

The French Connection

By Zane Householder

Out of all the arts currently in existence, cinema is probably the most populist art, reaching out to all levels of society. It is also arguably the most profitable art. Because of its populist and commercial successes, cinema is prone to be adjusted and molded to fit the culture and humor of the audience it is attempting to attract. It is for this reason that out of all the arts, it is only in Cinema do we see the re-make. And no country sees its films remade more than in France.

I doubt there are many French people who are not aware that their films are often remade in Hollywood. While there are films that do the originals justice or attempt something a bit different and on their own (La Totale! -> True Lies / Trois hommes et un Couffin -> Three Men and a Baby / La cage aux folles -> The Birdcage) there are also many re-makes that can't hold a candle to the original and these examples make you wonder why they were remade at all (Nikita -> Point of no Return / Le Dîner de Cons -> Dinner for Schmucks).

That is a good question: why? Well, Americans, after decades of being a world superpower have become a bit ego-centric. Because Hollywood has dominated world cinema since the first world war, rolling out film after film in English, there really is little room for anything else. Because of this, we're not used to reading subtitles and dubbing foreign films just looks and sounds too unnatural for Americans. Therefore foreign films are left to cinephiles - a small minority in the US. This isn't very smart business-wise, to spend a lot of money on a film little people will see so movie producers just buy the rights and make it more "American" - for better or for worst .

What usually happens in these re-makes to make them more American, is that morals are transformed into something more black and white. French films are known to have rather ambiguous definitions of right and wrong, but American producers think that this is too cerebral for American audiences so we have to make sure that there are definite bad guys and good guys. We can also observe that most of them have a happy ending. One example is the ending of *Mixed Nuts*, a remake of the French film *Le père Noël est une ordure*. In both versions, a man is accidentally killed in the end. In the French version, this man is just an innocent by-stander who is then fed to zoo animals. In the American re-make, the "innocent by-stander" turns out to be a hunted serial killer, and the protagonists are hailed as heroes.

How convenient.

