

Cool Hand Luke

I like the way George Kennedy
in the final scene charges
the mirror sunglasses like
a bull at a matador he is
so angry at Luke getting shot.
And there's Dennis Hopper
pre-*Apocalypse Now*,
baby-faced, and the prisoners
are all white middle-class
looking and the prison guards
white too and stiff as if they were
manikins, or as if they were raised
as sharks and morphed into
humans for this role, and when
the shooting is finished they'll
be slipped back into the ocean.
I like that scene in which
Luke's mother comes to visit
him and she's dying, laid out
on a cot in the back of
a pickup truck coughing,
and you can tell she adores
Luke, but Luke doesn't know
how to make it all up to her, his
wasted life. It's as if he's been
dipping into her his whole life
with his indifference—she's
been nothing but a can of
snuff and he's been dipping
into her one pinch at a time

with his thumb and forefinger
and he feels bad about it,
but being in prison there's not
much he can do now and now
she's dying. She's propped up
in the back of that pickup truck
with her lung cancer,
smoking in the heat, and all
he can do is look down
and kick at the dust with his
boot and mumble something
about how it all doesn't
seem to add up to much.