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The 'Outlaw Couple' - Young Lovers and Killers

by

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Introduction

The Attraction of the 'Outlaw Couple'

The outlaw couple-in-crime tradition first emerged in Hollywood film in the thirties and has continued into the nineties. This fugitive couple film belongs to the sub-genre of the gangster/thriller cycle, and is also included within the film noir corpus. It involves the depiction and destruction of young couples instantly attracted to each other looking for an exciting life, and the freedom to live it. These films usually centre around a heterosexual couple who find themselves branded as criminals (though there are exceptions) and are forced into a life on the road in a 'love-on-the-run' thriller.

These films are distinguished from gangster movies in that they are usually set in the country rather than the city. The rural locale is necessary to heighten the idea of journey and freedom via the road. When the outlaw couple escape the city they enjoy for a short time an idyllic lifestyle and a communion with nature. They realise there is no turning back, moving through a mythical landscape that camouflages reality and entraps them to their journey's end - death. These films bring the audience along on the couples' journey, even though the inevitable end of this journey is pointed out to us very early on.

The 'outlaw couple-in-crime films' usually achieve cult status. This applies in some aspect to all of the six main films dealt with in this thesis. Challenging the ideas of mainstream cinema many have enjoyed success with mass audiences, yet all have been attacked by critics. The term 'cult movie' implies a movie on the fringe of mainstream cinema. The word 'cult' means a devotion to or admiration of a person or thing, a system of religious worship. Cult movies have followers like religious cults do. People use cult movies to define themselves - to connect themselves with an ethos, usually one which is not quite socially acceptable. As Peary describes aptly: Cult movies are born in controversy. (Peary, 1982, p. xiii)

What is the appeal of the 'outlaw couple'? The characters Bonnie and Clyde were as well received by the film audience of the 1960s, as the real couple were received by the public of the 1930s. The main appeal of the 'outlaw couple' derives from deep-rooted fantasies of rebellion against society. The 'outlaw couple' turn their backs on any sort of normal socially integrated lifestyle. They exist outside the pale of bourgeois morality. Unconcerned with the future they live for the excitement of the moment. This is the *essence* of their appeal. Obviously the majority of people would never be prepared to actually act out the fantasy. However through the 'outlaw couple' film the audience can experience the thrill and excitement from a safe distance. A catharsis is achieved through watching their life, and we unlike them will not have to pay the ultimate price. The 'outlaw couple' in many of these films actively seek fame, and display a desire to be emulated for their notorious exploits. Some of the couples' in effect played to the public. They become legends in *Bonnie and Clyde*, through photos of themselves which they send to the newspapers. In *Natural Born Killers* Mickey and Mallory continuously tell everyone who they are, and always leave one traumatised person alive to tell their story, and in *Badlands* Kit leaves a mark where he is captured and gives away his possessions as souvenirs. But these are also violent couples, and despite their aesthetic appeal, the couples in these movies are almost always ultimately destroyed by their own violence.

The moral issues are seen in these films through the conflict of the 'outlaw couple' and society. Society becomes the threat to 'our' heroes. All these couple-in-crime movies are anti-traditional with respect to Hollywood conventions, and tend to confuse the issue of hero/villain in interesting ways. We relate to the glamorous couple, but because of society we are pushed to declare these rebellious people to be in the wrong. We partly approve of their motives but have to condemn them, because what they are doing is socially dangerous, and often repugnant. The outlaws are generally destroyed by very violent methods. This is the most virulent expression of society's outrage at what they have done. Society has criminalised the couples, who cannot be re-absorbed into it because it has no room for deviant sexual youth in society.

The audience and social attitudes in the cinema changed during the period from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties. According to Cook, the audience shifted from a predominantly middle-aged modestly educated, middle-to-lower class group to a younger, better educated, more affluent and predominantly middle class group. The older audience tended to stay home and watch television. These new spectators had different and more liberated views than the previous audience. "For better or for worse, it had a generally permissive attitude toward such former cultural taboos as the explicit representation of sex, violence, and death." (Cook, 1981, p. 625)

From *Gun Crazy* in the 1950s to *Natural Born Killers* in the 1990s, the vital essentials of this sub-genre have survived, whilst adapting to differing social conditions and different genres and styles ranging from: *film noir* and classicism, encompassing the French New Wave and modernism, through to postmodernism. These essentials have been transposed yet remain fresh and new, and have produced enticing results for their audiences. They have all have caused a sensation at the time of their release and have gained cult status with audiences in the years following. No two 'couple-in-crime' movies are the same, each exemplifying distinct changes in American generic cinema, social norms and gender politics.

The issue of gender identity in these films is particularly interesting. The 'outlaw couple-in-crime' movie probes the received inherited traditional notion of what constitutes masculinity and what constitutes femininity. When delving deeper into the actions of both genders, we begin to understand better the roles of the male and female at work as a couple. The understanding of the characters is seen through their interaction with each other and society. In researching this thesis I have indeed become a 'cult' follower, because I have discovered movies unknown to myself and have tried to re-evaluate them under my own headings and interests in them. The thesis is therefore divided into three main chapters, which deal with outlaw couples from three particular periods: the classical, the modern, and the postmodern.

Chapter One

Classicism: Gender Identity in the *film noir* 'Outlaw Couple'

The fugitive couple in *Gun Crazy* (1950) is characteristic of the *film noir* (which is not a genre but a style of film), whereas *They live By Night* (1948) although containing elements of *noir*, is not as it is so often referred to actually a *film noir*. However both contain two crucial components of the *film noir* world; 'gun-craziness' and 'mad love'. In both films the outlaw couple have an intense desire for sex and money, (and are, in this sense, the forerunners of *Bonnie and Clyde*). This intense and fatal love, *l'amour fou*, results in a compulsion to be together which means everything to the couples, even if it leads to death.

During the Hollywood studio era especially, classical structures often featured double plot lines, in which a romantic love story was developed to parallel the main line of action.
(Giannetti, 1972, p. 312/3)

It is *film noir* which juggles with the black and whiteness of masculinity and femininity, and starts to confuse the two, so that the character of the truly hard masculine hero is often seen in the femme fatale. This is partly the reason for our interest and fascination with the femme fatale. It is the male character who is confused and wishes to postpone things, unsure about the rightness or wrongness of what they are doing, the one in the old stereotypically female role hindering the narrative action, whilst she is the one whipping it up and perpetuating it. The films still fit in to what Giannetti calls the *Classical Paradigm*. This Classical Paradigm is a narrative model based on a conflict between a protagonist, who initiates the action, and an antagonist, who resists it. However there is a reversal of the normal allocation of roles to genders. Take for example *Gun Crazy*, in which Laurie, the femme fatale, is the obvious protagonist and Bart the male antagonist. The formula, however, is less defined for the couple in *They live By Night*, where Keechie, the female, is the obvious antagonist, and Chickamaw, leader of the gang, is the protagonist. However, Bowie (her lover) displays traits of both the protagonist and the antagonist.

The protagonist usually gets what he or she wants through violence or sex. The climax arises when the conflict between the two is at its peak, and ultimately only one person can win. The resolution occurs after this confrontation and the dramatic intensity has had a chance to subside. In the outlaw couple movie, death is usually the only resolution possible, at least for one member of the couple.

The Classical Paradigm emphasizes dramatic unity, plausible motivations and coherence of its constituent parts. Each shot is seamlessly edited to the next in an effort to produce a smooth flow of action, and often a sense of inevitability. (Giannetti, 1972, p. 312)

Film noir is so named from its usage of chiaroscuro mise-en-scène. The darkness and light give a strong visual and dynamic style to certain American movies of the forties and fifties, so labelled by the French critics. As explained by Andrew, *film noir* were bleak, pessimistic thrillers or melodramas in which an atmosphere of paranoia and alienation, corruption and mystery is conveyed through dark, shadowy images. (Andrew, 1991, p.28)

This darker world of *film noir* is inhabited by inexplicable characters, and others are drawn into this world of no escape and doom:

In place of the frothy romanticism at which Hollywood used to be adept come haunted visions of doomed men and women for whom love is replaced by blind passion and sexual obsession, which often erupts into violence and cold-blooded murder. (Crowther, 1988, p.7)

In *Gun Crazy* it is Laurie's 'dangerous' quality that attracts Bart to her, and she possesses the sexual power in their relationship, which in effect keeps Bart going. Laurie thrives on violence, and is very masculine compared to the usual glamorous body of the femme fatale. She has 'masculine power', through her capability in handling a gun. Bart is sexually naive, and Krutnik even implies a homosexual element to his character through his overly male social background. However apart from Bart's inability to make a correct judgement of Laurie, due to his lack of experience with women, there is no evidence to support this. Laurie has no morals or scruples unlike Bart, who's conscience act for the both of them.

Unfortunately Bart is in too deep emotionally to get out. Laurie enters the film about twenty minutes after it starts, and dominates throughout the rest. *Gun Crazy* (Figure 1.1) was originally entitled *Deadly is the Female*, (Figure 1.2) a title too simplistic and obvious, whereas *Gun Crazy* gives us and Bart less insight into who and what Laurie is. Left in the dark, the true evilness of Laurie's character and plans are seen as the film unfolds. Bart is scared of losing her, and conscious of this Laurie uses her femininity to blackmail him into staying with her, "Better kiss me goodbye Bart, I won't be here when you get back."

Bart after leaving reform school returns to his home town more relaxed than when he left as a boy. The army has civilised him, and after meeting Laurie he is thrown off balance. They first encounter each other at a shooting contest in a carnival, the contest acts as a test for each others potency. Bart narrowly wins but it is enough to make him worthy of Laurie's admiration. As Krutnik suggests, the combination of desire and violence lends a perverse charge to the shooting contest, and to the relationship between the couple throughout the film. (Krutnik, 1991, p. 221). In contrast to Laurie he is weak, and lacking in confidence for the life of a gangster hero; however, she rescues him from his mundane and boring life, and brings out his true self, as Clyde does for Bonnie. Their mutual desire for, and understanding of, guns ignites their attraction for one another, and this shared desire is soon displaced on to a sexual level. They maintain this sexual excitement by committing crimes and firing their guns. Bart is fascinated by Laurie from the time they meet to the inevitable end saying with all sincerity "Laurie, I wouldn't have it any other way."

To enhance the impulsive spirit of Laurie in *Gun Crazy*, Joseph H. Lewis, the director, gives the film a nervous jagged movement in contrast to the more sedate bittersweet sentimental tone in *They Live By Night*. Lewis especially focuses on the interplay of sex and violence as key concepts in noir. Lewis's consistent stylisation, "imbues the sexuality of Annie Laurie and Bart with a desperation and fatality that defines the noir vision." (Silver & Ward, 1980, p.118) Bart and Laurie's romance is self-destructive,

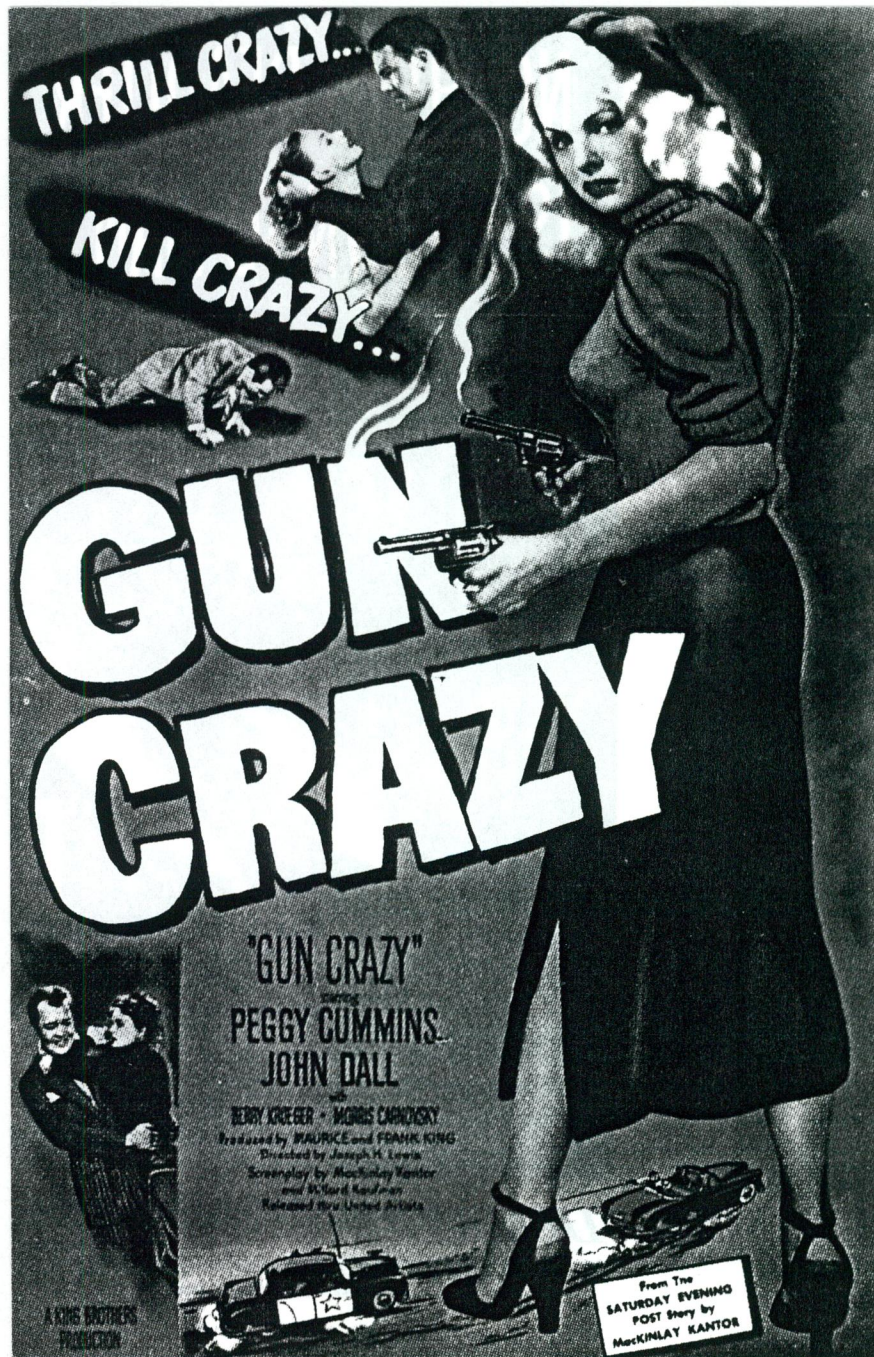


Figure 1.1 The original film advertisement for *Gun Crazy*, 1950

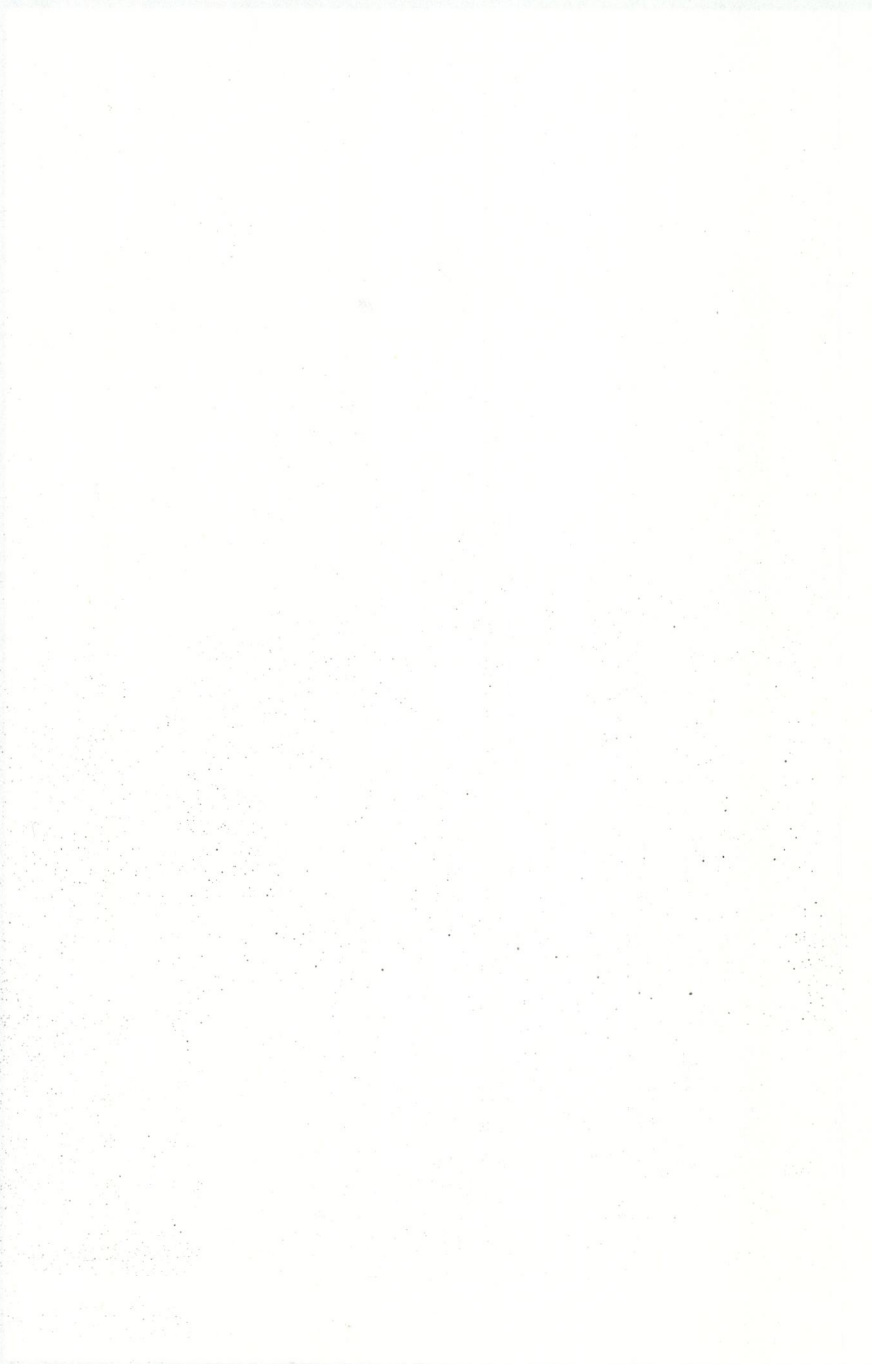




Figure 1.2 The rejected film title for *Gun Crazy*, 1950

whereas Bowie's and Keechie's is much more innocent and a victim of circumstances.

In *Gun Crazy*, the killer instinct is strongly manifested in the female role rather than the male, further exemplifying the departure in 'outlaw couple' films from gender specific stereotypes. Laurie steps into what would conventionally be understood as the 'male' role pushing Bart into the female role. This is shown also by Bart's inability to kill, highlighted when he only manages to shoot the reflection of Packy (their manager), in the mirror, and when he has to lie to Laurie that he killed the driver in one of their getaways. The viewer is left unsure whether Laurie has feelings for anyone, including Bart, until they attempt to separate, a decision made by Laurie. The cars start off in opposite directions but both turn simultaneously towards each other, almost colliding. As Krutnik suggests Laurie is made vulnerable through love, that is, through her nature as a woman. (Krutnik, 1991, p. 145) This results in her handing over her power to Bart. Bart, with his newly appointed status, ironically, is the one to kill Laurie. But he does this out of love for his friends and indeed for Laurie. No one else was worthy of shooting her.

The characteristic attributes of *film noir* are expressed in various degrees in both *Gun Crazy* and *They Live By Night*. *Gun Crazy*, falls into the category of the classic *film noir*, where Laurie's violent passions as femme fatale, the enigmatic female, provokes the timid Bart into a life of crime, through a sexual relationship. The style of the *film noir*, encourages more interest in characters such as the sexual psychopath Laurie, than the wholesome Keechie, as reflected in the audience reactions. As Giannetti suggests classicists favour characters who are goal orientated so that we can take a rooting interest in their plans of action. (Giannetti, 1972, p.313) On the other hand, Nicholas Ray in *They Live By Night* takes a more gentle approach to *noir*, through using the noir format with its emphasis on snaring, violation, defeat and the capability to escape the past. Keechie is not a femme fatale (she stands by her man) and that role is given to a subsidiary character, Mattie, who betrays Bowie to the police. (Figure 1.3)

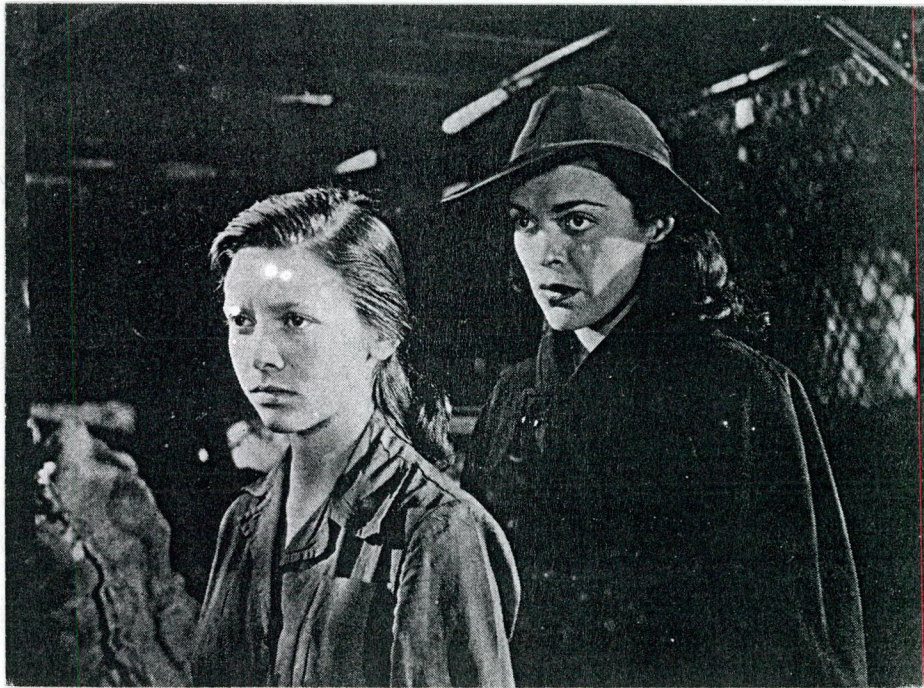


Figure 1.3 The innocent Keechie, aside the *femme fatale* Mattie



It is argued however that *film noir* is often only reversing the stereotype precisely in order to bring the woman down. This is not the case in *Gun Crazy*, where the film is not in a conventional way condemning the guilty woman. Although more sympathy is bestowed on the unfortunate Bart, the film is not inviting the audience to condemn Laurie, which is what normally happens when a woman steps outside the 'norms' of society. In *film noir*, "the woman does not have as much to lose as the hero by transgressing against her acceptable place." (Krutnik, 1991, p. 141)

The females make use of their femininity to influence the male counterpart differs considerably between the two films. In *They Live By Night* Keechie uses her femininity to stabilise Bowie's character and lead him away from the world of violence, and is Bowie's only hope of salvation. Both are equally passive characters, and Bowie's masculinity is undermined by Chickamaw and T-Dub, the leaders of the gang. Bowie shows some strength when he leaves Keechie to do the bank robbery, even though she threatens him with "it's either them or me".

They Live By Night and *Gun Crazy* due to their rural settings, provide a narrative development transposed from that seen in 'mainstream' noir. They are both *noir* thrillers of a countrified type, with the couples living on the margins and outskirts of society and the law. This rural noir contrasts greatly with the noir city, giving a greater feeling of openness and space than the claustrophobic ambience of the noir city, whilst retaining a dark tonality.

It is due to society's injustice to the couples that their lives cannot thrive. In *They Live By Night* the credits tell us that "this boy and this girl were never properly introduced to the world we live in". Their innocence is highlighted in the scene in which Mattie betrays the couple to the police. The viewer knows their fate, while the couple remain naive. They are isolated and tormented characters at war with society and themselves.

The injustice of society is seen clearly in Fritz Lang's earlier outlaw-couple film *You Only Live Once* (1937). The main character Eddie Taylor who has

just been released from prison, marries the loyal Jo and wants to get on with a normal life, but society will not allow him to do so. Eddie Taylor, a man with good intentions, is viewed by society only as a criminal and is, subsequently, wrongly accused of a crime and sentenced to death.

He becomes a murderer while escaping from prison; 'Society' has made him what it thought he was all along. *You Only Live Once* was an indictment of 'society', of the forces of order that will not give Eddie the outcast a chance." (Kael, 1967, p.198)

In *Gun Crazy*, living within the narrow norms of society would be a living death for both Laurie and Bart. Both have held jobs involving their love of guns. However, within the constraints of normal society this 'gun craziness' was unfulfilling and limited. Consequently, both Laurie and Bart end up in a life of crime. Their love of guns may parallel their love for each other, possibly in a symbolic manner. "We go together like guns and ammunition." (Bart) It is uncertain as to whether this may be interpreted as a metaphor in which Bart is the gun while Laurie is the ammunition that kills, or conversely, Laurie is the gun firing Bart, the ammunition for a life of killing.

It is unsure as to whether the killer instinct of Laurie and the passive nature of Bart is due to their upbringing. Bart's background is explained in depth, parentless as a young boy and sent off to reform school as a teenager. Nothing is known about Laurie's past except that she has killed once and is likely to again. "It is through her insistent seductions that the hero is lured from the 'straight and narrow' and, significantly, the films do not seek to explore in any detail what motivates her in her attempt to defy the law." (Krutnik, 1991, p. 141)

The couples in both films do get married, but is that just a formality? In *Gun Crazy*, they pawn Laurie's wedding ring when they lose all their money. Bart suggests to Laurie that they should start a family, Laurie agrees, but there is no hint of a maternal instinct in Laurie's nature, quite the opposite when she wants to use Ruby's baby as a hostage. Even her presence in Ruby's house interrupts the stability of the home. This is a standard element of *film noir*; the bad girl versus the good girl. It is this bad

girl that influences the innocent hero, so she is subject to punishment. Society has no room for the kind of love that Bowie and Keechie possess in *They Live By Night*, and this is symbolised by their Grade B Hawkin's wedding ceremony. They do however have more nurturing qualities than either Laurie or Bart, shown by Bowie playing with the baby on the bus, and Keechie becoming a mother.

Laurie and Bart completely, and blatantly, reject all aspects of normal life throughout the film. However, they demonstrate otherwise on their last night on the town, through their enjoyment of 'normal' social activity such as dancing in a night-club. Both claim that this is the best moment in their lives, but Laurie and Bart had a 'normal life' before, so did it take all their excitement to reach this conclusion, or are they just fooling themselves? It is less believable than in *They Live By Night* where Bowie wants to get a lawyer to clear his name, yet has to get the money to pay for the lawyer by robbing banks. Bowie and Keechie are alienated from society due to their involvement with Chickamaw and T-Dub, society, circumstance, and themselves. Bowie sees himself as the victim of society not the culprit. Bowie and Keechie, however, do unquestionably want to lead a 'normal life'. They live a pretence of normality in their cabin with Bowies' share of the hold-up money, until Chickamaw arrives. He clumsily breaks an ornament for their Christmas tree, "Symbolically destroying the possibilities of a normal life for the fugitive lovers" (Lucas, 1988, p. 285)

This is a recurring motif throughout. Keechie lives in hope that they will be lucky, and if they just lie low for awhile they can eventually live like other people, and that they will be accepted when, "we've proved they can live right like other people" Ray uses close-ups in most of his shots, which rather than giving a sense of intimacy actually stresses the alienation of the couple from society, by excluding everything else from the frame, and "suggesting a degree of entrapment." (Poague, 1990, p. 888) (Figure 1.4)

The 'outlaw couple' in the classical period provides a film with a definite narrative, and well established characters. The elements taken from *film*



Figure 1.4 Bowie and Keechie framed by a bar-like structure

noir, and the use of black and white film, has given these films a forbearing and darkness to their world of crime, and acts as a constant reminder of their fate. Adding to the films a sense of seriousness. *Amour fou*, is the strong element in these films in relation to society. In *They Live By Night* and *You Only Live Once*, this love is impossible because society is unjust, but in *Gun Crazy*, this love is beyond the law. *Film noir* has established the female as a strong character, as seen in *Gun Crazy*, which will continue through our the modernist period, and has bridged the gap between classicism and postclassicism.

Chapter Two

Modernism: Rebels with a Cause

The postclassical period brought the qualified 'male' hero of *noir* into mainstream Hollywood cinema. Clyde's masculinity in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), is brought into question by his impotence which undercuts any 'real' masculine ability to be the hero. However Clyde is a dominating figure, and he leads the way in the film: he is a man because of his gun and his ability to use it. Of *Gun Crazy*, Hirsch says that Bart's fascination with guns is obviously a compensation for his own lack of manliness. (Hirsch, 1981, p.195) This is true also for Clyde, who needs a gun to prove his masculinity.

Clyde shows Bonnie his gun while playing with a match stick in his mouth. Both take on a symbolic significance. She is at first shocked at the sight of the gun, but then she gets excited and starts to stroke it.

"Bonnie caressed his gun and urges him to 'use it', pressing the connection between repressed sexuality and the need for some physical action in which to sublimate it". (Kolker, 1980, p.34)

The issue of Clyde's impotence is one of great importance throughout the film. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, unlike *Gun Crazy*, sexual excitement starts from violence. (Figure 2.1) After robbing the first store, Bonnie starts kissing him passionately in the car as they make their getaway, and when he does not respond she is aghast, "Your advertising is just dandy. Folks'd just never guess you don't have a thing to sell", but does not leave him.

Yet a sexual element is still evident throughout the film, as both Bonnie and Clyde's sexual frustration can be released through violence. For Bonnie it is using a gun and learning how to shoot, and for Clyde the violence is the only outlet he has to still prove that he is a man. It is this that attracts Bonnie to him, and compels her to stay with him.

Clyde is Bonnie's only hope of escape from the cage that is her job and home life, and in return Bonnie is Clyde's only hope of becoming the man

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Figure 2.1 The original film advertisement for *Bonnie and Clyde*, 1967

that he wants to be. To become equal to each other and to be able to identify with their own image only occurs through Bonnie's ballad, when they can finally manage to be together romantically. However just as they manage to come together, the two pieces of paper (which are the ballad) drift apart to reinforce the fact that image and reality can never coincide.

Bonnie is a stronger character than Clyde as she is sexually aware. Bonnie never gives the direct impression of being scared of anything, yet she misses her mother, who signifies security and comfort. Clyde has strong family roots like Bonnie, and the only times he over-ruled her demands were when they were family orientated, for example giving Blanche a share of the money because she is Buck's wife. The scenes of Bonnie's family are shot like a family home video, through a smoky haze which makes it all unreachable and unobtainable to them. After they leave Clyde tells her he's her family now: the 'couple-in-crime' setting up an alternative community/family.

Their relationship is built on fantasy, that of becoming legends, and a 'professional relationship'. They make their own destiny by creating this fantasy world for themselves, they start believing in it, and it slowly takes on a life of its own. Bonnie and Clyde never get rich, but they get what they ultimately want and love - fame.

The other main female character is Blanche Barrow, Clyde's sister-in-law. She is the complete opposite of Bonnie, older and plainer and scared of guns, she relies constantly on Buck and wants to lead a 'normal' life. Blanche and Bonnie at first glance take an instant dislike to each other. Both women see each other as the person that they hope never to become. As a couple Bonnie and Clyde are always beautiful, whereas Buck and Blanche Barrow who were never beautiful to start with, are both facially disfigured. Bonnie and Clyde are the romantic beautiful couple right to the end, they recover from their wounds to be beautiful once more, and to be remembered as such, before they are killed.

In contrast to Bonnie, Marianne in *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965) is the ultimate femme fatale, and the driving force of the couple. Marianne is the origin of violence, "She is mysterious, ultimately elusive, fascinating and destructive; this 'otherness' follows from a narrative centred on the hero's point of view" (Mulvey, 1989, p. 54)

The streak of violence in Marianne is a major component of her femme fatale character. She is much more violent than Ferdinand, and Bonnie, killing four men and knocking out various others. She is looking for adventure and money. Marianne and Ferdinand are two adults trying to behave like characters in fiction. (Figure 2.2) Ferdinand is weak and easily led, as is clear from the nick-name of 'Pierrot the fool' that Marianne gives him. Marianne provides Ferdinand with the opportunity to rebel against his wealthy wife. He leaves his wife and child to run off with Marianne, his former lover, to a world that he does not want, a world of violence and *amour fou*.

Ferdinand wants to live in an aesthetic domain, in a painting by Picasso or in a poem by Rimbaud; Marianne wants to live in a gangster movie. Ferdinand gives up everything important to him for Marianne, especially their idyllic life by the Riviera. *Pierrot Le Fou* deliberately and self-consciously tells us in a crude voice-over that we are now leaving this new life to go back into the gangster movie. It is parodying the genre and its mode of addressing itself to the audience, which is typical of Godard's techniques of making the film artificial, so that the spectators are continually reminded that they are watching a film. Built up of little pieces like a jig-saw puzzle the audience has to piece the film together, and this involves the audience differently. We are never shown Marianne killing the dwarf, just a series of images of the dwarf, she playing with the scissors, and Ferdinand finding the body with the scissors in his neck. (Figure 2.3) Timelessness is of the essence. The audience are not encouraged to identify emotionally with the characters. Engagement with the film is essentially intellectual.



Figure 2.2 The original film advertisement for *Pierrot Le Fou*, 1965



Figure 2.3 Marianne with scissors and Picasso in the background

"*Pierrot Le Fou* is like a big kaleidoscope, the many and ever changing components of which always add up to the same general image, which remains constant." (Guarner, 1967/69, p.94)

As a couple, Ferdinand and Marianne lack in trust and commitment. Ferdinand loves Marianne and trusts her or at least wants to. Does Marianne love Ferdinand? She says she does, and she remembers exactly when they last met "Five and a half years; it was October." (Marianne) She sings him a love song, says she will never leave him, yet she ultimately betrays him. Ferdinand, like Bart in *Gun Crazy*, ends up killing his lover.

Ferdinand is the central consciousness and most of the narrative is told from his view point and through his diary. Their double narration, often conflicting, heightens their isolation as a couple. Ferdinand finds Marianne uncultured, but leaves his bourgeois wife for her. *Pierrot le Fou* is the first time that the sub-genre itself is investigated: the notion that it is a text within a text, and the characters are merely acting out roles handed along to them by fiction and society. Ferdinand only ever sees Marianne as a character in a romantic novel, so the sub-genre becomes self-reflective.

It was due to films like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Pierrot Le Fou*, that this sub-genre entered into its modernist phase during the late fifties and sixties. *Pierrot Le Fou* as a modernist film is in effect one step ahead of *Bonnie and Clyde*. *Bonnie and Clyde*, while having strong modernist elements, has not broken all ties with classicism. Penn follows a clear narrative and encourages the audience to identify whole-heartedly with his two characters. *Pierrot Le Fou* explores new ground and attitudes to cinema in general. One of the main objectives in *Pierrot Le Fou* is making the audience realise that they are watching a film, not real life. Characteristic of his French background Godard wanted to create a cinema that was more rational and less emotional. To do this he regularly quotes images and uses signs such as neon lights, to incorporate elements of reality into the film.

Godard helped start the French New Wave which put some life back into the French films of the 1960s. The French New Wave, were 'art' films, filmed on a low budget by young up and coming directors. These directors

were less interested in the story and more in the characters and ideas behind it. Indeed when Godard went to make *Pierrot Le Fou* he had no script, just a story, and a few locations in mind. Godard in *Pierrot Le Fou* produced a 'modernist' film due mainly to his inability to produce a 'classic' or 'genre' film. "*Pierrot Le Fou* is largely a colourful fruit salad of Hollywood forms-crime, thriller, comedy, chase film, musical, adventure." (Rosenbaum, 1973, p. 124)

The influence of the French was great at this time:

"French directors discovered the poetry of crime in American life (from our movies) and showed the Americans how to put it on the screens in a new 'existential' way". (Kael, 1969, p. 203,)

The screenwriters of *Bonnie and Clyde*, David Newman and Robert Benton originally approached both François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard to direct *Bonnie and Clyde*, to introduce some of the French New Wave elements into the movie. It was ultimately directed by Arthur Penn. "Penn was among the first of his generation to reject many of the time-honoured conventions of the classical American Cinema." (Giannetti, 1981, p. 388)

Influenced greatly by the New Wave, this is shown in Penn's editing technique; not as flowing as classical cutting, his editing is jagged and tense, with a lot of close ups. In making *Bonnie and Clyde*, he incorporated its ideas and techniques and brought the 'poetry of crime' back into Hollywood mainstream, so little was lost by using an American director.

Thus, along with free intercutting of time and space, the use of slow and accelerated motion, he also used little vignettes ending in visual and verbal puns à la Truffaut and the alternating of comic and violent moments apropos of Godard
(Quart & Auster, 1984, p. 84/85)

Penn used humour to keep the audience on edge, whilst critics took it up as glamorising their crimes and making fun of the law.

Part of America's character is its violent culture, which began in the West and led on to Vietnam. Film reflects this through society. The violent

deaths of Bonnie and Clyde by a grotesquely excessive use of fire arms acts as a metaphor for the Vietnam war. In *Pierrot Le Fou* there are distinct references to Vietnam and conflicts in Arab countries as a backdrop throughout the film.

Bonnie and Clyde is set in the depression era of the 1930s. In their eyes, the fictional couple in the film have nothing to lose by taking on a life of robbing banks, it is just a means of escape from a narrow existence in an economically depressed society. The depression however is not the reason for their crimes, only an excuse. They assaulted the system and showed bravura, but it was merely a gesture of rebellion. They are robbing the 'system', the banks and the police, not the common people, as seen when Clyde does not take the farmer's own money because it belongs to him and not the system. An existential gesture on the part of the couple, but what is of importance in this rebellion is the gesture itself. That the act of transgression is authentic, rather than criminal and inauthentic. This is really significant in terms of how Penn is reversing the moral codes of the whole society. Although the gesture maybe seen as empty, existential and even futile, none-the-less the gesture itself is important because the alternative is conformity, and to conform is resigning to being unglamorous and ordinary in both the depression 30s and the high-tension 60s.

The picture in its own way addressed the needs, desires and aspirations of a society replete with ambivalent feelings. It remains something of a 'cult' film among the young, principally because those ambivalent feelings have as yet to be reconciled.
(O'Connor/Jackson, 1980, p.252)

In contrast Ferdinand in *Pierrot Le Fou* leaves behind the bourgeois society that he and his wife live in. Ferdinand abandons this civilised sterile world, which is shown in the form of a party that his wife makes him go to, where the art of conversation is crudely reduced to advertising clichés. He rejects the conformity of this stifling society and searches for freedom and happiness. For Godard, "To borrow, wreak and steal is doomed and romantic. To own and be possessive is bourgeois. Yet the two are never

totally separate.”(Orr, 1993, p.139) Therefore this journey into paradise is fated. Ferdinand knows his destiny in running off with Marianne, and is resigned to it. Ferdinand looks in the mirror, and Marianne asks him what does he see. “The face of a man who’s about to throw himself over a precipice at a hundred miles an hour.” (Ferdinand)

At the start of *Bonnie and Clyde*, we are whisked into a fantasy world of fun, until the first killing. They are innocent amateurs, but the laughter turns to grim realism when Clyde kills the bank teller. Victims of society, they become the bankteller’s victim even before he becomes their victim. In fact, none of the ‘Barrow Gang’ kill anyone who does not attack first. There is always an extenuating circumstance that causes them to kill, and Penn is always trying to exonerate them from guilt at every turn. From that first killing their fate is established, and the death of Bonnie and Clyde is a foregone conclusion. As their crimes and the violence in the film grows they proceed to become more isolated from society. Society sends Bonnie and Clyde, and the audience warnings of their death. Firstly the farmer, (who they did not rob) says he will bring a mass of flowers to their funeral, secondly Eugene the undertaker and finally Bonnie’s own mother, “You try to live three miles away from me and you won’t live long, honey.” Ironically society kills them just as they learn how to complete themselves in love rather than violence.

Crime always has to be punished, but the punishment should fit the crime. Penn like most American film makers rarely strays from this Hollywood code, but he reverses the audiences understanding of this formula. The ending of *Bonnie and Clyde* was received so badly by the critics who thought it was an insult, when all Penn was doing was playing the Hollywood conventions against themselves. The reprimand of the ‘outlaw couple’ is often experienced by the audiences as being heavily unjust. In the viewer’s eyes it is even more unjust than any crimes that the ‘outlaw couple’ perpetrated on society throughout the course of the film. This is exceptionally clear in *Bonnie and Clyde*, where the manner of their departure is in fact the crime of the film itself. They have almost against their will, and because of circumstances, found themselves living in a

certain way, but really they had little choice, so they become the tragic heroes of the film. Penn emphasizes that "society has its mirror in its outcasts" (Sherman & Ruben, 1969, p. 114)

Critics who responded badly to *Bonnie and Clyde*, were responding to the way Penn treated the story. Audiences were free only to get caught up in the story, or reject the film as being a lie, whereas Godard makes it possible to obtain some middle ground, offering an experience to think about. Godard is a film maker who makes aesthetic and formal decisions for the audience on how to represent characters and narrative. While the violence in *Bonnie and Clyde* is violently realistic, we are forced to respond to it in a very real way, but Godard makes it clear that it is red paint, and not blood. "What is casually murderous and gratuitous in Godard became graphically blood-stained in the American cinema, of the 1970s, reclaimed for melodrama with modernist trimmings." (Orr, 1993, p. 134)

Bonnie and Clyde are two people who do not belong to the life and times of a society in which they find themselves. Clyde knows this, and believes that he and Bonnie deserve better than a small-time life. He knows that Bonnie is a waitress from the first moment that he sees her, so it does not take much to convince Bonnie. "You're worth more'n that, a lot more'n that, and you know it, and that's why you come along with me." (Clyde)

We are watching these people look for a sense of meaning in their lives, and they indeed died for their attempt, and that attempt is one of the aspects that made this film so meaningful to audiences from 1967 to today. This endeavour at authenticity within an insincere and inauthentic social system is what makes these 'criminals' into honourable martyrs. They are rebels with a cause, and that is what makes the moral reversal at the end of the film so interesting. *Gun Crazy* has not the same rational to its ending, yet Penn had the model of *Gun Crazy* to work with. Our sympathy and admiration lies with Bonnie and Clyde, and Penn insures this, by giving the audience excitement in their lives, and a fear for their survival. Part of our distress at the end of *Bonnie and Clyde* is because the two characters in whom we have invested so much time, have been cut down right in front

of our eyes, and therefore the 'good guys' who killed them must be the 'bad guys' because they have done this to us. Penn cleverly gives us the standard classical Hollywood ending (that the killers are killed), but the forces of law and order are shown as the criminals, and the criminals, Bonnie and Clyde, are represented as the good guys. This violent, moral, and political transformation reverses the accepted notions of innocence and guilt.

Bonnie and Clyde are rebelling, through violence, against a corrupt and sterile society. They are legendary figures acting out the peoples' frustrated desires, and this is how they become not only emblems for the disenfranchised of the 1930s, but they also become symbols for all of the population in the 1960s.

Bonnie tells Clyde that she does not want a rich man after enormously enjoying the extravagant musical *Goddiggers* (1933). This film within a film is typical of the musicals that were released to take peoples' minds off the depression, while at the same time re-inforcing the whole American money dream myth, which Bonnie and Clyde are both caught up in. "*Gold Diggers* of 1933 is, for all its many fairytale elements, full of the touches that register a sense of the conditions felt by the majority of Americans." (Babington & Evans, 1985, p.57) Bonnie and Clyde are trying to take a short cut into that dream; they are the oppressed striking back, as those who cannot find admission into the good life will try to steal it from others.

Chapter Three

Postmodernism: Media Made Killers

Holly and Kit in *Badlands* (1974), are characters without character, they are life imitating pop-culture. Whereas Bonnie and Clyde are trying to be themselves and are not attempting to imitate anyone, Holly and Kit are infatuated by movie stars/idols/icons and are consciously conforming to a loose set of pop cultural stereotypes. Distracted with movie-icons and movie trash, Holly ends up with Kit, a garbage collector. Holly and Kit are portrayed as being without a self sustaining sense of identity, and as they have no identity they have to raid the image bank of popular culture, by appropriation from Hollywood and television. The most obvious models of behaviour available to this culturally impoverished couple, are roles of extreme violence and melo-dramatic killings. Holly lives her life as if in a film, where heroes are taken from the movies and magazines, Kit is 'James Dean' to Holly, and led by this fantasy their love is a 'Teen-Romance'. Carried away with her 'real' teenage romance, Holly tells us that: "he wanted to die with me and I dreamed of being forever in his arms." Holly believes that she is actually in this movie, and that the characters killed by Kit are not real. It is not until mid - film that Holly even notices. "Suddenly I was thrown into a state of shock, Kit was the most trigger happy person I'd ever met."

Holly does not run off with Kit because she is in 'love', "but because by doing so she believes that she will become a star in an adventure story." (Peary, 1982, p.12) Holly is just a lonely girl looking for a little excitement, taken with Kit not just for his looks, but because of the attention he pays her. She acknowledges that he could have had any girl in town but he chose her instead: "As I'd never been popular in school and didn't have a lot of personality, I was surprised that he took such a liking to me." However this is just part of her fantasy, and an example of how she justifies her actions to herself. As we already know Kit is a psychopath, and why would any girl want that? Holly may have little personality, but she has a lot of sentimentalism.

Kit loves his stereotype image of a rebel, and wants to live up to it. (Figure 3.1) The dominant partner, he is a 'social misfit' who loves guns and violence. Erratic and unpredictable, Kit shoots a football because he considers it to be excess baggage, and is unconcerned about being shot down as long as there is a girl (not Holly in particular) to scream out his name. Holly soon falls out of 'love' with Kit: "He needed me more than ever, but something had come between us. I'd stopped even paying attention to him." What had "come between" them? She remains clueless, but makes up her mind to never again tag around with a hell bent type no matter how in 'love' she was. They are both very similar characters, yet Holly fails to realise this. She gives herself up, and Kit is captured not long after. "He claimed to having a flat tyre but the way he carried on about it, I imagine it was false." (Holly)

Kit is unwilling to carry on without Holly, as she is the essential element for his fantasy of a big ending. He allows himself to be caught, leaving a monument to note the place. Instead he enjoys the attention given to him by the state police and National Guardsmen, joking with them and receiving adulation and attention, which he considers his due. (Figure 3.2)

Kit believes that by becoming a 'celebrity' he can give significance and immortality to a life that otherwise is doomed to be unnoted in the history of the world. Sadly, only by becoming a murderer can Kit achieve his goal." (Peary, 1982, p. 13)

There is emptiness at the heart of Kit and Holly, unlike the emptiness in the lives of Bonnie and Clyde, as Bonnie and Clyde are not lacking for character, but a position in society where they can find themselves. Holly and Kit have no-one to find.

When the couple finally part, they are disappointed in each other, despite knowing that they are both empty, dull people. They wanted more from the other to give them what they need out of life. (Peary, 1982, p. 14)

In *Badlands*, Malick intentionally makes Kit and Holly dull characters to make the point that criminals are not always the exciting people that the media hype them up to be, and that "criminals of their ilk are not worthy



Figure 3.1 Kit copying the familiar stance of his hero James Dean



Figure 3.2 The captured Kit enjoys the police's admiration of his charm

of the adulation Americans traditionally bestow upon them.” (Peary, 1982, p. 14)

The film is seen through Holly's viewpoint, as it was in *Pierrot Le Fou*, via Ferdinand's diary. They similarly are the more important characters. There becomes two Hollys, the narrator and the character in the film. Holly's narration of exaggerated excitement contrasts greatly with the slow images seen by the viewer, showing a mundane life of much the same quality that Holly had before she met Kit. The use of narration also pushes Kit into the limelight as a killer/misfit, while distancing herself from the killing as the spectator documenting events. We hear Holly's commentary through the movie, her expressionless dull monotone voice matching her facial expression, composed as a story to be sent in to one of her fan magazines. Her voice is haunting, and we soon realise that the images and words are from the past.

The couple break free from the organised society; “They start out in a city - that is neatly laid out grid of streets which belongs to an ordered society” (Johnson, 1974, p.45) This is re-inforced by the scene where Kit approaches Holly's father who is painting a billboard depicting a harmonious and idealised society. They have to break free from this structured livelihood and flee into the countryside, which is repeated when they flee from the main roads and drive across the plains. (Johnson, 1974, p.45) Society treats Kit and Holly like wild animals, seen when they are hunted down by bounty hunters.

In *Natural Born Killers* (1995), the blurring of the distinction between pop-culture and reality is taken one stage further. In *Badlands* we understand Holly and Kit's acting out of their chosen roles as a form of self - delusion. This is possible because as viewers we are never in any doubt about the distance between their construction of the world and their significance in it, and the reality of the situation.

In *Natural Born Killers* it is harder for the viewer to adopt this stance. Mickey and Mallory construct an identity for themselves in a similar way

to Holly and Kit but in the case of *Natural Born Killers*, the viewer is not permitted a clear view of the couple to contrast with their fantasy. (Figure 3.3) Mickey and Mallory are presented through the prism of modern American junk T.V hence the references at the end of the film to OJ Simpson, Tonya Harding, The Menendez brothers etc. (Figure 3.4) The protagonists, Mickey and Mallory, grow even more aware than Bonnie and Clyde of the importance of the media, as seen in the "I Love Mallory" pastiche television sitcom. The sitcom acts as a postmodern device of showing what is in effect a 'flashback'. "It serves as a chilling, ironic, and highly effective critique of television's clichéd vision of the 'happy nuclear family'." (Pizzello, 1994, p. 45) Gross explains "The literal interpretation of this show-within-a film is that Mickey and Mallory are 'victims' of abuse. But the sitcom format undermines that reading." (Gross, 1995, p. 8)

This postmodern film reflects elements of O'Brien's view: that the distinction between reality and TV is blurred. Even in 'reality' the distinction between the 'real' and the 'fictional' becomes increasingly problematic. (O'Brien, 1989, p. 21) Film becomes fused with 'real life' because 'real life' is our big media circus. "In a climax that underlines the absurdity of life in the Media Age, Mickey engineers a daring escape from the prison when a riot erupts during his live, exclusive interview with Gale on Super Bowl Sunday." (Pizzello, 1994, p. 36-7) (Figure 3.5) Wayne Gale, the reporter, is still filming, but the situation which is 'live and very real' becomes removed from the audience as it is still being filmed as 'TV junk', as opposed to the 'live' interview with Mickey which was 'controlled'. (Figure 3.5)

Unlike the earlier montage techniques of the New Wave, Oliver Stone, the director of *Natural Born Killers*, has his own style. Gross explains that Stone does not undo conventional narrative sequence in the name of other discursive or intellectual systems. (Gross, 1995, p. 9) The rapid stylistic changes in this film, create a bombardment of images, often containing elements of 'pastiche', a sampling of other films, described by Jameson as the allusive and elusive plagiarism of older plots. (Jameson, 1983, p. 117). Also encompassing the postmodernism schizophrenic experience where

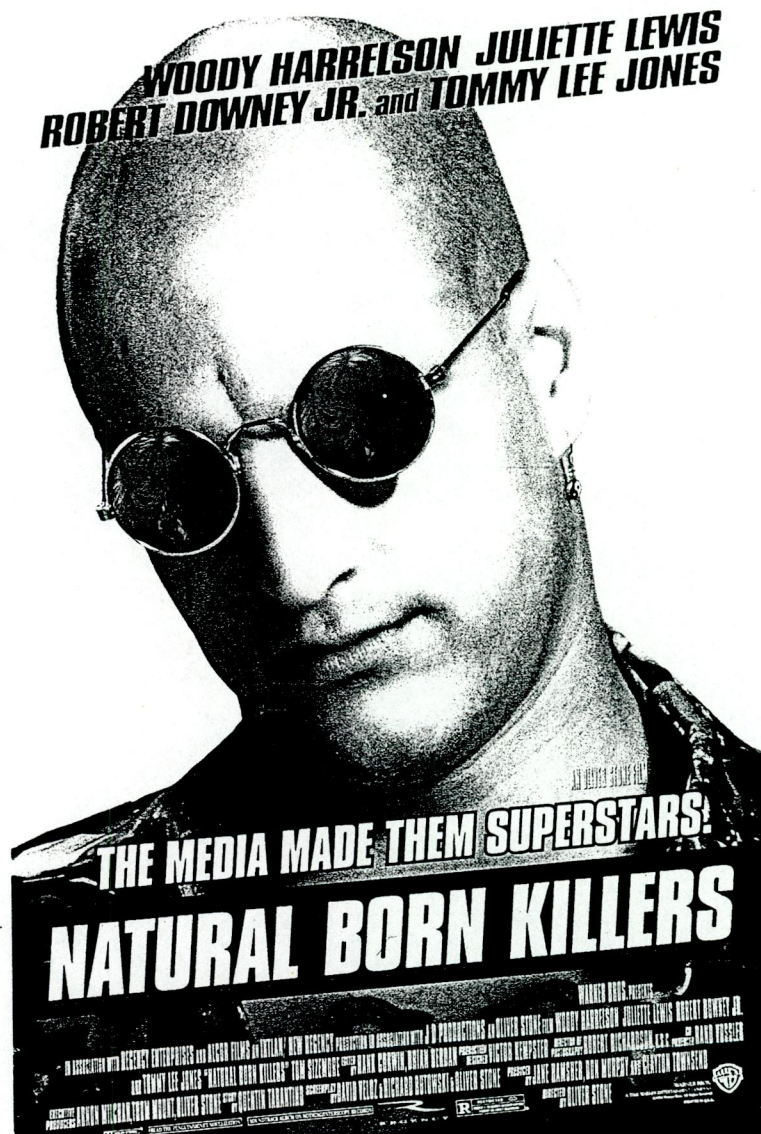
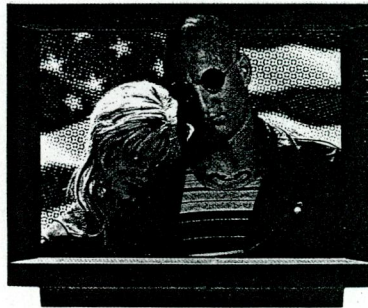


Figure 3.3 Film advertisement for *Natural Born Killers*, 1994

WOODY HARRELSON
JULIETTE LEWIS
ROBERT DOWNEY JR.
AND TOMMY LEE JONES

DIRECTOR OLIVER STONE BRINGS YOU
A BOLD NEW LOOK AT A COUNTRY
SEDUCED BY FAME,
OBSESSED BY CRIME
AND
CONSUMED BY THE MEDIA.



AN OLIVER STONE FILM
NATURAL BORN KILLERS
In the media circus of life, they were the main attraction.

WARNER BROS. PRESENTS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH REGENCY ENTERPRISES AND ALCOR FILMS
AN IXTLAN / NEW REGENCY PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH J D PRODUCTIONS AN OLIVER STONE FILM
WOODY HARRELSON JULIETTE LEWIS ROBERT DOWNEY JR. AND TOMMY LEE JONES
"NATURAL BORN KILLERS" TOM SIZEMORE EDITOR HANK CORWIN, BRIAN BERDAN
PRODUCTION DESIGNER VICTOR KEMPSTER DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT RICHARDSON, A.S.C. CO-PRODUCER RAND VOSSLER
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ARNON MILCHAN, THOM MOUNT, OLIVER STONE STORY BY QUENTIN TARANTINO
SCREENPLAY BY DAVID VELOZ & RICHARD RUTOWSKI & OLIVER STONE
PRODUCED BY JANE HAMSHER, DON MURPHY AND CLAYTON TOWNSEND
DIRECTED BY OLIVER STONE

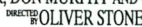


Figure 3.4 Alternative film advertisement for *Natural Born Killers*, 1994



Figure 3.5 Gale's 'live' interview with Mickey the 'natural born killer'

material in the film fails to link up into a coherent sequence, the images are disconnected and isolative signifiers; "...it's a straightforward rush of inexplicable raw visual data." (James, 1995, p. 45) There is an overload of images, and not a single conventional image in the film. The film is a channel-surfing experience to indicate that Mallory sees her life via television, whereas *Badlands* "rejects a smooth flow in favour of terse self-contained sequences." (Johnson, 1974, p. 43), but has a stronger narrative reflecting the belief that Holly and Kit see theirs via film.

Mickey and Mallory have created their own world where they kill who ever they want. Whoever annoys them, gets in their way, or just happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. A psychiatrist in the film diagnoses that Mickey and Mallory know the difference between right and wrong. They just don't give a damn. They are silhouetted against a corrupt society. Jack Scagnetti, the cop, is a psychopath and a killer himself who is infatuated with Mallory. Gale, the reporter, condemns Mickey and Mallory for killing innocent victims, but his own violence emerges during the riot.


In *Natural Born Killers* sexual attraction sparks off the violence: Mickey sees Mallory, wants her, and kills her abusive parents in order to get her. Mallory is ultimately led by her love for Mickey. We are told by Holly, that she and Kit are in love though it is never actually said to one another, or expressed through any clear action. In contrast to the success of the picnic in *Bonnie and Clyde*, their consummation of love is much more disappointing. Holly lacks the passion of Laurie, and unlike Bonnie is not attracted to the use of guns. The violence executed by Kit does not in turn spark off any sexual charge or power thrill from the killings. Mickey and Mallory, however, are a 'romantic couple' (their wedding, the rings to signify their love, their tattoos), but it is merely a parody of a couple seen especially in the ending where normality is achieved by pretending to be the 'happy family'.

The film *Thelma and Louise* (1991) contrasts greatly with *Badlands* and *Natural Born Killers*. Thelma and Louise are older than the adolescents in all the 'outlaw couple' films mentioned, but at the same time still have to

discover who they really are. Unlike Kit and Holly, they succeed in establishing their true characters and are happy with the result. Instead of a heterosexual couple, they are two female friends who find themselves on the run, through an unfortunate turn of events. (Figure 3.6) Clover explains that Thelma and Louise are not outlaws in the first instance for economic or larger social or political reasons. They are outlaws because the one has killed the other's rapist-in a fit of anger. (Clover, 1992, p. 234) Louise kills Thelma's potential rapist because she was once raped herself. Thelma and Louise are forced outside the law by male oppression, and driven to their fate. Once again, as in *Bonnie and Clyde*, we question society's judgement of them. Is society justified by their deaths? We see them as loveable and eccentric, and on the most part as innocents. Society deems them to be dangerous armed women. The two women are tragic victims. Society on the surface seems to be punishing them because they have committed the crime of manslaughter. In reality, the two women are being punished because of their lack of 'femininity.'

They cast off the clothes, make-up etc., emblems of their previous more 'feminine' selves, through the course of the film. They look and are very different characters (stripped to only tee-shirts and jeans) from how they appeared at the start of their journey. In society's eyes they have turned into a pair of hardened, sweaty, dusty 'masculine' outlaws, yet to the audience they are two very feminine "...beautiful, easygoing women who recognise that they can no longer tolerate a deepshit status in a man-made American universe." (Johnston, 1991/92, p. 23)

SUSAN SARANDON • GEENA DAVIS



Somebody said get a life...
so they did.

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scored a perfect 10."
VOGUE MAGAZINE

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movie since
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Pauline McLeod
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★★★★
"...you won't see a
more engaging movie all
year...a joy from start
to finish."
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19 MAGAZINE

A RIDLEY SCOTT FILM

THELMA & LOUISE

18

PATHE ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS A PERCY MAIN PRODUCTION A RIDLEY SCOTT FILM SUSAN SARANDON GEENA DAVIS THELMA & LOUISE
HARVEY KEITEL COSTUME DESIGNER ELIZABETH McBRIDE MUSIC BY HANS ZIMMER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DEAN O'BRIEN AND CALLIE KHOURI
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER THOM NOBLE PRODUCED BY NORRIS SPENCER BASED UPON THE SCREENPLAY BY ADRIAN BIDDLE B.S.C. WRITTEN BY CALLIE KHOURI
DIRECTED BY RIDLEY SCOTT AND MIMI POLK DUBLING BY RIDLEY SCOTT

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ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK ALBUM AVAILABLE ON RCA CASSETTES AND COMPACT DISC.

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Color by DOLBY DIGITAL

Figure 3.6 The film advertisement for *Thelma and Louise*, 1997

Conclusion

Central to all these 'outlaw couple' movies are the concepts of femininity and masculinity. Both sexes display strong traits of their opposite gender. A certain number of the females have definite signs of masculinity through their love of guns and violence, and even by just crossing over the boundaries of society. The male, in contrast, is often weakened by the dominance of the female. However, as Man suggests several of the women protagonists in these films find some kind of fulfilment in their life of crime (*Gun Crazy, Bonnie and Clyde*), but all of them find fulfilment in an attachment to their male counterpart. (Man, 1993, p.44)

Film Noir, modernism and postmodernism question the basic notions of stereotyping. Assuming that we understand what stereotypes are, and that we believe in them, these 'outlaw couple' films attempt to break them down through defining and redefining "basic notions - like 'female' and 'male' - and the realities they inflict." (Byars, 1991, p.72) Acknowledging that both masculine and feminine idiosyncrasies are found in both sexes, therefore rejecting any form of stereotyping.

The 'outlaw couple' film recounts both an inward and outward journey. The inward journey is one of self exploration (of the mind, the heart, and the spirit) whereas the outward journey is one of physical on-the-road travel. Ultimately, however, both journeys must come to their inevitable end, terminated by society. The 'outlaw couple' seem to be condemned because of the crimes they have committed, but in actuality the real 'crime' in society's eyes is the couples' deep sexual attraction to one another. It is the lovers' *amour fou* which society can not and will not condone or sanctify, for it was born 'out' of society. According to Krutnik, many of these 'outlaw couple' films give violent and vicarious expression to desires which are manifestly and inherently 'criminal'. (Krutnik, 1991, p. 226) It is also only through violence that their love can be released. For something that was originally banished only to be brought back by two young lovers who transgressed society's laws and taboos is something that is not allowed.

The couples in all the films are "living on the edge of risk, precariously, without time or energy for sustained reflection on the lives they live." (Timmerman, 1993, p. xii) Ultimately "each realises that their notoriety as a couple poses a major threat to their continuing together, but they decide to remain with each other regardless of this danger." (Krutnik, 1991, p. 224). As Krutnik suggests, the 'outlaw couple' represents a transgressive fantasy which is marked, in multiple ways, by the inevitability of its failure. (Krutnik, 1991, p. 138) As Cowie then points out, "It is the fantasy itself that demands the punishment, for in the punishment the reality of the forbidden wish is acknowledged." (Cowie, 1993, p. 136) Paradoxically their only form of reintegration with society is through their deaths, where society can once again regain control. "Society is jealous of those who remain away from it, and will come knocking at the door." (Campbell, 1993, p. 207)

In the film industry, violence seen through the 'outlaw couple' is very much a live and topical subject in the mid 1990s, and considerable controversy rages about the reason for, and effect of how, this portrayal is affecting society at this time. The 'outlaw couple' has changed with the passage of time, and the most recent film, *Natural Born Killers*, is probably only a precursor of more films which will surface in due course. The 'outlaw couple-in-crime' movies of the future will no doubt reflect the times in which the movies are shot, but will also relate to the 'outlaw couple' films from the 1930s up to the present time. They will add a new dimension to the 'outlaw couple' which will allow for more debate.

A p p e n d i x

They Live By Night

RKO, U.S.A 1948

Director - Nicholas Ray

Cast: Cathy O'Donnell (Keechie), Farley Granger (Bowie), Howard de Silva (Chickamaw), Jay C Flippen (T-Dub), Helen Craig (Mattie).

95 mins

Two hardened criminals, Chickamaw and T-Dub, escape from prison taking with them a young naive criminal, Bowie. They rob a bank, but Bowie is injured during their escape. He is nursed back to health by an innocent girl, Keechie. The two fall in love, get married, run away and try to make a fresh start with Bowie's share of the money. Chickamaw catches up with Bowie and forces him into another robbery. T-Dub is killed during (and Chickamaw after) the robbery. Bowie turns to Mattie, T-Dub's sister-in-law, for help, but she turns him into the police to get her husband out of prison. Bowie is shot down by the police, leaving his pregnant wife.

Gun Crazy

United Artists, U.S.A 1950

Director - Joseph H. Lewis

Cast: Peggy Cummins (Annie Laurie Starr), John Dall (Bart Tare), Berry Kroeger (Packett), Anabel Shaw (Ruby Tare).

87 mins

Bart Tare has always had a fascination with guns, and is sent to reform school for stealing one from a downtown shop. He arrives home years later, and goes to a carnival with his old school friends. He is instantly attracted to a trick shooter, Annie Laurie Starr. Proving through a competition that he is an excellent marksman himself, he is then asked to join the travelling carnival. Laurie persuades him to leave the carnival in

search of more excitement, and they become outlaws, robbing filling stations and liquor stores to survive. They plan one more big job before escaping to Mexico, but Laurie kills two men. They return to Bart's home town once more, but again the couple are forced to flee for their lives. Trapped in a fog in the wilderness, Bart shoots Laurie before being shot by the police.

Pierrot Le Fou

France, 1965

Director - Jean-Luc Godard

Cast: Jean-Paul Belmondo (Ferdinand), Anna Karina (Marianne)

110 mins

Ferdinand leaves a party early and runs off with the baby-sitter, a former lover. After Marianne commits a few murders, the pair try to live by the Riviera. Marianne is bored and wants to get back into the gangster life. She betrays Ferdinand, takes their money, and runs off with her so called 'brother'. Ferdinand follows them to an island where he kills the 'brother' and Marianne, before wrapping himself in dynamite and committing suicide.

Bonnie and Clyde

Warner Bros, U.S.A 1967

Director - Arthur Penn

Cast: Warren Beatty (Clyde Barrow), Faye Dunaway (Bonnie Parker), Gene Hackman (Buck Barrow), Estelle Parsons (Blanche Barrow), Michael J. Pollard (C.W. Moss).

111 mins

Bonnie and Clyde meet when Bonnie spies Clyde trying to steal her mother's car. The two walk into town, and Clyde shows her his gun. Clyde robs a store to impress her, and as they make their getaway they introduce themselves to one another as Bonnie smothers him with kisses. She soon

finds out that he is sexually impotent. Bonnie stays with him regardless. After a few minor robberies they invite a car mechanic, C.W Moss, to join them. Not long after, Clyde's brother Buck and his wife Blanche join the group to form the 'Barrow Gang'. Later, Buck is killed and Blanche blinded. Bonnie and Clyde are wounded, and hide out in C.W's father's house to recover. They manage to consummate their love before they are betrayed, and killed in a police ambush.

Badlands

Warner Bros, USA 1973

Director - Terence Malick

Cast: Martin Sheen (Kit Carruthers), Sissy Spacek (Holly), Warren Oates (Father).

94 mins

Based on the true story of the murdering spree of Charles Starkweather and his girlfriend, Caril Fugate in 1958. Kit, a social misfit, meets a fifteen year old called Holly. Kit kills Holly's father and fakes their own suicide, and they go on a killing spree throughout the American Mid West. They set up home in the idyllic countryside until bounty hunters come after them. They head on, Kit killing and stealing until Holly gives herself up, and Kit follows her lead shortly afterwards. Through Holly's narration we learn that Kit is sentenced to the electric chair, and she marries her defence lawyer.

Natural Born Killers

Warner Bros, USA 1994

Director - Oliver Stone

Cast: Woody Harrelson (Mickey Knox), Juliette Lewis (Mallory Knox), Robert Downey Jnr (Wayne Gale), Tommy Lee Jones (Dwight McCluskey).

118 mins

Two kids, Mickey and Mallory, are on a killing spree. In a series of flashbacks in the form of a spoof television sitcom, we see how the pair

met. Mickey and Mallory kill her abusive father and helpless mother. They perform their own wedding ceremony. Their car runs out of gas in the desert and they are given shelter by an old Indian. During a nightmare Mickey accidentally kills the Indian Shaman. During their getaway they are bitten by snakes. They attempt to get an antidote from a store but they are surrounded and captured. One year later, Wayne Gale, the host of *American Maniacs*, has an interview with Mickey who proclaims that he is a 'natural born killer', sparking off a prison riot. Taking advantage of the situation, Mickey gains control and is re-united with Mallory. The two escape using Wayne and others as human shields. In the wilderness they kill Wayne, leaving his video camera to tell the tale of Mickey and Mallory.

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