



Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway shooting it out as "Bonnie and Clyde."

# 'Bonnie and Clyde' - Mature Violence

It was gangster films—particularly those which tended to "glorify crime and criminals"—that were largely responsible for the emergence, in the mid-1930's, of groups like the Catholic Legion of Decency.

Now that the Legion has another name and other preoccupations (chief among them: nudity), an unusual gangster film named "Bonnie and Clyde" has surprisingly become one of the year's most controversial, both because of the "glorification" issue and because of the effect it may have on the future of violence in motion pictures.

"Bonnie and Clyde" is based on the Depression-era escapades of Bonnie Parker (played by

newcomer Faye Dunaway) and Clyde Barrow (Warren Beatty), who went on a murderous bank-robbing spree in the Southwest before being slain in a police ambush in Louisiana in 1934.

What sets off "Bonnie and Clyde" from other gangster-type films made recently ("The St. Valentine's Day Massacre" has received hardly any serious attention, for instance) is that Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow and their gang are presented as fun-loving, likeable and rather bumbling criminals, whose slapstick-style auto-escapes are accompanied by banjo-plunking hillbilly music, giving a comical air to the grim proceedings.

For, throughout the film, the viewer is witness to some of the most unsettling scenes ever shown: a man trying to stop the getaway car is shot in the face, a grocer is beat about the face, one of the gang members has the back of his head blown open, a woman has her eye shut out, and in the ambush scene that ends the film, a seemingly endless number of bullets are fired by the police into Bonnie and Clyde while their already lifeless bodies bounce from side to side as the bullets strike.

**Praise and Condemnation**  
The film has drawn high praise from some reviewers, heavy condemnation from other reviewers, and in one highly unusual instance, the film reviewer for "Newsweek" harshly criticized the film one week, went to see it again, changed his mind and wrote a follow-up review, and then going on to laud the film.

Indecision about the film is expected to be widespread. The National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, whose annual "pledge" used to have Catholics promising to stay away from films "which glorify crime and criminals," said NCOIP, which rated it A-4, "for adults, with reservations," noting that the violence "would indicate that the film is questionable fare for the young or sensitive viewer."

"Reworking the elements of the traditional gangster film, with comment on the personal and social world of its main characters, this film, by combining 'folksy touches' with scenes of brutal crime, appears ambiguous in its treatment of these characters," said NCOIP, which rated it A-4, "for adults, with reservations," noting that the violence "would indicate that the film is questionable fare for the young or sensitive viewer."

Negative reactions from critics have included objections ranging from the fact that the main characters are "too giddy" to the fact that the characterizations and events are not 100 per cent accurate (to which the film's creators have responded that they were attempting to create a "folk ballad").

**Mature Violence**  
But the majority of the criticism has been directed at the film's violence. In the "Saturday Review," Hollis Alpert said in his review that "undoubtedly a new form is burgeoning: the picture of 'mature violence.'"

The New York Times' Bosley Crowther, who has launched a series of attacks on the increased use of violence in films, has disagreed with the argument that the screen is merely reflecting the increased use of violence in the real world. "It is precisely because there are vast areas of violence and bloodshed in our world... that our media of so-called entertainment should strive for balance and moral truth," he wrote.

It was the violence issue that made "Newsweek's" reviewer put down "Bonnie and Clyde" at first as merely a "squalid shoot-'em for the moron trade" because the film "does not know

what to make of its own violence." Seeing the film a second time and surrounded by an audience no more or less morose than I, but enjoying itself to the point of rapture, I realized that "Bonnie and Clyde" knows perfectly well what to make of its violence—that violence is not necessarily perpetrated by shambling cavemen or quivering psychopaths but may also be the casual, easy expression of only slightly aberrated citizens, of 'jes' folks."

"I had become so surfeited and preoccupied by violence in daily life that my (initial) reaction was an excessive as the stimulus. There are indeed a few moments in which the gore goes too far, becomes stock shockery that invites standard revision.

"And yet, precisely because 'Bonnie and Clyde' combines these gratuitous crudities with

scene after scene of dazzling artistry, precisely because it has the power both to enthrall and appall, it is an ideal laboratory for the study of violence, a subject in which we are all matriculating these days."

Others have seen it as a "wild commentary on the Depression era," when bank robbers obtained almost folk-hero status. One letter-writer to the New York Times even drew a parallel between the film's comic atmosphere—objected to by many critics—and the "carnival" atmosphere described by recent riots in Newark, Detroit and other cities.

"In 'Bonnie and Clyde,' the letter-writer observed, 'Arthur Penn (the director) has managed to create an unusual documentary—sweet, savage, absurd. In short, real.' (Catholic Press Features)

## Rosary TV Films Ready

Hollywood—(RNS)—The message of the Family Rosary Crusade—"the family that prays together stays together"—will be presented on television throughout the country beginning this Fall.

Father Patrick Peyton, C.S.C., head of the Crusade, announced that TV stations in the U.S. will begin showing the first of a six-week package of half-hour films on Dec. 10.

The series is a composite of the 15 older Rosary films and two newer films which have been made by the Family Theater, production unit of the Crusade.

Appearing in the films, along with Father Peyton, will be such Hollywood personalities as Jeanne Crain, Jane Wyatt, Dolores Hope, Stephen McNally, Frankie Avalon, and Bing Crosby.

Father Peyton also announced that 15 short radio shows especially for children are being prepared for release. The narration on the programs will be by Raymon Burr, with music provided by the concert pianist, Amparo Iturbil.

## New Film Ratings

Following are the titles of films reviewed this week by the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures.

- Class A, Section 1  
A Midsummer Nights Dream  
Tarzan and the Great River (Paramount)
- Class A, Section 2  
Counterpoint (Universal)  
Torture Garden (Columbia)
- Class A, Section 3  
The Exterminating Angel (Spanish) (Aitura Films International)  
The Day the Fish Came Out  
Our Mother's House (British) (MGM)
- Class B  
Matchless — Objection: Blatant suggestiveness in costuming and situations.  
Navaho Joe (Italian) (United Artists) — Objection: Wanton killing, brutality and sadism characterize the treatment of this inferior Italian imitation of the "Western."  
The Shattered Room (Warners) (Seven Arts) — Objection: Suggestive situations; murder and suicide plot solution.  
Thunder Alley (American International) — Objection: This action film of special appeal to teenage audiences, is marred by the casually presented immoral behavior of its "hero."

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