

Four-Star Reviews: Bonnie and Clyde

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Bonnie and Clyde (1967) was one of the most famous, and ground breaking films in cinematic history. This was the retelling of the infamous Depression-era bank robbers who became folk heroes, containing classic performances from Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway, as well as one of the most controversial endings ever in film.

The film certainly gives an air of romanticism, at least at first, with its portrayal of the two people. Bonnie is persuaded by both Clyde's charm and his threatening aura. She has the sort of personality which easily falls for Clyde's comment that she is the best girl in the state, and in no time flat she is swept into the risky business of bank-robbing. Along the way, they pick up a young gas station attendant named Moss, and later, Clyde's brother (Gene

Hackman) and sister-in-law are part of the bunch.

A combination of Bonnie and Clyde's rebellious youth, and their numerous run-ins with the law ensure their notoriety in a time in which people were in need of something to free their minds of the miseries of poverty and hardship. Yet all good things must come to end, and they do here, as well, — and most violently.

One major theme in the movie is the idea of celebrity. As Bonnie and Clyde make their way across America, everyone wants to be part of the story, to say that they saw (or in some cases were robbed by) Bonnie and Clyde, celebrity criminals. The newspapers in the country saw fit to fabricate the number of robberies committed in order to sell more papers and to perpetuate the mystique.

The movie makes the claim that these criminals were not out to harm the common folk, and in fact there is one scene in a bank in which Clyde kindly

tells an elderly customer that he is not out to take his money away. This anti-authoritarian attitude certainly didn't harm the heroic image they had acquired.

I certainly did not find these characters endearing. For me they seemed more like white trash than radical socialists; foolish kids more than heroes. But that tension between what they really are, and what people (those following their story, the criminal gang itself, and even the film's audience) want them to be is strong stuff, especially as it soon becomes clear it will not be a happy ending.

The actual relationship of Bonnie and Clyde is also interesting. Warren Beatty, in playing this character, has a little joke on himself and his notorious womanizing image, when Clyde tells Bonnie clumsily that "I ain't no loverboy." While this may seem to be modesty on his part, it is later clear there is more to it. Clyde suffers from impotence, as all his energies are focussed on crime. Bonnie, on the other hand, is the sexual aggressor, equally comfortable in

her own body, and in handling a gun. (The parallels between sex and violence are fairly clear.) Faye Dunaway successfully plays the character for her toughness, and, later on, for her fear that her fantastical lifestyle will start crumbling down on her.

The infamous ending is no doubt known to many, in a bloody, utterly final shootout which broke taboos for both violence and grim endings.

Despite the more bloody (and senseless) violence in current films, those situations could never match up to the ending of this film, as it is so final, so cold, so wrenching, that it will stick to you for at least a few minutes. Basically, a number of thoughts should come to your head — Do they deserve punishment? Should the audience have been rooting for these characters? □

