

*Under 450-word review of a virtual Arthur Penn retrospective, centering on a specific film  
Intended for a general student demographic, who might not necessarily be familiar with Penn,  
1960s Hollywood cinema, or the vernacular of cinema studies*

Out of all the films screened at last night's virtual Arthur Penn retrospective, it was *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) that I dreaded the most, a film that finalized the couple's jump from historical account to pop culture iconography. Despite being a USC student, I had yet to view the crime classic in any format. In my defense(!), the base ingredients seemed liable to wander into edgy Joker x Harley Quinn territory, playing up the imagined hedonism of two criminal lovers at the expense of thematic complexity.

But the titular couple, played by Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty respectively, are less Bacchanalian freewheelers and more rebels with causes. Their layered intimacy becomes a matter of commitment beyond the limits of sex and bank robbing. "I ain't no loverboy," says Clyde, gently aborting a passionate kiss from Bonnie. *Wow*, I thought, *it's actually a slow burn*, a duo rivaling the chemistry of the future Thelma and Louise. And yet these fractured moments of intimacy are compounded by a consistent, almost intrinsic drive to protect one another – two individuals struggling for meaning against a Depression-era landscape. In the era's push for realism, cinematographer Burnett Guffey produces some eerily beautiful compositions: fields of chaff, broken windows, and a pale sky coalesce into unfeeling Van Gogh paintings, the grit of which was apparent even through my laptop screen.

It's a realism with a romantic echo, staples of Penn's operation in American New Wave, that gives a surprisingly earnest heart to *Bonnie and Clyde*. The tone often changes abruptly to mirror the tragic ironies and quirks of life itself – one memorable comedic scene involves Gene Wilder as a kidnapped undertaker before shifting to a dreamy (yet funerary) family reunion. Gone are the painless shootouts of classical Hollywood, where actors would simply jerk and fall amid puffs of smoke; here, gunshots followed up with mini explosions of fake blood, scandalous for the time but mere procedure today.

Yes, *Bonnie and Clyde* hits all the predictable beats of the crime thriller genre, such is the notoriety of its very characters. But it never become trite, with the expected ending still able to shock and reverberate throughout today's audiences. Decades later, *Bonnie and Clyde* shines with the uncanny glint of an engraved pistol, a blueprint for antihero staples from *The Godfather* (1972) to *The Departed* (2006). Beneath the romantic veneer of Hollywood drama lies a profound commentary about the humanity of crime and the failures of the American elite, a narrative critical to understanding the next generation of films to follow.