tion. At times, the device worked similarly in the Left movies, but more often the films used the discrepancy between the hero's self-image and reality simply for comedy. Thus, most of the Left's characters were at times bunglers whose botches were funny. The Graduate couldn't remember what name to use in a hotel where he met Mrs. Robinson. Clyde held up a bank that folded; the Wild Bunch shot up a town for a sack of lead washers; and Butch and Sundance couldn't remember the Spanish orders for a holdup in Bolivia. McCabe, in particular, was far from his self-projection. The movie's opening sequence, with McCabe mysteriously arriving, barely visible under an enormous fur coat, ominous, projected, as Diane Jacobs observed, an image of McCabe "as he would like to be seen."[17] But the rest of the film moved steadily away from that idealization. McCabe lost consistently at cards and failed in his advances to Mrs. Miller, who punctured his balloon: "Hey, you know if you wanna make out you're such a fancy dude, you might wear something besides that cheap jockey club cologne." And more tauntingly, "You think small because you're afraid of thinking big."

Occasionally these disillusionments slid past comedy into scenes that raised more explicitly the implications of the gap between myth and fact. In *Cool Hand Luke*, for example, Luke's buddies tried to cheer up the recaptured hero with his own mythic photograph, only to hear the real story:

KOKO: Luke? . . . We got the picture! See?
DICK: A pair of beauties [the women with Luke in picture]. Best I ever
    seen.
TATOO: You really know how to pick 'em.
STEVE: Tell us about 'em. What were they like?
LUKE: Picture's a phony. . . . I had it made up for you guys.
KOKO: A phony! Whatta you mean, a phony?
GAMBLER: We saw the broads.
DICK: Yeah. Did you have them both at once or—
LUKE: It's a phony. Made it just for you guys.
STEVE: Aw, come on. We saw it all.
TATOO: The champagne.
TRAMP: Some life.
FIXER: You really had it made.
LUKE: Nothin'. I had nothin', made nothin'. Couple towns, couple bosses.
    Laughed out loud one day and got turned in.

Koko: But . . . but. . . .
Luke: Stop beatin' on it! That's all there was. Listen. Open your eyes. Stop beatin' it. And stop feedin' off me. Now get out of the way. Give me some air.

In general, however, the Left films did not try for a Godardian alienation. They rarely encouraged (or allowed) the audience to withdraw its sympathy from the protagonists. Instead, they celebrated the outlaw heroes' lifestyle—supposedly outmoded by the frontier's closure, supposedly revealed as a role assumed by otherwise empty people—as an analogously possible response to the events of the late sixties. This pattern held true even in *Bonnie and Clyde*, superficially the most Godardian of the popular Left films. Certainly Penn repeatedly demonstrated his heroes' self-consciousness, their overt theatricality, their uses of ready-made roles and styles. The movie began on a note of artificiality, with actual Depression snapshots giving way to pictures of Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway as Bonnie and Clyde, a transition that established the underlying discrepancy between the film's mythologizing and the true story. The couple's first meeting produced references to films ("I bet you're a movie star," Clyde told Bonnie, having recognized her as a waitress), to Hollywood dreams ("Now, how you like to go walkin' in the dining room of the Aldophus Hotel in Dallas wearin' a nice silk dress and having everybody waiting on you?"), and to movie-magazine-influenced notions of style (about Bonnie's spit curl: "Change that. I don't like it."). With the arrival of Buck and his Kodak, the group posed constantly, with Bonnie assuming mock-tough stances borrowed from gangster movies, cigar and all. On bank robberies, Clyde announced himself like a master of ceremonies: "Good afternoon. This is the Barrow Gang." For her part, Bonnie worked, to Clyde's delight, on her poem, "The Story of Bonnie and Clyde":

Clyde: You know what you done there? You told my story. You told my whole story right there. Right there! One time I told you I was gonna make you somebody. That's what you done for me. You made me somebody they're gonna remember.

Although clearly himself part of the fictionalizing process, C. W. Moss was captivated by Clyde's legend. "You think laws is gonna

catch Bonnie and Clyde in town?" he asked his father in disbelief. "Clyde's got a sense. Don't you know, Daddy? Nobody catches Clyde. Never. Never."

Certainly the movie, with its mixture of comedy and gunplay, and its steadily escalating violence, pointed to the discrepancy between myth and fact, and to the corruption inherent from the start in the Barrow Gang's self-image. At points, the film became terribly painful (especially in the scene with Buck's death), certainly more so than *The Wild Bunch*, a film that for all its violence, contained little suffering.[18] Clearly, Penn intended for his movie to work along Godardian (or Hitchcockian) principles: initial identification with the heroes, gradual withdrawal of sympathy, and final recognition of their errors and one's own complicity in them:

Very often we would lead the audience to believe one thing, and then in the next sequence we turn around. . . . We used laughter to get the audience to feel like a member of the gang, to have the feeling of adventure, a feeling of playing together. Then, near the end of the film, we begin to turn a little bit. . . . We hope by then that you're already trapped, that you're caught in the film as a member of the gang and now you have to go along.[19]

To a certain extent, the film worked on this model, but never entirely. Richard Schickel's insistence that the self-satirizing elements so distanced the film's material that "no one—except an adolescent—could mistake it for reality"[20] missed the movie's reaffirmation of the outlaw-hero life as a viable sixties mode. For Penn never fully undercut his heroes, allowing Clyde, for example, despite the evident demythologizing, to shoot a gun out of Hamer's hand like an old-fashioned western hero, and to make a series of incredible getaways. Robin Wood better understood the film's effect:

For all the blood and pain, for all that we see the protagonists meet peculiarly horrifying deaths and are shown quite unequivocally that "Crime does not pay," the film is far more likely to encourage spectators to be like Bonnie and Clyde than to encourage them to be conforming, "responsible" citizens in society as it exists. The Bonnie and Clyde of Penn's film, however many banks they rob, however many men they kill, remain attractive and sympathetic characters: plainly the most at-

tractive and sympathetic in the film. Obviously, the intense identification audiences feel with the characters is a major factor—*the* major factor—in the film's immense box-office success.[21]

Significantly, *Badlands*, a movie that *never* allowed the audience to identify with its protagonist, a James Dean-imitating killer, had no success whatsoever with the mass audience. The constant distancing devices, specifically the confession-magazine-style voice-over narration and the remote, obviously stylized compositions, made the film seem cold and lifeless. *Bonnie and Clyde*, on the other hand, even in its conclusion, encouraged identification (the heroes' white clothes and car and the sudden flight of birds made the massacre seem to violate nature itself). In effect, therefore, despite the presence of self-conscious references to myth-making, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and the other Left films like it, resembled their straighter, less self-conscious Right counterparts in continuing to glorify the old myths.

In sum, the Left cycle adopted the New Wave *topos* of self-conscious heroes only to defuse it; in doing so, it reconfirmed the American Cinema's voraciously assimilative power. Indeed, as it appeared in the Left movies, the *topos* of self-consciousness was so depoliticized that it was promptly appropriated by the Right cycle as well. The key to this maneuver, whereby a device conceived as a critique of prevailing ideology could become a prop for that same ideology, lay in converting Godard's insight about the media age into an old-fashioned existentialism. Thus, while Godard repeatedly depicted his protagonists' embrace of media-given roles as the inevitable modern inauthenticity, the American Cinema typically represented such role-assumptions as glorious recognitions—those climactic moments when a character "found himself" and came into his "true nature." The scene in which Clyde Barrow responded to the foreclosed farmer by discovering the role of an avenging Robin Hood provided the *locus classicus* of this figure, which increasingly appeared in the Right films of the early 1970s as well.

Jacques Lacan's notion of "the mirror stage" and "the decentered ego" offers a way of reading such scenes ideologically.[22] Lacan's entire psychoanalytic project turned on his denial of the

whole, autonomous self, and his counterinsistence that the individual ego always results from the succession of images that it introjects. This process, Lacan argued, begins with "the mirror stage": somewhere between the age of six and eighteen months, the infant becomes able to recognize his own image in a mirror. In doing so, he replaces his fragmented sense of self (in which even his various limbs seem separate and unconnected) with the full, autonomous image in the mirror. Thus, he begins his own ego-formation with a misrecognition: the mirror-image, after all, is only an image.

Those who use Lacan often ignore his warning that the mirror stage is itself only the most literal instance of these misrecognitions from which the individual constructs himself out of external images. Thus, the mother is the first "mirror," the parents together the second, and an individual's culture the third. A particular ideology, therefore, contributes overwhelmingly to the formation of even the most apparently "original" selves. Hence, the Left and Right cycles' self-advertised individualists inevitably represented only the sum of the misrecognitions that we call American culture. In this light, Bonnie and Clyde, The Wild Bunch, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Buford Pusser, Dirty Harry, et al. seem not so much characters as "chords" of refracted, superimposed mirror images held together by the audience's complicity in their formation and recognition.

Althusser authorizes such a materialist reading of Lacan, observing how Lacan merely confirmed the inherent subversiveness of Freud's message:

Freud has discovered for us that the real subject, the individual in his unique essence, has not the form of an ego, centered on the "ego," on "consciousness" or on "existence"—whether this is the existence of the for-itself, of the body-proper, or of "behavior"—that the human subject is decentered, constituted by a structure which has no "centre" either, *except in the ideological formations in which it "recognizes" itself.*[23]

"The ideological formations in which it 'recognizes' itself"—what better description of the American Cinema and the popular audience's reaction to it? Certainly, in the immediate case, the Left and Right cycles' recognition scenes, in which a hero apparently comes into his own true nature, derived utterly from American

mythology. Furthermore, while seeming to criticize those "ideo-logical formations," the Left and Right movies perpetuated them by themselves becoming panoramic, powerful mirrors in which the mass audience could continually "find itself."

The most revealing version of such a (mis)recognition occurred in the Right film *Death Wish*. After the rape-murder of his wife and daughter, pacifist Charles Bronson temporarily left New York for an architectural project in Arizona. There, a friend took him to a reconstructed frontier town where actors played out for tour-ists movie versions of attempted robberies foiled by a gunfight-ing sheriff. Watching such a scene unfold (which becomes a movie-within-a-movie), Bronson "recognized" himself and his "destiny." In effect, this staged scene in a movie-set town became his and his audience's mirror, the image (of course ideological) of the true hero and the genuine, right conduct. By extrapolation, *Death Wish* itself became a still larger mirror, even more powerful for having disarmed its audience by means of the film's own internal disavowal.[24]