

Bonnie and Clyde Film Summary

Bonnie and Clyde by Arthur Penn

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Context

Arthur Penn's father hoped his son would become a watchmaker like himself, but by the time Arthur reached high school, Arthur had his own ideas. His dreams revolved around theater. Arthur began by acting in Joshua Logan's theater company, moving on to study at the Actor's Studio in Los Angeles. In 1951, he caught the television bug and got a job with NBC. In two years, Arthur was writing and directing live television productions for Philco Playhouse and Playhouse 90. The year 1958 saw Arthur's first effort in feature films, *The Left Handed Gun*, starring Paul Newman as Billy the Kid. Unfortunately, American audiences were unimpressed. Luckily, Arthur directed the Broadway smash, *Two For the Seesaw*, that same year. He continued an exceptional reputation on Broadway with incomparable hits like *Toys in the Attic* and *All the Way Home*.

Arthur's success in pictures would continue to be a roller coaster affair. Critics and audiences loved his film adaptation of *The Miracle Worker* which starred Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke. Arthur earned an Oscar nomination for his direction and both Bancroft and Duke took home golden trophies for their parts. Arthur's star dimmed when he was fired from *The Train* after only two days of shooting in 1964. The following year he made *Little Mickey*. Although the film starred heartthrob Warren Beatty, it still bombed at the box office. After being fired from *The Chase* in 1966, Arthur once again left filmmaking.

Penn would be coaxed back in a year by acquaintance Warren Beatty. Beatty wanted his help making a little movie called *Bonnie and Clyde*, a film loosely based on historical accounts of the lives of criminals Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow. Warren would produce and act as the lead, Barrow. Newcomer Faye Dunaway would beat out the likes of such talents as Natalie Wood, Carol Lynley, Leslie Caron, and even Beatty's sister, Shirley Maclaine, for the part of Parker. Not only did *Bonnie and Clyde* make Arthur Penn a film legend because of its visionary style, but it also made stars out of Faye Dunaway and Gene Hackman, and introduced comic genius Gene Wilder. Nominated for ten Academy Awards including Best Director, Best Story and Screenplay, Best Actor, and Best Actress, *Bonnie and Clyde* walked away with two awards, one for Estelle Parsons as the *Best Supporting Actress* and the other for Burnett Guffey's Cinematography. Although it had had to be re-released after being criticized for its shocking violence, the little film about two young gangsters in love had made good on its promise to entertain.

By the end of the 1960's, *Bonnie and Clyde* was inarguably one of the most talked about movies of the decade. Later, the innovative crime picture continued to awe viewers and inspired future directors like Ridley Scott and Oliver Stone in their productions of *Thelma and Louise* and *Natural Born Killers* respectively. The American Film Institute ranked *Bonnie and Clyde* number twenty-seven in its list of the top one hundred movies of all time.

Moviegoers also fell in love with *Bonnie and Clyde*. Bonnie berets, fedoras, and double-breasted suits became fashionable as viewers tried to copy the movie's leading stars. *Bonnie and Clyde* themed parties flourished throughout the country. Unfortunately, a

drawback to the fascination with the movie was an increase in amateur bank robbers who tried to imitate their newfound heroes.

In addition, *Bonnie and Clyde* also created household names out of its leading stars and helped pave the way for their future successes. For her riveting role in the picture, in 1968, Faye Dunaway was awarded a British Academy Award for being the Most Promising Newcomer to Leading Film Roles. The same year, the American Academy recognized the same performance with an Oscar nomination. In 1977, Faye accepted an Oscar for her role as Diana Christensen in Sidney Lumet's *Network*.

Warren Beatty first introduced himself to American moviegoers with the 1961 film, *Splendor in the Grass*. His characterization of Clyde Barrow earned him a British Academy Award and two Oscar nods (Best Actor and Best Picture). In 1982, Beatty took home the Best Director Oscar for his critically acclaimed film about American journalist John Reed, *Reds*. In 2004, Beatty was recognized by the Kennedy Center for his outstanding achievements in entertainment.



Summary and Analysis

Bonnie and Clyde opens to a gold Warner Brothers shield. It is followed by blurry snapshots of the Barrow and Parker families depicting the childhoods of Bonnie and Clyde. Mixed in with cast and crew credits, these pictures appear on a dark background and are accompanied by the clicking sound of a camera shutter.

The last two title cards describe the film's major protagonist, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow. They read: "Bonnie Parker - was born in Rowena, Texas, 1910 and then moved to West Dallas. In 1931 she worked in a café before beginning her career in crime. Clyde Barrow - was born to a family of sharecroppers. As a young man he became a small-time thief and robbed a gas station. He served two years for armed robbery and was released on good behavior in 1931."

The last title card disperses into a colorful close-up of luscious, red lips. The lips belong to a young, attractive blonde woman. She is naked and primping in front of a mirror in her bedroom. Bored, she flings herself down on her bed and repeatedly strikes the bars of the bed frame. The camera zooms in on her eyes which reflect an inner torment. After a moment, the young woman rises from the bed and goes behind her dressing screen. The top of her dresser is visible; it is decorated with a small collection of figurines and a rag doll. A few photos are affixed on the wall.

The woman looks out her window and notices a young man wearing a white hat looking rather closely at her mother's car. She calls out and asks him what he's doing. The young man spins around and looks up at the window. The pair look each other over, and the woman yells for the man to "wait there!" Then the woman hastily throws on some clothes and rushes down the stairs. When she gets outside, she flirtatiously tells him that he should be ashamed of himself for trying to steal an old lady's car. The man responds that he wasn't stealing the car; he was merely looking it over because he was thinking about buying one for himself.

The woman retorts that the man doesn't have enough money to buy dinner, least of all a car. In the midst of all the flirting and sarcastic retorts, the man offers to buy the woman a Coke in town. During their sidewalk stroll, they continue to flirt and learn more about each other. He learns that she is a café waitress, and she learns that he is an ex-con who committed armed robbery.

After the couple passes a closed-down movie theater and several abandoned shops, the man asks the woman about her life in town. "Whatcha all do for a good time around here," he asks. "Listen to the grass grow?" Then the man describes his own daring by pointing down to his right foot and telling the woman how he chopped two toes off to get off a prison work detail. Although she declines the offer to look at his foot, she is noticeably impressed.

Next, the woman and the man are seen drinking from Coke bottles. As though she doesn't believe his story, the woman asks the man what armed robbery is like. To prove



that he is for real, the man removes a large pistol from inside his jacket and discreetly points it upwards at hip level. The woman looks at the gun for a moment and then fondles its barrel. A moment later, she is spurring the man to action by insinuating that he isn't brave enough to use the gun. To impress her, he impulsively decides to rob the Ritts Grocery store. He strides across the vacant street but not before telling her to keep her eyes open. The camera remains on the woman who is in the middle of the street.

An extended moment of silence passes, and then the man emerges from the store with a stack of bills in one hand and his gun in the other. Pleased with himself, he shoots his weapon into the air above the head of the store owner. Excited by all the action, the woman jumps into a parked car as the man hotwires it. Finally, they make the introductions.

Bonnie and Clyde, as they have identified themselves, make their getaway in the stolen car. The couple is not pursued, and as they drive away to the sounds of banjo music, a sexually excited Bonnie smothers Clyde with hugs and kisses. Throughout this emotional display, Clyde remains unaffected. When they near a grove of trees, he stops the car and tells Bonnie to slow it down and then finally, to cut it out. Clyde pushes Bonnie away and gets out of the car. He walks away and then returns to the car and makes a confession. In his own way, he tells her he is impotent, but it has nothing to do with her. A frustrated Bonnie snaps, "Your advertising is just dandy. Folks would never guess you don't have a thing to sell. You'd better take me home..." When Clyde tries to touch her, she tells him not to and climbs out the passenger door. Clyde follows and informs her that if all she is looking for is sex, then she should go back to West Dallas, but that she'll regret it if she does because she'll spend her whole life being a waitress serving greasy burgers to stupid truck drivers who want nothing more than to get in her pants. He continues by telling her that she's so much more than that; that she's like him. They want different things out of life than most people. Together, he says, they can make history. Caught up in Clyde's fantasies, Bonnie agrees to go with him.

Later while eating a burger in a restaurant, Clyde suggests that Bonnie tuck in a strand of her hair that is hanging loose. Bonnie tucks it in, and Clyde calls her a knockout. After stealing a convertible, they hide out in a deserted farmhouse for a night. When Bonnie wakes up in the morning, she is frightened because she does not see Clyde. His appearance on the other side of a window sets her mind at ease. In a few moments, Clyde has Bonnie outside doing target practice with his gun. While they are shooting, the wind blows ominously through the bushes, foreshadowing the final scene of the film.

The noise draws the attention of the farmer, Otis Harris, who had been evicted from the property by the bank. He and his family and their black hired hand were nearby viewing the property one last time. Once Clyde hears the old man's story, he puts a few shots through the bank's sign. As an empathetic gesture, he also allows Harris and his hand to shoot bullets into the farmhouse. Before the family leaves, Clyde introduces himself and Bonnie. "This here's Miss Bonnie Parker. I'm Clyde Barrow...We rob banks." This statement signals the beginning of a new path for Bonnie and Clyde.



Committed to living up to their newly created reputation, Clyde and Bonnie drive to their first bank robbery. Although Clyde is obviously apprehensive, he reassures Bonnie that even her mother could take this bank. Nervously, he enters the bank while Bonnie waits in the car. Unfortunately, the bank "failed three weeks ago" due to the depression, and there is no money on the premises and only one bank teller inside. Embarrassed, Clyde forces the teller to go outside and tell Bonnie there is no money. Bonnie finds the whole thing hilarious and laughs uncontrollably while Clyde broods. In his anger and frustration, Clyde shoots out the bank's front window. After barely avoiding an approaching small truck on the road, Bonnie and Clyde speed off down the road, with a honky-tonk banjo tune playing in the background.

Clyde is now even more desperate to live up to his own image. In an effort to do so, he turns back to robbing grocery stores. In the next robbery, he pretends to be a customer who just so happens to be toting a gun. After he asks the clerk about peach pies, Clyde is suddenly attacked by the butcher who wrestles him to the ground. In defense, Clyde bashes the man in the head with his gun, drawing blood in the process. Shocked by the butcher's behavior, Clyde runs and jumps on the running board of the getaway car. Guilelessly, he expresses his indignation over the butcher's violent assault. Clyde cannot believe that he is the target of such violence. This act of retribution by the butcher and Clyde's defensive maneuvering are signs of the escalating violence.

On their journey, Bonnie and Clyde have engine trouble with one of their stolen vehicles. At a gas station, they meet a mechanic named C.W. Moss who fixes their car. After introducing themselves, they invite Moss to join them. When he doesn't respond immediately, they imply that he doesn't have what it takes to be a part of their crew. C.W. shrugs off their comments and then brags about his time in a reformatory. He then empties out the store's cash register and joins Bonnie and Clyde in the car. C.W. is now a member of the Barrow Gang.

In the next scene, the butcher, in a hospital bed, identifies the grocery store robber in a mug shot. At the same time in a small motel room, Bonnie lies awake beside Clyde who is snoring loudly. C.W. sleeps in a chair beside the bed.

A second bank robbery follows. Bonnie and Clyde enter the bank while C.W. waits outside as the getaway driver. At first, Clyde speaks so softly that he goes unheard, but then he loudly repeats that they are there to rob the bank. The two get the money, but the robbery almost fails because when Bonnie and Clyde leave the bank, they don't see C.W. He has parallel parked the car and has some difficulty getting the car out again. When C.W. finally gets the car on the road, there are many cars in the street, and he has to maneuver his way through the traffic. As the group attempts to escape, there are young men pointing out their getaway car. The elderly bank manager yells for someone to stop the car, and when no one does, he impetuously leaps onto the running board of the car. Clyde reacts rashly and fires the pistol. The bullet smashes through the manager's glasses and blows off his face. The camera reveals the gruesome scene on the car window. This scene equates to the rising action in the drama. A man has been killed, and there is no turning back for Clyde Barrow.



After the hold-up, the trio hides out in a movie theater where they watch a scene from a movie in which blonde chorus girls dance with gold coins and sing "We're In The Money." While Bonnie, sitting apart from the other two, is held spellbound by the picture, Clyde speaks angrily to C.W. about his stupidity. He tells C.W. that he doesn't have a brain in his skull, that it is his fault that he had to kill a man and that C.W. is the reason that all of them are now wanted for murder. Clyde ends by warning C.W. that if he ever does anything like that again, he will kill him. This conversation is distracting Bonnie, and she suggests that they go outside if they want to talk. Clyde's anger has not lessened, and he uses his hat to hit C.W. on the head.

Back in their motel room hideout, Bonnie dances and sings in front of the room mirror in emulation of the screen actresses she has seen earlier. Clyde meanwhile is still thinking of their latest escape and the surrounding danger. Because of his affection for Bonnie, he offers her the chance to go home, saying that she still can't be identified and that things are only going to get rougher. Bonnie refuses to leave, and Clyde tells her, "You ain't gonna have a minute's peace." Bonnie's response of "Do you promise?" reveals her reckless spirit. Touched by her loyalty, Clyde embraces Bonnie on the bed and kisses her. After he pulls the shade down for privacy, they embrace again. Clyde struggles to consummate his love for her, but fails and breaks off the embrace. Bonnie tries unsuccessfully to rekindle the passion. The couple ends up at different ends of the bed. Once again, Clyde shamefully confesses his impotency while Bonnie rests her cheek on his gun.

Next, Clyde, Bonnie, and C.W. are joined by Clyde's older ex-con brother, Buck, and his erratic wife, Estelle. When C.W. goes out to the car to meet them, the first thing he notices is a copy of Screenland Magazine. He asks to look at it to see if there are any pictures of Myrna Loy inside. Buck suggests getting out his Kodak camera so that they can all pose for pictures. They take some pictures, and in the process, Bonnie and Clyde begin to create their own legends. One photo is taken of Clyde as he holds a machine gun. Another is taken of Bonnie rebelliously smoking while holding a gun at her side.

When the brothers are alone in the motel room, Buck asks Clyde if Bonnie is as good as she looks. Having no real knowledge of Bonnie sexually, Clyde lies and says that Bonnie is even better. The two discuss the murder that Clyde committed, and Buck questions his brother's moral code: "It was either you or him, wasn't it?...The guy that you killed, you had to do it, didn't ya? It was either you or him...You had to, you had to do it. Right?" Clyde sort of plays the answer off, and then advises that the group move to Missouri where they are unknown. He also tells his brother about the two toes he chopped off to get away from the work detail. On the road to Missouri, Buck tells Clyde a corny joke about a lady who is fooled into drinking brandy by her son and her doctor.

In Missouri, the newly formed gang, Bonnie, Clyde, Buck, a somewhat reluctant Blanche, and C.W. rent an apartment over a garage for a month. While Blanche is excited about her first home with Buck, Bonnie is far from pleased. Buck immediately phones in a grocery delivery order for pork chops, red beans, coffee, and Dr. Pepper. While they wait, they pass the time playing checkers together. Bonnie is bored by her



roommates' presence and goes into the bedroom; Clyde follows. Then Bonnie starts to make fun of Blanche, and Clyde cautions her to be quiet. Bonnie is infuriated by her and Clyde's lack of privacy, but Clyde only says that he is hungry and goes back out into the main room. Soon the groceries are delivered, and Bonnie goes to the door to get them. Although the delivery boy offers to help her get the bags inside, Bonnie declines his help. As he walks away, the delivery boy looks back suspiciously at the moving curtains on the second-floor window.

Later that evening, Bonnie reads one of her poems to the group. As she finishes the poem, Clyde by chance goes over to the window and sees a police car moving into their driveway. He tells the others that the law is outside, and Blanche instantly begins to scream. The police immediately start shooting. C.W. tries to stop Blanche from screaming by covering her mouth, but it doesn't help much. Buck rushes outside, kills a policeman, and then releases the hand brake on the police car blocking the driveway and preventing them from escaping. Somehow, Blanche who has screamed throughout the entire scene gets separated from the rest of the gang as they burst through the garage door in their car. When the group circles back around to get Blanche who is running wildly down the street, they narrowly avoid being injured and caught.

As they speed away from the law, Blanche continues to scream. Bonnie gets madder by the minute because she is fed up with Blanche's childish moaning and whining, especially after putting them all in danger. Bonnie screams at Blanche and tells her that it would have saved them all a lot of trouble if she had been shot. Blanche tries to get Buck to take her side, but he doesn't say anything. She also wants him to leave the gang, but Buck knows it's too late because he has killed a police officer and there will be no turning back. Unable to control her anger any longer, Bonnie forces Clyde to pull off the road. Heated words fly between the two as Bonnie tells Clyde to get rid of both Blanche and Buck, but Clyde refuses. When Bonnie pushes him too far, Clyde reminds her of just where he found her, in West Dallas picking up truck drivers. Bonnie bites back by bringing up Clyde's impotence. His feelings hurt, Clyde turns and walks away. Bonnie then apologizes, using her fear about the gun battle as a reason for her behavior. Clyde and Bonnie make up, and the Barrow gang continues their ride to find a safe hideout.

Next, the group steals a newspaper from a mailbox. Inside of the paper is an article describing their crimes and exploits throughout the country, including the fact that they are being chased by police officers from several states. As Buck reads to them out loud from the newspaper, the rest of the gang listens in awe as they hear about their new folk hero status. Bonnie and Clyde are beginning to think of themselves as stars in their own movies.

Not everyone is so impressed by the Barrow gang though, especially the law enforcement community. When the gang parks by the side of a large pond on a deserted road, they are determinedly followed by one of those community members, Texas Ranger Capt. Frank Hamer. He tries to sneak up on the parked vehicle, but he is caught by Clyde who has circled around through the woods. The gang handcuffs Hamer with his own handcuffs. Clyde demeans him for being so far away from home and tells



him that he should be out protecting the rights of poor people instead of chasing them. While Buck and Clyde contemplate shooting the Ranger, Bonnie comes up with the idea of humiliating Hamer by taking his picture with them in compromising positions and then sending the picture to newspapers.

Clyde and Buck find this idea amusing, and so Bonnie puts her arm around the glaring Ranger. Then she flattens out his curly moustache with his own gun, and she and Clyde pose for a picture with him. For the next picture, Bonnie kisses Hamer on the lips. She wants to convince people she and Hamer are having a sexual relationship. Immediately after the kiss, the Ranger spits in Bonnie's face. Outraged, Clyde almost drowns Hamer in the lake. Instead of murder, Clyde is forced to settle with sending the handcuffed Ranger out onto the water in a rowboat to drift aimlessly.

During their next bank robbery, the third one, Clyde formally introduces the group to the people in the bank as the "Barrow Gang." Generously, Clyde allows a poor farmer to keep the cash that he is withdrawing from the bank. When a bank guard attempts to stop the robbery, Clyde shoots off the guard's hat, and then boasts loudly that next time, he'll shoot a little lower. As Buck leaves the bank, he takes a pair of sunglasses from one of the bank guards, and says, "Take a good look, Pop. I'm Buck Barrow - from the Barrow Boys." The Barrow Gang has been successful in this robbery and at the moment, they are flying high. As they drive away, pursued by police cars, upbeat banjo music plays in the background.

Mixed in with the gang's getaway is a collection of short scenes highlighting the moods of a couple of the robbery witnesses. The bank guard has become a celebrity in his own right. He is shown bragging to reporters about how he stared directly into the face of death. The poor farmer who was allowed to keep his money also has something to say about the Barrow gang: "All's I can say is, they did right by me, and I'm bringin' me a mess of flowers to their funeral." This statement by the farmer also serves to foreshadow the futures of Bonnie and Clyde. Everyone involved, including the members of the Barrow Gang, know that this spree can only end one way.

Once they reach a safe distance from the law, Clyde divides up the cash from the robbery. It is not much, and both Clyde and Buck comment on how hard the times are, even for bank robbers. When Clyde gives Bonnie some of the loot, Blanche complains to Buck who in turns asks Clyde about Blanche's share. Bickering breaks out between Blanche and Bonnie. Finally, Clyde takes back Bonnie's share and gives it to Blanche. Bonnie storms away, angered by the fact that Clyde has not taken her side. Clyde catches up with her and tells Bonnie that he had to give Blanche money because Blanche is a part of the family. When Bonnie tells him that her family could use some of the money, Clyde reminds her that the law has been hanging around her mother's house, and that it isn't safe for them to go back there and visit. Even though Bonnie is obviously very unhappy, she accepts Clyde's decision.

Later, C.W. informs everyone that the car is leaking oil. The group sneaks into town to steal another one. They steal one of the cars belonging to a pair of lovers who are sitting on their front porch. When the man sees that his car has been taken, he and the



woman give chase in her car. In the midst of the chase, the couple decides it is safer to go back and alert the police so they turn around. Not to be outdone, the Barrow gang turns around and goes after the couple. The outlaws surround the pair, soon identified as Eugene Gizzard and his fiancée, Velma Davis and take them for a joyride in their stolen vehicle. Although the couple is a little concerned when they realize they have been apprehended by the Barrow Gang, the entire situation turns into a little party when Bonnie informs Eugene and Velma that they are just folks and Buck starts to tell a few of his jokes. The party comes to an abrupt halt when Eugene reveals he is an undertaker. Bonnie, feeling the closeness of her own death, insists that Clyde get rid of Eugene and Velma. The bandits leave the couple alive but stranded on the side of the road, still holding the remains of the food they all shared earlier.

In the following scene, Bonnie runs off into a field without saying anything to anyone. She is trying to get away, to go home to her family. Clyde sees her and chases her down. When he catches her, Bonnie begs to see her Mama. Clyde promises to make it possible if only Bonnie will never leave him again without speaking to him first. Next, Bonnie is reunited with her family in an abandoned quarry. All the conversation seems quite casual as though it is a typical family reunion until Bonnie gives her mother a necklace. Then her mother tells Clyde how she just gets so scared when she reads about them in the paper. Clyde tries to play down the media as an instrument of the law trying to make the Barrow gang seem worse than it is. When he tells Ma Parker that all will be well and that he and Bonnie will end up living right down the road from her, Ma Parker knows it will never happen. She basically tells Clyde that the law will kill him and Bonnie if they ever try and settle down, and that all they can do is to keep running. Closing out her life with her daughter, Ma Parker says goodbye to Bonnie with a sad finality. Then she hugs her for the last time. Tears well up in Bonnie's eyes, and the gathering comes to an end. The relatives drive away, and the Barrows and C.W. are left alone as always.

In the film's next image, the gang has arrived at a Tourist Court Motel in Platte City, Iowa. They are hanging out in Clyde and Bonnie's cabin, looking at C.W.'s new tattoo which he has placed on his chest. Bonnie is again in an unpleasant mood, and she and Blanche start their constant bickering. To alleviate the tension, Clyde sends C.W. and Blanche to get chicken dinners for everyone. Buck does not go with them, but he leaves Clyde and Bonnie to themselves. While she and Clyde are alone, Bonnie talks about how miserable she feels as a result of being isolated from her family and how depressed she is about their continual flight from the law. Clyde cannot change anything, and Bonnie sadly realizes that running is now her life. All Clyde can do is verbally express his love for her.

The camera switches to Blanche and C.W. talking in the car. C.W. notices that Blanche has been smoking a lot lately and suggests that she go back home. With her religious upbringing, Blanche just doesn't know how she can do that. When the pair pays for the chicken dinners at the café, a customer spots the gun in C.W.'s pants and notifies the authorities.



Later that night, police, using several vehicles including an armored car, surround the motel. Just as Bonnie shows Clyde how she has taken in her dress, the police start to shoot inside the motel. C.W. throws a grenade into the armored car, and Buck and Blanche try to escape the motel behind a mattress. In the battle, more police officers are killed, and Buck is shot in the face. Chaos ensues as the gang attempts to escape in the dark. As the bandits flee the motel, Blanche is blinded by a gunshot. After they escape, C.W. gets into a getaway car and follows the rest of the gang to a field. Once they get there, Blanche prays loudly for help for herself and Buck. Having nowhere else to go, the gang hides out in the field, doing as much as possible for Blanche and Buck.

By morning, the police, led by Frank Hamer (the Ranger from earlier) have found the outlaws and have surrounded the tree covered field. The police tell the gang to surrender, but instead, Clyde tries to drive his way out. He is shot in the left shoulder, and the car becomes so damaged that it is can no longer be driven. Clyde, Bonnie, and C.W. run from the car, but Buck and Blanche make it only onto the ground outside of the car. As Buck bleeds to death on the ground, Blanche screams loudly, begging him not to die and denouncing the bloodbath. As Bonnie, Clyde, and C.W. run from the law, Bonnie is shot in the shoulder. Clyde steals a car from a farmhouse, and the three remaining members of the Barrow gang head to C.W.'s father's house in Louisiana.

C.W. drives, and on the way, they stop at a shanty town constructed by poor and displaced farmers, Okies. Despite their own lack, the Okies give C.W. water, soup, and blankets. In awe, the families crowd around the car and peer into the backseat, staring at the celebrated pair who are both barely conscious. One man reaches out quickly and gently touches Clyde as if he were a holy man.

At the Moss home, C.W.'s father, Malcolm, appears to be hospitable to Bonnie and Clyde, but he really dislikes them because they have led his son down the wrong path. Still, Malcolm takes them into his house.

Another scene is swiftly interjected on screen. Ranger Hamer is seen telling the police officers that he wants to talk to Blanche. Recognizing him from the photos that the Barrow Gang took of him, the officers break into laughter. In response to their laughter, Hamer retorts in a serious voice that he figures on having his picture taken with Bonnie and Clyde just one last time. These words represent the personal vendetta that Hamer has against Bonnie and Clyde. He will not stop until he catches them.

The camera then zooms back to the Moss home. Clyde is lambasting the media for calling him a coward. One headline asks "Where is he?" Clyde believes that the media is implying that he ran away while his brother was dying on the ground, and he is furious. Although Malcolm is seen openly agreeing with Clyde, in private with C.W., it's another story. In the kitchen, Malcolm belittles his son for following Bonnie and Clyde into a life of crime.

Blanche, her face and head completely covered by bandages, is next seen being questioned by Hamer in the sheriff's office. Hamer plays on her emotions as a preacher's daughter to get her to reveal information about C.W. By the time the Ranger



leaves the room, he has discovered C.W.'s full name. Now, he has a very good idea where he can find Bonnie and Clyde.

In the next scene, Bonnie and Clyde are sitting in a car during a rainstorm. Bonnie is in the back, and Clyde is in the front. Bonnie is writing a poem titled *The Story of Bonnie and Clyde*. When she finishes it, she reads it to Clyde.

As Bonnie reads this poem, the scene on screen changes to one in which Bonnie and Clyde recline in an open field. Bonnie is now reading the same poem from a newspaper. Clyde sent the poem in to be published. Bonnie's voice is also heard off-screen as Hamer studies the same newspaper. Clyde is ecstatic that Bonnie has told their story in what he considers to be a true and honest fashion. "You know what you done there," he says, "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." Now that Clyde considers him self to be a bonafide celebrity, he is finally able to consummate his love for Bonnie. As the newspaper blows away in the wind, he and Bonnie make love.

Another scene moves the camera away from the image of Clyde and Bonnie. Without dialogue, it shows Malcolm talking in secret to Ranger Hamer at Eva's Ice Cream Parlor. When the camera returns to Bonnie and Clyde in the field, they have just finished making love. Unsure of his performance, Clyde asks Bonnie how he was. Bonnie reassures him by telling him, "You did just perfect." Later in their bedroom on the Moss farm, Clyde proposes to Bonnie. Then they both imagine what they would do if they could start all over again with no records.

The camera switches to C.W. and his father at the dining table. Malcolm tells C.W. about a deal he made with Hamer to ambush Bonnie and Clyde on their way home the next day. C.W. is angry, but he agrees when his father tells him that he'll get off light by siding with the law. C.W.'s willingness to accept his father's plan is also based on the fact that he believes that no one can ever catch Bonnie and Clyde.

The next day arrives, and Clyde and Bonnie appear onscreen coming out of a downtown shop, both carrying bags. Clyde asks where C.W. is, and Bonnie replies that he is at the hardware store getting light bulbs for his father. As Clyde is getting in the car, one of the lenses falls out of his sunglasses, but he stills places the frames on his face. Then he makes a joke about driving with one eye closed. After she excitedly shows Clyde a small figurine she has purchased, Bonnie goes to get C.W. While she is gone, a sheriff's patrol car pulls up next to Clyde, and Clyde nonchalantly backs the car out. He drives to the store and then calls out "Gladys Jen, it's time to go home now." Noticing the police car, Bonnie hurries back to the vehicle, and she and Clyde leave downtown. As he drives away, Clyde informs Bonnie that they will go back to town in about twenty minutes to get C.W. Satisfied, Bonnie offers Clyde a bite from a green pear.

Riding down the highway, the two lovers notice Malcolm on the side of the road beside his truck. When Clyde gets out of the car to help him, Malcolm speaks the last sentence



of the movie, "I've got a flat tire, and I ain't got no spare." Just as Clyde is about to say something, Malcolm is distracted by an unexpected car coming down the road from the opposite direction in which Bonnie and Clyde arrived. A flock of birds soar upward, and thick shrubs rustle ominously from across the road. Out of the blue, Malcolm dives underneath his truck.

Clyde yells "hey," and he and Bonnie share a brief but all consuming, knowing glance. Suddenly, bullets fly from the shrubbery. As Clyde tries to make it to the car, he is shot down. One bullet even causes a piece of his brain to exit his skull. Bonnie is trapped in the car by a hail of bullets, and her body falls half way out of the car on the driver's side. In their final moments, Clyde rolls over gently in slow-motion and stops moving, his suit covered by bullet holes. Bonnie's arm, dangling from the car, finally stops moving, and her golden hair hangs in the wind.

Two black men were driving the other vehicle, and they join Malcolm in coming closer to view the ghastly scene. Ranger Hamer and the other officers also walk up from their hiding places. All the men stare at what is left of the two bandits known as Bonnie and Clyde. Then the screen goes black.



Characters

Clyde Barrow, played by Warren Beatty

Description

One of the sons of a poor sharecropper, Clyde Barrow is a handsome yet somewhat insecure and impotent young man in his early twenties. An ex-con, he once severed two of his body toes to escape from doing work in prison. As a result of having grown up in extreme poverty, Clyde started to crave the finer things, and he saw only one way to get them - by taking them.

Clyde's big dream in life was to make himself into "somebody"; Clyde wanted people to be talking about him all across the country. By the time he finished a multi-state robbery spree which caused the deaths of several people and embarrassed state and law enforcement agencies to no end, they would be.

Despite his total disregard for rules and the establishment, Clyde is still very loyal to his family. This is evidenced by his deep regard for his brother, Buck, and his unfaltering tolerance of Buck's wife, Blanche. Clyde's affection for Bonnie is also steadfast as he risks capture so that she can meet with her family.

Analysis

Because of his impotence, Clyde tries to prove he is all man by committing crimes and exposing himself to danger. Slightly narcissistic, he comes to believe his own stories of innocence and the law's personal vendetta against him. Henceforth, he honestly has no idea why the butcher would want to hurt him.

In one of the bank robberies, Clyde allows a customer to keep his own money. He is not out to hurt the little people, only the big banks. This mindset is reminiscent of the much worshipped hero Robin Hood with whom Clyde wishes to be compared.

When a newspaper publishes Bonnie's biographical poem about herself and Clyde, Clyde feels fulfilled because Bonnie has portrayed him in a flattering light and made it possible for the entire country to read about him. In his eyes, he is finally somebody. Now, he is able to overcome his own self-inflicted impotence and consummate his love for Bonnie.



Bonnie Parker, played by Faye Dunaway

Description

A young, beautiful lady, Bonnie Parker, is bored with her life when she sees Clyde Barrow preparing to steal her mother's car. As she sees him in his nice suit and hat, she realizes that he represents real excitement. Once he exposes her to excitement in the first robbery and promises her more, Bonnie realizes that Clyde Barrow is her ticket away from her dead end job as a café waitress.

Bonnie is also creative and writes mediocre poetry in her spare time. Sentimental, romantic, and passionate, Bonnie often leaps before she looks things over completely. On the other hand, she can also be antagonistic and rather forceful when it comes to achieving her own goals. By no means, does she try to hide her intense dislike of Blanche, and she is quick to get Eugene and Velma out of the car when she feels threatened by Eugene's presence.

Analysis

Bonnie's desire to escape her dead end life in West Dallas is the main reason why she leaves town with a man she doesn't know. Once she falls in with Clyde, she becomes caught up in her legend as well. When she realizes that she has changed her life for the worst, it is too late for her to turn back now.

Because she feels isolated from everyone she loves, Bonnie reunites with her family at an abandoned quarry. The meeting is her attempt to recapture the innocence she left a short while before. At the end of the reunion when Bonnie's mother tells Bonnie and Clyde to keep running, Bonnie sadly realizes that all she has now is her life with Clyde. Even so, the little childlike innocence that she maintains allows her to imagine another, simpler life for herself and Clyde where they are able to settle down and live comfortably. Her final attempt to evoke her past life occurs moments before her death when she purchases the small figurine. The figurine is similar to those seen in her bedroom at the beginning of the movie. Her purchase reflects her longing for a different time and place, when she was a young woman instead of a wanted outlaw.

C.W. Moss, played by Michael J. Pollard

Description

C.W. Moss is a small town mechanic who is fascinated by the idea of associating with celebrities. When he meets Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, it is his opportunity to finally be in the big leagues, and he quickly joins forces with them. When they are both injured, he cares for them and even takes them to the family home to recover.



Analysis

To some extent, C.W.'s fascination with Bonnie and Clyde leads him to completely ignore the consequences of all their actions during their crime binge. The one discrepancy occurs when he suggests to Blanche that perhaps she should go home because he can tell the pressure is really getting to her.

The betrayal of Bonnie and Clyde is orchestrated by C.W.'s father, Malcolm. Not for one moment does C.W. see them as villains. In some ways, he doesn't even see them as being mortal. It is assumed that the only reason he didn't tell Bonnie and Clyde about the ambush was because he believed they were unstoppable.

Buck Barrow, played by Gene Hackman

Description

Buck Barrow is a fun natured man who enjoys telling jokes. Like his brother Clyde, Buck is also an ex-convict. He is married to a nagging preacher's daughter named Blanche. Despite Blanche's wishes, Buck decides that they as a couple need to join up with Clyde, Bonnie, and C.W. It is a choice that will end in his death, and Blanche's imprisonment.

Analysis

Buck is a man who very much enjoys having a good time. At the same time, he wants to savor each moment of his life and carries a Kodak camera around in his car.

Buck also believes in fair play. It is very important for him to know that Clyde only shot the bank manager because he had no other choice. When Buck shoots a police officer in self defense, his entire demeanor changes, and he is at a loss for words. He is a robber but not a murderer.

Blanche, played by Estelle Parsons

Description

The daughter of a minister, Blanche is Buck's high-strung, often hysterical wife. While she is ready to settle down and start a family, Buck wants to meet up with Clyde. Blanche and Bonnie play off each other like cats and dogs, and there is usually no peace in the group when the two are near each other.

Blanche turns to God when times get rough. Although she would like to return home, she doesn't know how she can when she has been involved in so much criminal activity. Once Buck dies and leaves her blind, alone, and incarcerated, Blanche, reveals



information about C.W. to Ranger Hamer. This is the initial information that leads to the death of Bonnie and Clyde.

Analysis

Blanche is a woman of contradictions. Although she verbally denounces the actions of the Barrow Gang, she remains with the group and even wants a portion of the earnings. To be a preacher's daughter, she also takes much pleasure in tormenting Bonnie. Her dislike of Bonnie is possibly caused by jealousy as Bonnie tends to possess the attention of all the men in the gang.

Frank Hamer, played by Denver Pyle

Description

Frank Hamer is a Texas Ranger who is in hot pursuit of the Barrow Gang. When they hold him hostage and take compromising pictures of him in an effort to humiliate him, his quest to capture them becomes his sole purpose in life.

Analysis

In the end, Hamer's need for retribution causes him and his men to mercilessly slaughter Bonnie and Clyde. The two outlaws die in a shower of bullets, and neither of them had a chance to defend their selves. The excessive violence surrounding their deaths, and perhaps even their deaths themselves, was unnecessary as it did not take so many bullets to stop one man and one woman. When Hamer said that he intended on having his picture taken with the two of them one more time, it was quite obvious that they would not be alive in the photo. They had humiliated him too much for him to allow them to live.

Malcolm Moss, played by Dub Taylor

Description

Malcolm is C.W.'s father. On the outside, he appears to be supportive of Bonnie and Clyde, but inwardly, he harbors deep resentment towards them for leaving his son astray.

Analysis

Malcolm's desire to save his son from the approaching doom surrounding Bonnie and Clyde causes him to help Hamer arrange the ambush which ends up killing the two bandits.



Eugene Grizzard, played by Gene Wilder

Description

Eugene is a young mortician who is sitting on the front porch with his fiancée when the Barrow Gang steals his car. Bravely, he and his fiancée, Velma, give chase. Upon turning around to notify the police, he and Velma, are abducted by the gang and taken on a joyride.

Analysis

Although a little concerned at first when he realizes he is traveling with the famed Barrow Gang, Eugene is soon put at ease and even starts to laugh at Buck's jokes. He becomes so relaxed that he even complains when C.W. starts to eat his burger by mistake. He and Velma appear excited by the novelty of being kidnapped by the Barrow Gang as though it will be quite a story to tell their friends.

Velma Davis, played by Evans Evans

Description

Velma is the fiancée of Eugene Grizzard who accompanies him on his adventurous road trip.

Analysis



Themes

Violence

Violence is one of the most powerful themes in *Bonnie and Clyde*. The central point is that crime and violence are interrelated; that one can not exist without the other. When Clyde starts to take what is not his, it is only logical that someone will attempt to protect what is his. When the butcher tries to stop the grocery store robbery, physical violence ensues, and the butcher is injured. Once the match of violence is lit, it has no choice but to burn until all flammable ends have been destroyed.

The Barrow Gang represents the flammable ends. Butch dies a painful death in the middle of a field, and Blanche is blinded and locked away. C.W.'s fate, though not actually shown, is to be a short sentence in prison. Bonnie and Clyde, the ones who started the rampage, suffer the most violent deaths as their bodies are riddled by enough bullets to stop a small army.

In actuality, Bonnie and Clyde's adventures began only with suggested violence because Clyde actually did not want to kill anyone. What Clyde learns is that a hint of violence is just as frightening and convincing as the real thing. It is a lesson not learned which could have saved his life.

Self Image

How the characters in *Bonnie and Clyde* see themselves is a major catalyst for many of the actions which take place in the movie. Having grown up a virtual nobody, Clyde is not satisfied until his fame has reached the popularity of a celebrity. It does not matter to him in the least that his fame is a result of criminal activity.

When Ranger Hamer is abducted by the Barrow Gang and then made to look like a fool, his self-esteem is damaged. His ego suffers even further when he realizes that his fellow law enforcement officers no longer deem him worthy of respect. To Hamer, the only way to rebuild his self image is to take Bonnie and Clyde down once and for all.

Sex and Power

People are attracted to power. In direct examination, women are especially attracted to powerful men, especially those possessing an air of danger. Upon observing Clyde near her mother's car, Bonnie is immediately attracted to him even though she knows he is not an honest man. She is enthralled by his risk taking attitude. When he shows her his gun, his sign of power, Bonnie is visibly aroused and has to stroke the weapon. Even though she is frustrated and disappointed by Clyde's inability to please her in the bedroom, she still does not leave him. What is more important to her than sex is the promise of power that Clyde offers her.

During the movie, Bonnie also attempts to use her body as a weapon. Her purpose in taking a compromising position with Ranger Hamer is to strip him of his power. Bonnie believes that if people think Hamer is having an affair with her, then no one will take him seriously anymore.

Style and Cinematography

Never one to forget those he considered to be great, Arthur Penn paid homage to many great directors and actors in his own works. These tributes are very apparent in *Bonnie and Clyde*. When Clyde wears the glasses with the one lens missing, Penn is paying homage to the French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo in the movie *A Bout De Souffle*. Memorable scenes in the movie also pay recognition to John Ford's outstanding drama, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

With *Bonnie and Clyde*, Arthur Penn rewrote the idea of how crime movies could be made. He used the French New Wave style to show Bonnie and Clyde in an existentialist manner, revealing who they were as people, as opposed to them merely being outlaws. Penn also used discontinuous editing and colored filters to remind the audiences that they were indeed watching a movie. To give the film a more realistic look, he favored the use of natural light over studio fabricated light. It lent much credibility to the Depression era setting, and the blazing sunlight reflected the image of how the anti-heroes saw themselves.

The many cameras that were used during filming were exceptionally mobile and allowed for a wide range of images. In the final scene of the movie, one of the most grisly in all movie history, Bonnie and Clyde are mercilessly slaughtered without ever firing a single shot. Their deaths were not like that in reality; the daring duo were actually armed and prepared to fight. Penn wanted to give another perspective on the lives of the anti-heroes. Clyde's death roll was more of an orchestrated ballet, made so by the use of slow-motion filming, and Bonnie's brutal end comes vividly with her hair hanging loosely in the wind, the seemingly angelic arches falling towards the ground.

One of the most unique aspects of *Bonnie and Clyde* is the movie's blend of slapstick comedy with violence. One minute audiences would be laughing, and the next they would be caught in a hail of gunfire. Penn's decision to use this unique style to his movie confused quite a few. Was this movie an action flick, a comedy, a drama, or was it a tragicomedy? In the end, Penn left it up to the audience to decide, and that unanswered question continues to make Bonnie and Clyde a legendary movie today.



Motifs

Revenge

Revenge is the reason behind the massacres which destroy the Barrow Gang. When Buck kills a police officer, the law enforcement agents do not attempt to help him as he lies in the field dying. He has killed one of their own, and his life is no longer of value to them.

Hamer's quest for revenge is what drives him to plot the gory slaughter of Bonnie and Clyde. Even though their bodies lie still upon the blood-spattered ground, Hamer's thirst for retribution is not complete until he has viewed their lifeless corpses.

Family

Family is of great importance to everyone, and that includes criminals. Although Bonnie is upset about traveling and living with Buck and Blanche, nothing makes Clyde happier than the thought of being with his brother throughout their adventures, and despite his great love for Bonnie, Clyde tends to take Blanche's side over Bonnie's in most arguments. His reason for doing so is that Blanche is Buck's wife, and that makes her family. To Clyde, family comes first.

When the pressure surrounds her, and she's feeling lost, the first place Bonnie wants to go is home to her family. For a short period during her visit with them, she is able to once again be her mother's daughter.

Albeit his faith in his father is misplaced, C.W. believes in his father's loyalty so much that he takes the injured Bonnie and Clyde home with him. Malcolm's love for his son is so strong that he plays a gigantic role in the outlaws' deaths.

Recklessness of Youth

One of the movie descriptions which heralded the arrival of Bonnie and Clyde in 1967 was "They're young! They're in love! They kill people!" It was a most fitting description because the two bandits were definitely young. In fact, it was their sense of youthful immortality which led them to believe that the end result of their unlawful pursuits would be only celebrated glory.

C.W. was also a man whose mental faculties were paralyzed by his youth. He was so heavily into hero-worshipping Bonnie and Clyde that he forgot to recognize that they were only humans and as such, capable of being caught and of being killed. In a sad and bitter irony which neither of them probably would have understood, Bonnie and Clyde died because of the love of one of their biggest fans.



Symbols

Photographs

In *Bonnie and Clyde*, the photographs serve multiple purposes. First of all, Buck and Blanche use the camera to capture their lives, their memories, the places they visit, and the people they see. When Clyde and Bonnie discover the camera, they use it to help in the creation of their own legends. Both of them have pictures taken while holding weapons to further enhance their notoriety. Later, the Barrow Gang takes photographs of Ranger Hamer in hopes of humiliating him and causing him to end his pursuit of them. The plan of course backfires.

Clyde's Gun

Clyde's pistol represents both power and masculinity. Clyde always has the gun nearby, and he isn't afraid to use it. He even boasts about his own skill with the pistol several times during the movie. Clyde's rationale for using the gun so often is to compensate for his inability to perform sexually. While he may fire blanks in the bedroom, Clyde can hit anything with his gun. The gun is also a big turn-on to Bonnie, and makes Clyde appear, in her eyes, to be the man of all men.

The pistol also gives some power to the displaced farmer who comes across Bonnie and Clyde at his old home. With the gun, not only is he able to release some anger, but he is also afforded the opportunity to feel he has the power to fight back if only for a brief moment.

Stories

The stories told and shared in *Bonnie and Clyde* are representative of various ideas to different characters in the movie. Besides the fact that Buck is a fun loving person, he also has a more serious side. When he tells a story, his purpose is not only to get a good chuckle but also to lighten up a situation and make things appear more attractive than they actually are.

Clyde sees the poem that Bonnie writes about the two of them as a story, and to him, it is a story that represents his new legendary status. In this case, the story represents the fact that Clyde Barrows is finally somebody.

On the other hand, stories are evidences of failure which ignite action. When Ranger Hamer and other law enforcement officers read about the Barrow Gang in the newspapers, they are reminded of their inability to capture the group. This awareness causes them to increase their efforts to apprehend the Barrow Gang.



Essay Questions

How are Bonnie and Clyde portrayed as heroes in the film?

The real Bonnie and Clyde were not as physically attractive as Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway. Explain why some critics have an issue with this casting.

Describe how the media affects Bonnie and Clyde's actions.

Discuss ways in which Blanche contradicts herself throughout the film.

Compare the character of Clyde Barrow to Jim Stark (James Dean) in *Rebel Without A Cause*.

Explain how Arthur Penn pays tribute to *The Grapes of Wrath* in this film.

In addition to guns, list and describe other symbols which were used in Bonnie and Clyde to suggest sexuality.

Describe Clyde's reaction to the butcher and why he was so surprised when the butcher came after him.

What is the purpose of the camera in the movie?

Compare the characters of Bonnie and Clyde to the protagonists of Terrence Malick's *Badlands*.