this respect, he is accused of murdering innocent demonstrators.

[6.18] However, in the course of trial, Hodges finds that a key video-tape of the incident drawn from a security camera has been destroyed by the National Security Advisor Bill Sokal (Bruce Greenwood). The tape demonstrates that Childers had legitimately responded to an armed mob rather than order his troops to fire against unarmed civilians. Sokal and the US Ambassador Mourain (Ben Kingsley) have conspired to make Childers the scapegoat so they can maintain favourable relations with the Yemeni government. Through their corrupt expedience, they lose their posts; perjure themselves and are prosecuted on ‘destruction of evidence’ charges. Childers is found guilty of a minor charge of breaching the peace. However, he is required to retire honourably from the Marines and Hodges is forced to reflect upon the tenuous processes of military justice.

[6.19] The film opened to a large amount of controversy and it received mixed reviews. It was accused of being Anti-Islamic by many critics, most especially those in Europe. The depiction of Arabic crowd was seen to be racist as almost every member of the mob is armed and dangerous. This included a young amputee girl who is shown to be viciously firing an AK-47 at Childers and his troops. Further, the film was accused of providing little or no explanatory context about the crowd’s behaviour. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) described it as ‘probably the most vicious anti-Arab racist film ever made by a major Hollywood studio’ (Whitaker 2000). The Yemeni government condemned it as a barbaric attack and urged Arabs to boycott the film (Alford 2010, 124–25).

[6.20] Friedkin revelled in the controversy. He argued that the film was not anti-Arabic but anti-terrorist. He pointed out that the film had received support from many former soldiers. Once again, Friedkin had striven to bring attention to the moral ambivalences associated with proving the guilt or innocence of soldiers and civilian during a period of conflict. Further, the filmmaker noted that despite Webb’s initial dislike of Gaghan’s screenplay that on





seeing the picture that the decorated soldier and diplomat had been proud of the end product (Friedkin 2013, 434). Most importantly, for Friedkin the film was a moderate box-office success and it made a combined \$71 million in the domestic and international markets. In this respect, it served to offset his industrial reputation for presiding over a string of financial disappointments.

Friedkin followed up with *The Hunted* which again starred Jones who had forged a strong working relationship with the director. This time his co-star was another Oscar winning actor Benicio Del Toro (*The Usual Suspects* [1995], *Traffic* [2000], *21 Grams* [2003]). The picture was based on the exploits of a wilderness tracker and survivalist Tom Brown Junior. Although Brown had never engaged in combat, he claimed to have trained hundreds of Delta Force, Navy Seals and Special Operations' soldiers to track down and kill their prey. Along with developing these fighting skills, Brown claimed that he had attained spiritual or shamanic powers drawn from an Apache called Stalking Wolf who he knew as 'Grandfather'.

[6.21]

Friedkin found him a fascinating if flawed figure. He commissioned a television writer Art Monterastelli to adapt a screenplay that had been written by David and Peter Griffiths. This unproduced screenplay had been on the so-called 'blacklist' of highly regarded scripts in Hollywood. It was based on a chapter in Brown's autobiography *Case Files of the Tracker* (2003) entitled 'My Frankenstein'. This described an encounter in the tracker's past in which he had allegedly taken down a Special Forces sergeant who had gone AWOL.

[6.22]

The film was shot on location in Oregon Silver Falls Park, Mount Hood and the Pacific North West by the award-winning cinematographer Caleb Deschanel (*The Black Stallion* [1979], *The Right Stuff* [1983]). It was produced on a budget of \$55 million (some \$20 million of this sum was reported as going on Jones's salary). Brown acted as the technical advisor and Friedkin employed several military combat specialists to make the fight scenes more authentic. Jones and Del Toro were trained in the Philippine Sayoc Kali martial arts techniques which formed the basis of the climatic knife fights which occurred between the two leads.

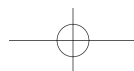
[6.23]

The narrative focused on the murderous rampage of a former Delta Force operator Aaron Hallam (Del Toro) who has become mentally unhinged due to his performance of covert operations. He kills two deer hunters in a ritualistic manner as he has become a delusional killing machine. Due to grisly nature of the murders, the authorities seek out L.T. Bonham (Jones) who had previously trained Hallam in order to apprehend the renegade assassin. While Hallam is initially caught by Bonham, the FBI are informed that he cannot be prosecuted due to the classified nature of the operations he has partaken in for the government.

[6.24]

Subsequently the former operative is to be transported to a detention centre by two security agents. However, in reality, they intend to kill Hallam

[6.25]





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to ensure his silence. Instead, the assassin kills them and escapes back to the wet and tangled woods. Ultimately, he is tracked down by Bonham who engages in a no-holds barred knife fight him. However, has the hunter become the hunted? Friedkin comments:

[6.26]

The film was structured as a cat-and-mouse chase with the cat and the mouse constantly changing places. I shaped it as modern riff on the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, wherein Abraham is ordered by God to sacrifice his own son as a test of his faith (Friedkin, 435).

[6.27]

While the film received some favourable reviews in terms of its staging, the action sequences, production and photography, it was mainly perceived as a rip-off of Sylvester Stallone's *First Blood* (1982). Like *The Hunted*, it had been shot in the Pacific North-West, and it introduced the character of the Vietnam War veteran and killing machine John Rambo. Subsequently, Stallone would resurrect Rambo and make several sequels including most notoriously *Rambo: First Blood II* (1985) in which Rambo would single-handedly 'win' the Vietnam War on the proviso of saving Prisoners of War in the 'Hanoi Hilton.

[6.28]

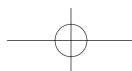
Despite high hopes for awards and nominations, the film eventually only made a worldwide total of \$45.5 million. The mixed outcomes drawn from Friedkin's studio ventures meant that he sought out independently produced features wherein he could have greater creative freedoms. Thus, it would be in his adaptation of two of the Pulitzer Prize winner Tracy Letts's plays – *Bug* (2006) and *Killer Joe* (2012) – that his cinematic reputation would be truly recovered.

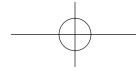
[6.29]

THE LAST OF THE INDEPENDENTS: *BUG AND KILLER JOE*

[6.30]

Friedkin was attracted to Letts's work after he had seen *Bug* in an off-Broadway performance at the Greenwich Village Barrow Scott Theatre in 2004. He believed that it was a powerful and arresting play that reminded him of Harold Pinter. It portrays the meeting up of an unhinged war veteran Peter with a lonely woman Agnes, who has lost her son and has been subject to the threats of an abusive ex-husband. The play is located in a single setting of a creepy Oklahoma motel room. After Peter and Agnes have sex, the drifter seeks to convince the divorcee that the room is being infested by a plague of invisible bugs which have planted there by the government. The couple engage in an increasingly horrific bout of paranoia and self-harm. They kill a man who claims to be a doctor who has been sent there from the mental institution that Peter has absconded from. Finally, in a joint suicide pact they douse themselves in petrol and set themselves alight.





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The play dealt with the blurring of illusion and reality. It contained themes of moral ambiguity, irrational fear, delusion and paranoid conspiracies. Therefore, Friedkin decided he wanted to make a film of what he conceived to be a pitch-black comedy. He felt that the claustrophobic setting lent itself to a cinematic treatment along the lines of *The Birthday Party* (or indeed, *The Exorcist*). Like Pinter, Letts's play focused upon one interior setting with a small number of characters. Friedkin optioned the rights for a year on the basis that the playwright wrote the screenplay. Further, he and Letts wanted to cast Michael Shannon (*8 Mile* [2002]) from the stage version to appear in the film.

[6.31]

In the event, Friedkin made a deal with the independent production company Lionsgate who's Vice-Chairman Michael Burns offered him \$4 million to make the film. This agreement was conducted on the basis that it would be marketed as a 'horror film from the director of *The Exorcist*'. However, he told Friedkin that he needed two stars to carry the picture. Burns wanted the little-known Shannon to be replaced by a higher profile actor. Conversely, the director and playwright decided to stick to their decision to retain their leading man. Shannon would go on to have a notable television and film career appearing in HBO's *Boardwalk Empire* (2010–2014) and Werner Herzog's *My Son, My Son What Have Ye Done* (2009). Further, he would be Oscar nominated in *Revolutionary Road* (2008) and *Nocturnal* (2016).

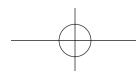
[6.32]

To offset their decision, they sought the actress Ashley Judd (*Heat* [1995], *Kiss the Girls* [1997]) to provide a star name as the female lead Agnes, along with the casting of the singer Harry Connick Junior in a key supporting role as her abusive husband. The director, writer and actors would all be paid on the basic minimum salaries as arbitrated by the film guilds. Although the movie took place in Oklahoma, it would be shot in southern Louisiana to take advantage of the favourable tax rebates offered there. For Friedkin it was a return to basics with a small and energetic crew. The main set was designed by Franco Carbone who had worked effectively on several low budget productions such as the horror film *Hostel* (2005).

[6.33]

Memorably, the film played to both an ecstatic and horrified response when it was premiered at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. It received a significant amount of critical praise in its grotesque presentation of violent self-harm. Roger Ebert commented that Judd and Shannon's manic intensity made him fear for the actors' sanity (Ebert 2006). Friedkin's unrelenting direction of his two leads and supporting cast was seen as a return to form from the filmmaker. He used close-ups, long takes and a range of tight camera angles to emphasise the claustrophobia. Subsequently, the picture was mass-marketed by Lionsgate and it made a small profit of \$8.1 million. However, Friedkin believed the film had been mishandled by the distributor:

[6.34]





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[6.35]

It's not a genre film, but marketing works in mysterious ways. They have to find a genre for it. 'This is a comedy. This is a melodrama. This is a love story. This is a horror film. This is an adventure film'. *Bug* doesn't fit easily into any of those categories (Douglas 2007)

[6.36]

In 2012, Friedkin followed up *Bug* with an adaptation of Letts's first play *Killer Joe*. This was another gothic black comedy, but this time it focused on a crime story set in the squalid back roads of Texas. It portrayed a tale wherein a dysfunctional father Ansel Smith and his drug-dealing son Chris (who is desperate for money to pay off of his debt to criminal Digger Soames) decide to hire a detective Joe, who moonlights as a contract killer, to make a hit on Ansel's ex-wife Adele so they cash in on her life insurance which is worth \$50,000. As they do not have the upfront money to pay Joe, he offers to do the job on the basis that he takes Ansel's odd and child-like daughter Dottie as a 'retainer' until the insurance is paid out.

[6.37]

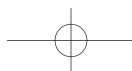
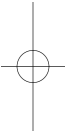
This chamber piece features a set of duplicitous 'trailer-trash' characters including Ansel's current wife Sharla. During the resulting carnage, they engage in an escalating series psychological mind-games, forms of sexual degradation (most especially when Joe forces the two-timing Sharla to perform a simulated fellatio on a Southern Fried chicken drumstick) and acts of extreme violence. For Friedkin, Letts's work chimed with him as:

[6.38]

We have the same worldview. We see the world as absurd and we see characters that embody both good and evil. We don't see people as totally heroic or idealistic. . . . What fascinates me about the characters Tracy's dramatized is the fact that there's the potential for great good and great evil in all of us. There are very few of us who couldn't commit either an act of great violence or an act of great charity (Peaty 2012).

[6.39]

Again, Friedkin's reputation with actors meant that he was able to attract a strong cast. The film included Emile Hirsh (*Into the Wild* [2007]) as Chris, Thomas Haden Church (*Sideways* [2004]) as Ansel, Gina Gershon (*Bound* [2005]) as Sharla and Juno Temple (*Notes on a Scandal* [2006]) as the ingénue Dottie. However, the most spectacular coup referred to the casting of the Romantic Comedy heartthrob Matthew McConaughey who sought out the role of the evil Joe. In particular, the actor had wanted to change the course of his career and had let his agents at Creative Artists Agency (CAA) know that he was looking for more edgy roles. *Killer Joe* would mark a turning point for McConaughey who would extent his range as the icily charismatic hit man. It led to the actor's so-called 'McConaissance' which enabled him to be considered for a wider range of films and television roles. These included his Oscar winning turn in *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), his memorable cameo in Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf on Wall Street* (2013), his





lead in Christopher Nolan’s *Interstellar* (2014) and his Emmy-nominated appearance in the first series of *True Detective* (2014–onwards).

[6.40]

The film was produced by Nicholas Chartier for his company Voltage Pictures on a budget of \$10 million. It was his second production after winning the Academy Award for Best Picture for *The Hurt Locker* (2009). Friedkin used many of his previous collaborators to make the film and it was shot by Deschanel and designed by Carbone. The picture was previewed at the Venice and Toronto 2011 film festivals where it proved to be a critical success. Friedkin’s direction was praised for its kinetic visual design and for strong performances he had elicited from his cast, most especially his leading man.

However, several critics were more circumspect about the lurid subject matter and the vicious cruelty expressed in Letts’ screenplay. The dark material would fall foul of the Motion Picture Association of America’s (MPAA) Classification and Ratings Award (CARA) board which slammed the film with an NC-17 rating. This meant that its box office chances were negligible. In turn, Friedkin withdrew the film from the CARA appeals process. The film was shown on a limited engagement in an unrated version across seventy-five American screens. Consequently, it only made a box office total of \$4.7 million.

[6.41]

Despite this financial setback, for Friedkin, the film and the controversy which surrounded it meant that his critical stock continued to rise. He was interviewed at a range of events as a luminary of the Hollywood film industry. While making reference to Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock and the European New Waves of the 1960s, with the exception of Paul Thomas Anderson (*Boogie Nights* [1998], *There Will Be Blood* [2007]) Wes Anderson (*The Royal Tenenbaums* [2001], *The Grand Budapest Hotel* [2014]) and the Coen Brothers (*Blood Simple* [1985], *Fargo* [1995], *No Country for Old Men* [2007]) the director lamented the current state of American filmmaking. Moreover, Friedkin received several plaudits for his direction including the prestigious Saturn Best Independent Film Award. In tandem, the renewed interest in the director went hand-in-hand with the re-appraisal of his most neglected and ambitious venture from the 1970s – *Sorcerer*

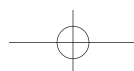
[6.42]

SORCERER – A FORGOTTEN FILM WHICH TAKES ON A CULT STATUS WITH CINEPHILES

[6.43]

After the failure of *Sorcerer* at the US and international box office the film was quietly forgotten. Like other flops it was consigned to the studio vaults for the accountants to write off and it did not receive any further theatrical rereleases. However, by the 1980s with the advent of the burgeoning home video market enabling films that had performed poorly at the US Box Office

[6.44]





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such as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) to find new audiences, *Sorcerer's* disappearance from the public view appeared to be all the more conspicuous. For instance, when Nat Segaloff interviewed Walon Green for his biography on Friedkin *Hurricane Billy* (1990), he commented that *Sorcerer* had become one of the great 'cult films as it was entirely unavailable on VHS' (Green 1988). The biographer told the screenwriter that the release of a video version of the film had fallen foul of the 'pissing contest' over the rights between Universal and Paramount. Green replied, 'You know something? It's never been on network TV, either' (Green 1988). Further Segaloff recalls:

[6.45]

When I was writing the *Hurricane Billy* book a friend of mine managed to record *Sorcerer* off the Z-Channel, a curated movie station in LA, and he posted me a copy. If anybody was on the fence about letting me interview them, a pirated copy of *Sorcerer* usually did the trick (Segaloff 2019).

[6.46]

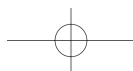
Interestingly, the film was briefly pastiched in a 1992 episode of *The Simpsons* (1989–onwards) entitled 'Mr Plow' wherein in a parody of the rope bridge scene Homer Simpson drives through treacherous mountain roads. Eventually, Universal released a Digital Versatile Disc (DVD) copy of the film in 1998. However, it was transferred from a fading print which meant that the colour timing was badly affected creating a drained-out picture. Further, the subpar copy presented *Sorcerer* in the wrong aspect ratio of 4:3 rather than the 1.85:1 Academy wide screen ratio that the film was shot in. Along with the poor picture, the sound mix was muddy and distorted. Moreover, Friedkin commented that it had been his only film that he had not personally overseen when making the transfer from a 35mm print to a digital copy. Finally, the DVD did not contain any extras in terms of interviews or features made in relation to the film.

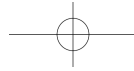
[6.47]

However, despite the low quality of the DVD, *Sorcerer* started to attain a second life on a series of retrospective film websites, bulletin boards, blogs, downloads, Facebook and Twitter platforms. For instance, in 2008, the film critic Sheila O'Malley wrote a glowing review of *Sorcerer* on her blog 'The Sheila Variations' claiming that, 'It's a masterpiece. . . . It just came out in the wrong year' (O'Malley, 2008). Elsewhere in 2013, an Australian film journalist Mark Fraser wrote a long and detailed blog which contained a critique about the production, the critical reception and the mishandling of the film by CIC in its international release (Fraser 2013). This analysis damned Vincent Canby's arguments about cutting the film and contended that they had acted as blue print for the wretched foreign version of the film (see Chapter Five):

[6.48]

There's a person missing from the index of William Friedkin's 2013 autobiographical memoir *The Friedkin Connection*. And while it might be a slight





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exaggeration to say his name is conspicuous by its absence, he nevertheless played a significant, albeit indirect, role in the butchering of what the director has said is the film by which he would most like to be remembered. When Friedkin's \$20 million-plus *Sorcerer* first came out in June 1977, the late Vincent Canby (1924–2000) – *The New York Times*' leading movie critic circa 1969–1993 – was one of a number of influential American reviewers who was eager to quickly write the movie off as a costly flop (Fraser).

In particular, a dedicated fan of the film and advertising copywriter in Raleigh, North Carolina Toby Roan established the *Sorcerer Blog* in 2012. This online resource was designed as a digital valentine to the film which Roan remembered seeing on its first run on 24 June 1977. The blog served as a makeshift archive to carry news, interviews, articles and photos about the film. Roan has noted that the film received a poor reception as it was deemed to have failed to meet expectations, but should be seen independently in relation to own merits. He has described how there had been a strong reaction to his blog, not least from the director himself who tweeted, 'Toby . . . I can't thank you enough for this. It's invaluable. Please Stay in Touch' (Roan 2012).

[6.49]

Another turning point occurred when the screenwriter Josh Olson provided an appreciation of the movie on the director Joe Dante's '*Trailers from Hell*' website in 2007. Olson argued that *Sorcerer* was the equal, if not the superior, of Clouzot's brilliant *The Wages of Fear*. He expressed his admiration of the tone of despair which permeated the film. While acknowledging that Steve McQueen would have been a compelling lead, he contended that Roy Scheider was 'stellar' in the part of Scanlon. Olson felt that the actor had the appropriate rough edge quality to convey the character's inner turmoil and desperation. Similarly, he commented upon the location filmmaking in which every shot emphasises the sweaty humidity of the unforgiving jungle. Therefore, the screenwriter felt that film had deserved to be seen by a huge audience. In, praising the film as Friedkin's masterpiece, Olson commented:

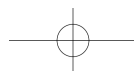
[6.50]

I'm going to take a ride on a very bumpy road with a movie that should have been a smash hit but wasn't thanks to a big hairy alien, some talking robots and a wide-eyed farm boy named Luke Skywalker. This is William Friedkin's *Sorcerer*. In 1977, there probably were not a lot of directors in Hollywood who were much hotter than William Friedkin. He'd made *The French Connection*, followed by *The Exorcist* – both of which had been phenomenal hits. And he followed those up with a film that I'm sorry beat me, sue me, even sent me all the hate-mail you want that I think is his best (Olson 2007).

[6.51]

Finally, Olson contemplated that he liked to believe that in a parallel universe Friedkin's film had been a game-changer. In this world, he would be presenting a trailer about a little-known cult science fiction film – *Star Wars*; Hollywood had been making smart, edgy movies for the last thirty

[6.52]





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years; there would be a full literacy rate; world peace and hunger would be a distant memory from the past Olson concluded that *Sorcerer* is a ‘tight and taut film which demonstrated the director at the top of his game.’

[6.53]

When you do the work and it’s not good – you do know it. You may not know it at the time, yet you can look back it and see it. But when you . . . do work of such a high calibre and you end up getting hammered the way this film did, I cannot imagine how frustrating that must have been for Friedkin. It’s a great film and worthy of your attention (Olson).

[6.54]

As a champion of the film, Olson was invited by the American Cinematheque Chief Programmer Grant Moninger to host a special screening of a new 35mm print of *Sorcerer* made by Paramount, along with *The Exorcist*, on 23 January 2011 at the Aero Theatre, Santa Monica. This was part of a two-day tribute to the director entitled ‘Stranglehold: The Gripping Films of William Friedkin’ who appeared with Olson on stage for a fifty-minute question and answer (Q and A) session between the showings of his films. *Sorcerer* was described as being Friedkin’s ‘most visually awesome film’.

[6.55]

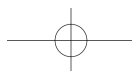
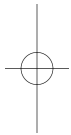
Olson believed that Moninger had engaged in a clever programming by showing *Sorcerer* before *The Exorcist* and asking him to conduct the Q and A with Friedkin between the films. This meant that the audience would have to come and see *Sorcerer* and then *The Exorcist* thereby ensuring that there would be a full house. Before, the film was shown the screenwriter asked the audience if they had seen it before and only a few hands went up. However, on seeing the action-adventure thriller, Olsen then asked them if they thought it was a masterpiece and the whole audience put their hands up. He commented:

[6.56]

I felt that Billy (Friedkin) was still anxious about the reception of *Sorcerer*. Once the audience gave Billy a standing ovation when he came up onto the stage, his attitude towards moving to get the film seen changed on that evening. I think it was then that Billy felt that the film was an artistic success rather than failure. I remember the look on his face. . . . Billy now says he always considered *Sorcerer* to be his masterpiece. So I am not going to speculate on his ego but I think that the showing was important for him in terms of audience reception (Olson 2019).

[6.57]

At the end Friedkin announced to the rapt audience that he would be working on a remastered Blu-Ray version of the film later that year. However, he was to discover that when Cine Family – a film society including 25,000 members – had wanted to show the film they received an e-mail from Paramount stating, ‘We no longer control this title and we don’t know who does’ (Pfeiffer 2014, 31). The head of the organisation Hadrian Belove notified Friedkin that *Sorcerer* had been arbitrarily withdrawn from being shown





by film societies and universities by Universal and Paramount Studios for copyright reasons. In particular, neither company would take any responsibility for the ownership of the film. Instead, they placed the film into a status of legal limbo by stating that the film had been produced under the aegis of their joint international distribution company CIC which had been defunct for many years (see Chapters Two and Five).

Friedkin expressed his belief that this decision was determined by the studios' strategy to destroy their filmic legacies. He felt that they only wanted audiences to seek out their new rather than older titles. Moreover, as both studios had been bought and sold on several occasions, he believed that the armies of lawyers who worked for them had probably buried away all the legal files pertaining to the ownership of the film. Therefore, in April 2012 to ascertain who held domestic ownership on the picture and if there were any royalty payments owing for its appearance on home video, Friedkin pursued a law-suit to find out which company held onto the rights for *Sorcerer*. He commented that he was not suing the studios for any financial gain but rather to keep the film being shown within the public domain. Friedkin maintained that any profits would be used to contribute to the preservation of motion pictures (Pfeiffer 2014, 31).

[6.58]

**SORCERER CONTINUES TO GROW IN STATURE – THE
RESOLUTION OF THE LAWSUIT AND THE RELEASE
OF THE REMASTERED BLU-RAY**

[6.59]

The *Sorcerer* suit went to the Ninth District Court of Appeals in California whose judge ordered a settlement should be arranged between Friedkin, Universal and Paramount. In March 2013, through a process of 'discovery' wherein the studios brought forward the appropriate legal papers it was shown that both studios only held a twenty-five year lease on the film. In the meantime, Warner Brothers had wanted to take full control of the film's copyright. In the legal fall-out, Paramount retained the theatrical and television rights while Warners took over its ownership for the Blu-Ray and DVD release and the on line streaming of the picture.

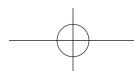
[6.60]

Warners supported Friedkin in the remastering of the digital version of the film. Friedkin collaborated with Ned Price, the Chief Preservation Officer at the Warners' Technical Operations, the sound mixer Aaron Levy and the colourist Bryan McMahan who had overseen the digital timing of several of the director's other films. They restored the film by making a 4K film resolution scan from the original 35mm camera negative. Most especially, they wanted to rectify the colour timing and the sound mix. Price commented that:

[6.61]

I was amazed at the brilliance of the original photography. Up to this point, I had only seen poor quality 35mm theatrical prints made from inferior subtitled

[6.62]





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dupe negatives. Working from the 4K scan allowed us to free up all the information contained in the original negatives. The soundtrack was restored from the original 35mm 4-track stereo masters which were in remarkably good condition and contained full dynamic range (Warner Brothers 2014).

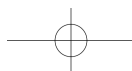
[6.63] Therefore, the High Definition (HD) Blu-Ray which was released on 22 April 2014 was digitally enhanced to the complete satisfaction of the filmmakers. A delighted Friedkin claimed that this was the best ever copy of the film he had seen in terms of its visuals and soundtrack. At a showing of *Sorcerer* at the TCL (formerly Grauman) Chinese Theatre in Hollywood he publicly thanked Price, Levy and McMahan, along with Walon Green, for their efforts.

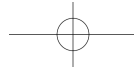
[6.64] The fully restored Blu-Ray version was accompanied by a booklet explaining the film's production and re-evaluation, along with an interview of Friedkin conducted by the Danish-American director Nicolas Winding Refn (*Pusher* [1995], *Drive* [2014]), Subsequently, it proved to be commercially successful reaching 'Number One in the Drama' and 'Number Two in the Action Adventure' Categories on Amazon's Film and Television sales site. This meant that Warner Brothers Home Video also decided to release a copy of the film on DVD.

[6.65] In tandem with *Sorcerer's* home video release, Friedkin was invited to be the guest of honour at the Danish CPH PIX film festival. There were several highlights at the event. The first referred to the showing of the film in its digital version with a short introduction from the director. Second, Friedkin was interviewed in front of an audience by Winding Refn for a filmmakers' master class. Finally, Tangerine Dream played their electronic score for *Sorcerer* for the first time live in Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens Concert Hall on 3 April 2014. Friedkin appeared on the stage at 10.30pm in the evening to introduce and compliment the band for their music on the film. In turn, the late Edgar Froese (who died in 2015) led the band out to play a two hour set that not only included the forty-four minutes of the soundtrack but another thirty minutes of previously unreleased material (Mullaney 2014).¹

[6.66] Subsequently, the soundtrack has been acknowledged as a standard-bearer and influential benchmark which brought synthesizers to the forefront of US film music. On 17 January 2020 a remastered vinyl copy (in jungle green and black) of the soundtrack album was released by Waxwork records in the US. The long-player (LP) was accompanied by deluxe packaging, new artwork by Tony Stella and liner notes written by Friedkin who describes how he felt a synchronicity between himself and Froese so that the 'music has always remained relevant and inspirational' (Gilchrist 2020). As Waxwork records' noted:

[6.67] Before the explosion of electronic and synthesizer based film scoring prevalent in the 1980's in movies such as *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, and before





the explosive modern day interest and revival of successful synth-scored TV series' and movies such as *Stranger Things* and *Drive*, the music to *Sorcerer* by Tangerine Dream is a wildly influential blueprint and example of how movie scoring could be approached (Waxwork Records, 2020).

THE CRITICAL RE-EVALUATION OF *SORCERER* AND
FRIEDKIN ON THE FESTIVAL CIRCUIT – SPECIAL
SCREENINGS AND A SHORT THEATRICAL RELEASE

[6.68]

The Blu-Ray version of *Sorcerer* was received as the lost masterpiece of the New Hollywood era. It was considered to be a 'must see' movie from *Entertainment Weekly* and it appeared as the 'Pick of the Week' for the *Los Angeles Times* film critic Kenneth Turan. Elsewhere, the *DVDTalk.com* reviewer Adam Tyner gave the film a very high recommendation while commenting that it was 'unnervingly and unrelentingly suspenseful' and 'A hell of a thriller' (Warner Brothers 2014). *Ain't It Cool News'* Harry Knowles noted that the:

[6.69]

Sorcerer that you see before you is not ever what has been in cinemas till now. William Friedkin personally oversaw the restoration and sound work for this spectacular presentation of what I consider to be one of the many masterpieces of William Friedkin (Knowles).

[6.70]

Friedkin was interviewed about *Sorcerer* by Lee Pfeiffer the editor of *Cinema Retro* in spring 2014 edition of the magazine. Within this extensive interview, the director explained about the production, the themes, the reception and the restoration of the film. He indicated his pleasure that the film would be finally placed in a wider circulation. Pfeiffer noted while he had enjoyed the film on his original viewing, he had not been overwhelmed by its narrative or vision. However, on repeated showings he became convinced that it represented 'American filmmaking at its finest' and that:

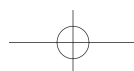
[6.71]

The good news for Friedkin is that . . . a new generation of film fans, critics and scholars have been rediscovering *Sorcerer* and they like what they have seen. The reappraisal of the film in some quarters as an overlooked classic has given Friedkin the last laugh, if you will. It has inspired him to go to great lengths to ensure the film is finally accessible and fully restored (Pfeiffer 2014, 26).

[6.72]

These critical plaudits had been preceded by Quentin Tarantino's placing of *Sorcerer* on his top ten films list in the BFI 2012 Greatest Ever Film Poll. Tarantino's decision to include the film increased its legitimacy and visibility. He has continued to champion the film when he appeared in Francesco Zippel's documentary *Friedkin Uncut* (2018). The filmmaker, while arguing

[6.73]



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that Robert Blake would have made the ideal Scanlon, contends that *Sorcerer* (along with *Apocalypse Now* and *Aguirre: Wrath of God*) continues to remind him that despite his own difficulties when making a film such as *Kill Bill* (2003) that:

[6.74]

No! You are just making a movie. It may be a little rougher and taking you a long time to do it. . . . Nevertheless I'm not William Friedkin in Brazil (sic) or wherever the hell he was shooting in the jungle and doing *Sorcerer*. . . . The Bridge scene is one of the great suspense moments in cinema. It's one of the great filmings of a sequence. The imagery itself. . . . The editing [mean] *Sorcerer* to me is one of the greatest movies ever made (Zippel 2018).

[6.75]

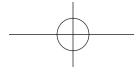
In May 2013, Friedkin held the world premiere of the restored film when he received a Venice Film Festival Golden Lion award in recognition of his directorial achievements. The Italian horror maestro Dario Argento (*Suspiria* [1977], *Inferno* [1980], *Tenebrae* [1982]) praised it as 'You can immediately feel a dark almost desperate atmosphere with characters almost insane . . . (as) . . . there is a constant anxiety in the film that gets you right away' (Zippel 2018). On 4 December 2013, Friedkin was invited by the prestigious Parisian Cinematheque Francais as the guest of honour at the *Toute la mémoire du Monde* (*All the World's Memories*) Festival where he provided a master class on *Sorcerer*.

[6.76]

Similarly, there were showings of the movie at the 2014 Sitges film festival in Catalonia and at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in the Czech Republic where Friedkin received the Crystal Globe for Outstanding Artistic Contribution to World Cinema. In 2015, Friedkin was invited to present a screening of *Sorcerer* at a special Directors Guild of America (DGA) event on 24 March. This showing of the film occurred at the DGA's Los Angeles Film Theatre complex where it was preceded by an introduction the Special Projects Chair Jeremy Kagan who called the film 'an overlooked masterpiece' and it was followed by a Q and A with Friedkin and a reception (DGA 2015).

[6.77]

Subsequently, the picture was shown at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016 in which Friedkin presented it as a classic film (Rilley 2016). In the UK, Mark Kermode presented a screening of the film in Plaza Cinema in Truro, Cornwall and arranged for Friedkin to record a special message to introduce *Sorcerer*. Simultaneously, the film was shown in the United States and often accompanied by Q and As with Friedkin at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York, the Warren Old Town Theatre in Wichita, Kansas, the Alamo Drafthouse in Texas, and the Nashville Public Library. It was reviewed on a second occasion on the *Trailers from Hell* website by the director Bernard Rose who concluded:



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It feels like the best movie you have seen from the 1970s. In its original version it's certainly the missing masterpiece from that era of truly great films. And it rounds out a trilogy of masterpieces that Friedkin made during that period which are *The French Connection*, *The Exorcist* and *Sorcerer*. *Sorcerer* is possibly the best . . . as when he gets to deliver action sequences, they are the greatest you will ever see (Rose 2017).

[6.78]

Sorcerer's critical stature continued to grow internationally. The film had enjoyed a strong response in France where critics including Jean Baptiste Thoret and Samuel Blumenthal commented that it was Friedkin's masterpiece (Thoret 2015; Blumenthal 2018, 180). A French Master's student Florian Dejean based at the University of Toulouse produced a critical theory based dissertation on the film entitled *Sorcerer: A Story of a Failure* (Dejean 2016). In Britain, it received further praise from reviewers including Kermode on BBC Radio 5 Live on the *Simon Mayo Show* and Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian* when it was released in a new print on a limited theatrical run in the autumn of 2017 (Kermode 2017b; Bradshaw 2017). Kermode remarked that:

[6.79]

It is one of the most gruellingly intense; stripped down, weirdly mean-spirited, absolutely edge of your seat, nihilistic thriller that American cinema has made in the past fifty years (Kermode 2017b).

[6.80]

The film was shown at the NFT, the Curzon Bloomsbury, Home Cinema in Manchester and the IFI Cinema in Dublin in the Autumn of 2017. It was accompanied by an interview of Friedkin about *Sorcerer* by Kermode in the BFI's December 2017 *Sight and Sound* called the 'Road to Perdition'. In tandem, the British film critic opened up a blog from cinemagoers who admired the film. One contributor compared it to the work of another great French auteur Jean-Pierre Melville, while another praised John Box's production design (Kermode 2017d).

[6.81]

It was during this period that Stephen King was invited by the BFI to pick his favourite eight films. He included several horror films including *The Night of the Demon* (1959), *The Village of the Damned* (1960), *Duel* (1971), *The Changeling* (1979) and Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955). However, on being asked what his favourite film was the horror master replied:

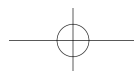
[6.82]

My favourite film of all time – this may surprise you – is *Sorcerer*, William Friedkin's remake of the great Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Wages of Fear*. Some may argue that the Clouzot film is better; I beg to disagree (King 2017).

[6.83]

Simultaneously, *Sorcerer* became the object of attention on numerous podcasts including *The Podwits*, *The Projection Booth* and *The Test of Time*. In receiving the many plaudits, the director maintained his dry sense of

[6.84]





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humour and his perspective on the film. The reappraisal led to him agreeing to collaborate with the French critic Samuel Blumenfeld in a book *Sorcerer: Sur Le Toit Du Monde* (Blumenfeld 2018). This French language monograph contained information about the background and nature of the film's production. It included interviews with the director, (Souad) Amidou, Walon Green, Luis Llosa, Bud Smith, Mark Johnson, Randy Jurgensen and Patrick Gordon. The book provided a range of rare photographs taken from the set and details on the arduous shoot. It contained a short forward with a quote from Tarantino reinforcing the ambition that Friedkin had shown in making the film (Blumenfeld, 3).

[6.85] Similarly, Zippel's documentary provided interview material, most notably from Green who remembered the opportunities which Friedkin and he had taken, 'We had feeling that we'd never a chance to do this again . . . so let's just go for it' (Zippel 2018). Therefore, the film's resurrection has served to reinforce Nat Segaloff's early recognition of it as a masterpiece. Friedkin's biographer while working as a reviewer for the local nightly *Boston News MTWTF Show* had contacted the director in 1977 to comment that:

[6.86] *Sorcerer* works on every level that a great film must occupy . . . thank you for the ballsiest, most consummate application for film theme, style and content since *French Connection* or for that matter, *Citizen Kane*, Great work!' (Segaloff 1977)

[6.87] Segaloff has continued to champion the film arguing that it contains Friedkin's finest work with great performances from Scheider and the other actors. Moreover, as he has commented:

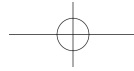
[6.88] We may never know why *Sorcerer* failed. Certainly time has venerated it. One is tempted to quote John Frankenheimer who, when complimented on *Seconds* remarked that the film went from being a flop to being a classic without ever becoming a hit (Segaloff 2019).

[6.89] WILLIAM FRIEDKIN'S FILMS AND
THE CONTEMPORARY ZEITGEIST

[6.90] *Sorcerer's* renaissance represented the growing realisation that Friedkin remains an important figure in the pantheon of influential US filmmakers. Although he has decried the notion that the 1970s directors represented a 'new wave' in American filmmaking, Friedkin belongs to a generation of auteurs who sought to redefine cinema in terms of content, themes and style. As his long-term collaborator Bud Smith commented:

[6.91] I can't praise Billy Friedkin any higher than I already have as being a filmmaker, because I've worked with a lot different guys now, and I've never worked





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with anyone who's more dedicated or intense in making a movie or believing in what he's doing at the time of making a film (Smith 1988).

Most especially, Friedkin has continued to make films which for, good or bad, imparted his viewpoint on the 'crooked timber' of human imperfection. Even during his fallow years, Segaloff contends that Friedkin remained a good director despite choosing or being assigned to substandard material. He compares Friedkin's career path of another key 1970s US auteur Michael Ritchie:

[6.92]

Who made great films in the 1970s such as *Downhill Racer* (1970), *The Candidate* (1972), *Smile* (1975) and *Prime Cut* (1972) then could not get to make the films he wanted to do. When I spoke to him after *The Island* (1980), which he knew I didn't like, I asked him why he didn't make films like *Smile* and *The Candidate* any more. He said, 'Because they won't let me'. (Segaloff 2019)

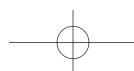
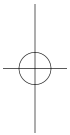
[6.93]

As Friedkin has noted the zeitgeist goes in cycles, and he has become 'hip' again amongst a younger set of cine-literate directors, critics and filmmakers. Along with Tarantino, filmmakers as diverse as Wes Anderson, Edgar Wright (*Shaun of the Dead* [2004], *Baby Driver* [2017]), Damien Chazelle (*La La Land* [2017], *First Man* [2018]), Guillermo Del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth* [2006], *The Shape of Water* [2017]) Joe Carnahan (*Narc* [2002], *The Grey* [2011]) Spike Lee (*Do the Right Thing* [1988], *BlacKkKlansman* [2018]) and Katherine Bigelow (*The Hurt Locker* [2008], *Zero Dark Thirty* [2012]) have been influenced by Friedkin. Critically, he has continued to be championed by Kermode, Thoret and Blumenfeld who comments that Friedkin's film stand out for being unique and different as he 'began as a radical filmmaker and has remained a radical filmmaker (Zippel 2018).

[6.94]

They have been attracted to Friedkin's work as it relates to the moral ambiguities which exist within the human psyche. As he has commented the two most interesting characters in history for him are 'Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler'. For Friedkin, Jesus and Hitler are example of extremes in regard to the former's capacity to lift up the spirits of humanity as against the latter's evil incarnate. Therefore, he is aware of the constant struggle between rationality versus irrationality and the fears, obsessions and ambiguities which exist between them. The director is concerned with the double-life of characters who maintain secrets within their duplicitous natures. His fellow Chicago filmmaker and school mate Philip Kaufman (*The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid* [1972], *The Wanderers* [1979], *The Right Stuff* [1983]) contends that the 'politics' of Friedkin's films come from the 'wild, independence of his characters' who operate both within and outside societal institutions and norms. According to Segaloff:

[6.95]





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[6.96]

Billy is a street kid who came out of local television and documentaries to make feature films. He is a guerrilla filmmaker who did not go to college or Film School such as UCLA or USC or come out of the Roger Corman exploitation route of film-making. He is an 'outsider' who also became an 'insider'. (Segaloff 2019)

[6.97]

This appreciation has been further reflected in the re-evaluation in some other Friedkin films, perhaps most notably with *The Boys in the Band* and *Cruising*. In the case of the former, it has been considered as a groundbreaking, queer classic and was subject to a revival in interest when released on Blu-Ray in 2018. In addition, an edited volume of a series of essays were commissioned by Matt Bell and entitled *The Boys in the Band: Flashpoints of Cinema, History, and Queer Politics* (2018). Further, *Cruising* has been seen by critics such as Kermode as a work of superior cinematic prowess with outstanding cinematography and a score arranged again by Jack Nitzsche, as he had on *The Exorcist*, which combines electronic, rock, punk, disco and funk themes. The film was released on Blu Ray in 2019 and included a new commentary of Friedkin being interviewed by Kermode.

[6.98]

With reference to the revival of interest in Friedkin's cinematic vision, the director wrote his autobiography *The Friedkin Connection: A Memoir* in 2013. Outside of reflecting upon his life and career, he considered the influences that had shaped his approach to filmmaking and the constant struggle between good and evil (Friedkin 2013, 474). Further, Friedkin made reference to his secondary career in directing well-received operas productions such as *Aida* in 2005 and *Il Trittico* in 2009.

[6.99]

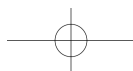
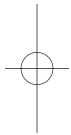
In turn, he became subject to the aforementioned film biography entitled *Friedkin Uncut* (2018) which was directed by the Italian documentarian Francesco Zippel and premiered at the 2018 Venice Film Festival. Zippel had worked as a translator and production assistant on Friedkin's 2017 documentary about a real-life exorcist Father Gabriel Amouth entitled *The Devil and Father Amouth* and co-written with Kermode. In such a manner, he had been able to gain access to Friedkin and filmed several days' worth of interviews with him, along with the previously cited material with Tarantino.

[6.100]

The documentary contained other interviews with Anderson, Wright, Chazelle and Blumenthal, along with Friedkin contemporaries Coppola, Kaufman, Argento and Walter Hill (*The Driver* [1978], *The Warriors* [1979], *Southern Comfort* [1981]). In addition, several actors who worked with Friedkin were included such as Ellen Burstyn, Michael Shannon, Juno Temple, Matthew McConaughey, William L. Peterson and Willem Dafoe, along with associates such as Green, Deschanel and Jurgensen.

[6.101]

For all intents and purposes, Zippel's documentary indicated how Friedkin's cinematic obsession of the dark recesses of the human condition when confronted with overwhelming odds of fate or faith was once again in vogue.





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Moreover, in a period of political disillusion and volatility his principal themes concerning the contradiction of human nature seemed ever more relevant. At the end of the film, the director reflected upon his iconoclastic philosophy on the world:

Fuck them and the horse they rode in on! And the ship that brought them other here and the dog that walks behind them. Fuck them all except nine people! Fuck them all except six road guides, two pallbearers and one to count cadence (Zippel 2018).

[6.102]

CONCLUSION

[6.103]

This chapter has shown how William Friedkin’s *Sorcerer* has been reappraised as a major film from a key US film director. Although the film had disappeared off the public radar for many years, it has re-emerged in the cine-literate popular consciousness. In part this stemmed from the rise of the social media as a new forum for knowledge and interest concerning films that were deemed to forgotten or obscure. In particular, Toby Roan’s *Sorcerer* blog has operated as a crucial online resource containing many artefacts and details on the film. On several occasions, Friedkin praised the public support that he had received from online sources and commented that the film had finally found its audience. This he found truly remarkable as the film had been for all intents and purposes ‘dead’:

[6.104]

A film I made in 1977, which is about 37 years ago, has now come back like Lazarus because of the new technology. . . . I am thrilled that I am still alive to see my films play to new and future generations (Friedkin 2014a)

[6.105]

Further, it indicates the significant changes in the cycles of cinematic fashions so that Friedkin and films have been subject to a major critical re-evaluation. Not least his films belong to an era in which filmic experimentation and narrative daring were facilitated due to the initial success of filmmakers such as Coppola, Ashby, Penn and Scorsese. These cultural and political imperatives have led to a growing consensus amongst critics and audiences alike that Friedkin’s dark vision had served to create several masterpieces in US filmmaking.

[6.106]

More specifically, *Sorcerer* was seen as the third great film in Friedkin’s spectacular run in the 1970s. Thomas Clagett in the introduction of his book *William Friedkin: Films of Aberration, Obsession and Reality* (2002) has stated that it compared favourably with the work of Orson Welles, David Lean and Sam Peckinpah (Clagett 2002). Therefore, the film has been appreciated for its brilliant filmmaking, ambitious storytelling, thrilling drama and stunts, and its outstanding electronic score. As Segaloff comments:

[6.107]





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[6.108]

Friedkin is acutely aware that as filmmaker and storyteller how to get from point A to point B. He is aware that a film needs a clear narrative line and construction upon which to make his wider statements. In his best films there a tight and effective development of the narrative such as *The French Connection*, *The Exorcist* and *Sorcerer* (Segaloff 2019).

[6.109]

The growing reputation of *Sorcerer* has seen it being venerated by Tarantino, King, Kermode, Thoret and Blumenthal alike. It has become widely available via Blu-Ray, DVD and online streaming alongside being shown on network television. The 4G digital version of film has played on short theatrical runs, been revived at festivals and appeared on special showings. *Sorcerer* has been subject to a dedicated book by Blumenfeld and was given a principle amount of time for consideration in Zippel's documentary.

[6.110]

This interest in *Sorcerer* coincided with a reputational up-turn for the director. With the success of his later work including *Bug* and *Killer Joe* and the reconsideration of films such as *Sorcerer*, *Cruising* and to a lesser extent *To Live and Die in LA*, Friedkin's position in the pantheon of influential American filmmakers appears to be assured. Moreover, the director and his works have appeared in a range of books, monographs, documentaries and studies. This was further accompanied by a documentary called *Leap of Faith* (2019) made by Alexander O. Philippe which featured Friedkin talking about *The Exorcist*. Within this in-depth analysis, Friedkin reflected on his influences including Carl Theodor Dreyer and Caravaggio, as well as interrogating the obsessions which had defined his filmmaking career (Blyth 2019, 78). In tandem, Christopher Lane edited a series of Friedkin's published and unpublished interviews in *William Friedkin Interviews* (2020) for the University of Mississippi.

[6.111]

Therefore, it appears that after forty years that the film has become fully appreciated and has truly found its audience. This level of interest in the director and his film has led to it being praised for its narrative construction, bleak characterisation, real-life effects, and the epic and daring direction from Friedkin. As Friedkin's fellow filmmaker Walter Hill comments, 'In a lot of ways I think it is a more perfect film than the previous two' (*The French Connection* and *The Exorcist*) (Zippel 2018). Finally, as the screenwriter Walon Green concludes:

[6.112]

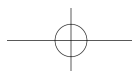
When I saw it (*Sorcerer*) the last time in Grauman's Chinese Theatre I thought this is a damn good movie. There is no need to change anything (Zippel 2018)

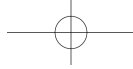
[6.113]

NOTES

[6n1]

1. Friedkin was interviewed about Edgar Froese when the leader of Tangerine Dream died in 2015 from a pulmonary embolism. Within this extensive interview, he informed the interviewer Fred Passaro that he had received a complete recording of the Copenhagen concert

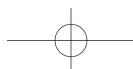
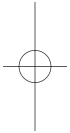




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which had been the last time he had met Froese, Further, he reviewed his use of music within his films with reference to Wang Chung and his own tastes concerning his likes for classical music, Miles Davis, Dave Brubeck, Gil Scott-Heron, Isaac Hayes, Led Zeppelin, The Who and Tool. For further details, see Passaro 2015.



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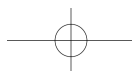
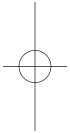
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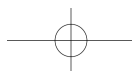
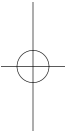
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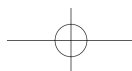
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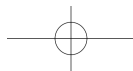
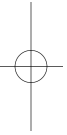
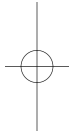
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