A SURVEY OF CRITICISM OF VIOLENCE IN AMERICAN MOTION PICTURES 1958 TO 1968

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Steven Karl Meuche

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ABSTRACT

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By

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This thesis involves an examination of film critics' reactions to selected films of 1958 to 1968 which contain acts of violence; the most controversial of these films, "Bonnie and Clyde," is explored in detail. A great variety of types of violence appeared in the films of this period. But, prior to "Bonnie and Clyde" in 1967, we find that the actual violence, with few exceptions, drew little attention from the American public or the critics.

Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde" caused great public and critical concern. It is shown that this unconventional film sharply divided the critics over the usefulness of excessive violence. A discussion of the critics' comments on "Bonnie and Clyde's" effect on the film audience is also included.

The preliminary chapters of this thesis present a brief historical survey of violent films prior to 1958 in which the writings of numerous motion picture historians

and film critics are used as a basis for speculation on the changes, over the years, in the audience response, censorship programs, and social norms as they relate to film violence.

Also included is an examination of film critics' attitudes regarding their art and their views on the use of violence in popular motion pictures.

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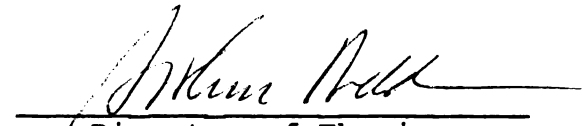

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INTRODUCTION

The period from 1958 to 1968 was a particularly exciting one for followers of film criticism. During this time the critics were commenting on some of the most violent and controversial American films ever produced.

This attempt to study critical reaction to violence in this decade of films necessitates a few preliminaries. Thus an examination of the writings of film reviewers on techniques for meaningful criticism and feelings about the use of violence in movies precedes our discussion of specific violent films. Also a review of some of the more violent motion pictures before 1958 should help us understand in what ways and how much violence has been presented through film's history. And perhaps we can find some correlations of the societal norms with the violence in the films of each period and the critics' reaction to that violence.

For the purposes of this research a thorough definition of violence is not necessary since we are dealing only with violence or violent episodes which are called to our attention and examined by the film critic. However, in our analysis, we will try to differentiate the way critics explain

real or fictional violence or the aesthetic treatment of acts of violence.

The films of 1958 to 1968 to be examined will be drawn from the Best Films lists, for each year, of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the New York Film Critics, The New York Times, and the Filmfacts composite of all films mentioned in fifteen Ten Best lists of leading magazines and newspapers. To be relevant to this study, all of these films must contain acts of violence which are examined by several major film critics.

An important portion of this thesis is devoted to Arthur Penn's 1967 production of "Bonnie and Clyde" because of its relevance to this study. Perhaps no other American film has generated more critical response than "Bonnie and Clyde." More than fifteen film critics wrote lengthy pieces dealing with this motion picture, and to almost all of them it was one of the most violent major films they had ever reviewed.

CHAPTER I

SOME CRITICS ON FILM CRITICISM

James Agee's premise that film criticism is a conversation between moviegoers seems to be generally followed, often with some amplification, by today's critics.[1] Judith Crist subscribes to the Agee philosophy but, she says, "my immediate goal is to keep the conversation going, to stimulate my listener into a response, whether it involves a reappraisal of his own opinions or an affirmation of his disagreement."[2]

The conversation approach is perhaps more informal and interesting, but the critic, to the moviegoing public, must often maintain the role of teacher and the reader the role of student. "The critic," says Hollis Alpert, "is of value in educating the public to understanding, appreciation, and

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[1]James Agee in his introductory review in The Nation (December 26, 1942), p. 22, wrote: "It is my business to conduct one end of a conversation, as an amateur critic among amateur critics. And I will be of use and of interest only insofar as my amateur judgment is sound, stimulating, or illuminating."

[2]Judith Crist, The Private Eye, The Cowboy, and the Very Naked Girl (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), p. xvii.

acceptance of better films and higher standards of film-making."[3] And to be respected and authoritative, Alpert says the good critic must have "more than cursory acquaintance with the fields of literature, theater, philosophy, science, art, and music--for movies, inevitably, when they are serious, and even when they are not--touch on all these fields."[4]

A respected critic must also be an artist and a thinker. Oscar Wilde, in his essay "The Critic as Artist," wrote "the critic is he who exhibits to us a work of art in a form different from the work itself, and the employment of a new material is a critical as well as a creative element."[5] As a thinker, John Simon writes: "the critic must have a world view, which, however one may wish to disguise it, is a moral position. Nothing is more suspect in criticism nowadays than a moral position, and yet there can be no criticism without one."[6]

Because the critic's work often appears in a mass circulation magazine or newspaper, he often must contain his reviews to what broadly interests the majority of his readers.

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[3]Hollis Alpert, The Dreams and The Dreamers (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 9.

[4]Ibid., p. 9.

[5]Oscar Wilde, quoted by John Simon in Private Screenings (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967, p. 5.

[6]John Simon, Private Screenings (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 5.

Thus, Hollis Alpert says, "the publishers create the star rating system, a kind of Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," because the "public has a tendency to regard the review as a service feature."[7]

The film critic for the mass audience exposes himself to the public's occasional dissatisfaction with his "art." Pauline Kael, in her outspoken style, often elicits caustic reactions from her audience. But Miss Kael knows how to fight back. In response to some letters critical of a radio broadcast on "The New American Cinema," she replied:

> I recognize your assumptions: the critic is supposed to be rational, clever, heartless, and empty, envious of the creative fire of the artist, and if the critic is a woman, she is supposed to be cold and castrating. The artist is supposed to be delicate and sensitive and in need of tender care and nourishment. Well, this nineteenth-century romanticism is pretty silly in twentieth-century Bohemia.[8]

There is no magic formula for successful reviewing of films; art is not created from formulas, and most critics view their profession as a form of artistic endeavor. A critical style is more often developed out of a sense of responsibility to help the critic's audience to see what is in a film, what is in it that shouldn't be, and what is not in it that could be. A good critic, says Pauline Kael, "helps people understand more about the work than they could see for

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[7]Alpert, Dreams, p. 7.

[8]Pauline Kael, I Lost It At The Movies (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1965), p. 234.

themselves; a great critic . . . can excite people so that they want to experience more of the art that is waiting there to be seized."[9]

To John Simon the critic serves also as a kind of "gatekeeper" to screen all films that seem worthwhile and to "spare us the waste of what as mortals we have the least of--time." Thus, continues Simon, "criticism can accelerate the verdict of the ages, it can speed up the coming of pleasure and enlightenment."[10]

In performing his art, the critic should also relate the films he reviews to his understanding of contemporary mores and manners. "If a movie serves falsehood, spreads prejudice, or distorts issues," says Hollis Alpert, "all this indeed should be pointed out, but with discernment and fairness of mind."[11] Alpert was referring to a critic's reaction to a film ("The Lovers") shown in Dayton, Ohio, which led to the prosecution of a theatre owner for displaying an obscene film. He writes: "What value are reviewers at all if they use specious definitions of morality as grounds for evaluation?"[12]

Screenwriter Dudley Nichols ("Stagecoach," "The Informer") as an outsider, views the art quite perceptively. Nichols

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[9]Ibid., p. 308.

[10]Simon, Screenings, p. 2.

[11]Alpert, Dreams, p. 9.

[12]Ibid.

deplores the critic who uses his wit, personality, and power until his own talents are exalted above his subject matter. He says, "the true critic, who must combine the heart of a poet with the intellect of a scholar, must find his reward in his work, in his sense of growth and discovery, in winning the respect of a few people whom he respects."[13]

To Pauline Kael, film criticism is exciting simply because the film art is exciting, and "you must use everything you are and everything you know that is relevant. . . ."[14]

In all his attempts to remain as objective as possible, the seasoned critic, out of a strong love and devotion to the film art, often finds himself emotionally involved in his work. For example, James Agee in his review in The Nation, of the best films of 1945, thanked the creative people of Hollywood for getting on the screen more than a split-second glimmer of what they have in them to put there. And, he continued,

> I am grateful for hundreds of split-second glimmers, which I wish I had room to specify. But the desire of any critic, like that of any artist, who has a right even to try to defend or practice an art--as perhaps any human being who has a right even to try to defend or practice living--cannot be satisfied short of perfect liberty, discipline, and achievement, though the attempt may be wholly loved and honored.[15]

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[13]Dudley Nichols in Lewis Jacobs (ed.), Introduction to the Art of the Movies (New York: Noonday Press, 1964), p. 270.

[14]Kael, Lost It, p. 309.

[15]James Agee, Agee on Film (1958 ed.: New York: McDowell, Obolensky Inc., 1941), p. 188.

Judith Crist has written: "Like parents, we carp and criticize and pick away at the flaws; like lovers, we go to passionate heights and depths in our reactions; like true friends, we know our relationship must be based on honesty."[16]

And Pauline Kael warns all observers of the art of film:

> When movies, the only art which everyone felt free to enjoy and have opinions about, lose their connection with song and dance, drama, and the novel, when they become cinema, which people fear to criticize just as they fear to say what they think of a new piece of music or a new poem or painting, they will become another object of academic study and appreciation, and will soon be an object of excitement only to practitioners of the 'art'.[17]

Thus the critic, as a conversationalist or a teacher, views his job as sharing his ideas about film with his audience. Hopefully, through his experience with film and his expertise as a writer, he gives the viewer of a motion picture a new angle or dimension. And because the critic deals in ideas, opinions, and social mores, he often becomes the center of controversy among fellow critics or the film audience. But he persists because, more often than not, he becomes the opinion leader and his ideas serve as a catalyst for discussion among other lovers of the art.

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[16]Crist, Cowboy, p. xv.

[17]Kael, Lost It, p. 23.

CHAPTER II

THE CRITICS ON VIOLENCE IN FILM

Violence or criminal behavior can be motivated for political, social, or economic reasons. And violence exists, and is often encouraged, in socially approved forms such as war and police action, or for self-defense. American motion pictures have managed many times to treat each of these aspects of violence and probably some others.

Critic John Simon describes three types of film violence: "the ineptly overstated kind, which proves finally boring; the sadistic one, which is finally nauseating; and the artistically meaningful one, which is thereby moral."[1] Simon admits there are exceptions to these simplified categories of violence on film. One might be the use of violence for high comedy. Here some critics point to Chaplin's "Monsieur Verdoux," a satire in which the hero, a mass murderer, says, "one murder makes a villain--millions sanctify." Arthur Knight calls "Monsieur Verdoux" "probably the most nonconformist picture ever made." Knight says, "Chaplin brazenly attempted to shock and outrage virtually every organized

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[1]John Simon, "The Question of Violence; It's Not How Much, But How," The New York Times, March 17, 1968, p. D17.

section of every American community with his pragmatic, unconventional morality."[2]

Judith Crist, in hailing "Verdoux" as one of the rarer, but more delightful aspects of violence in film, writes: "But much rarer is the comedy provided by the killer; the lesser criminal as clown can be a laughing matter, but clowns are close to our hearts, and who, besides his mother, can love a murderer, let alone laugh at his on-the-job activities."[3]

Film violence also can be used in many other ways. John Simon, in his essay, "The Question of Violence: It's Not How Much, but How," says, "violence can depict a condition; or, by isolating that condition from its context, comment on it analytically; or, by establishing some correspondence between the condition and an underlying truth, convey something deeper than the surface events."[4]

Producers of violent films seem to spend a great deal of time in public appearances and interviews with the press justifying the use of violence as necessary to the film's continuity. Time magazine's 1967 cover story on violence in films examined a new production philosophy. "Movies still make moral points, but the points are rarely driven home in

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[2]Arthur Knight, The Liveliest Art (New York: New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1959), p. 50.

[3]Crist, Cowboy, p. 75.

[4]Simon, The New York Times, p. D17.

the heavy-hammered old way. And like some of the most provocative literature, the film now is apt to be amoral, casting a coolly neutral eye on life and death and on humanity's most perverse moods and modes."[5]

Violence is also justified as merely depicting a lifestyle that is commonplace in a world of violent happenings; it frequently enters into our thinking and feeling. And to represent it on the screen, some critics argue, is merely telling something about ourselves.

Much can be learned of the critics's attitude toward limitation on film violence from a symposium conducted among members of the National Society of Film Critics by Richard Schickel and John Simon. Schickel and Simon asked fellow critics "how much farther can the film go with sex and violence; or has it already gone too far?" Some of the respondents spoke of the relation of film violence to the actual brutality of the sixties as expressed in the mass media. Television news reporting of the Vietnam War or riots in American cities represents the true form of today's film violence, according to Hollis Alpert. He responds: "Films use . . . the illusion of violence as a means of convincing the audience of the 'reality' of what they are seeing. When used to an excessive degree it is to mask weakness in story

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[5]"The Shock of Freedom in Films," Time (December 8, 1967), p. 66.

structure and development by concentrating the audience attention on these details."[6]

Stanley Kauffman replied: "How can films go further than they have gone? We already have torture and killing on the home screens (TV newsreel clips of war)."[7]

Both the movies and the front page of The New York Times, says Richard Schickel, reflect our setting aside our inhibitions against violence.[8]

Because the cinema is the art that deals most profoundly with life, Robert Koenigil says, "it is the greatest creator of modern myths. That is precisely why it is dangerous: it will excuse certain important things and then show effectively a very modern style that may become perverse to the imagination: it shows how easy it is to kill, that murder is a way out, that it solves certain other insoluble problems."[9]

The question of whether the film reviewer should be a guardian of public morality influences Hollis Alpert's comments on the limitation on film violence. Alpert says:

> What a good many quite conscientious people are concerned about is the rising level of tolerance in the audience toward portrayals of sex and violence, as shown by the commercial success of many films that feature these aspects, and our worry about the films is really

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[6]Richard Schickel and John Simon, eds., Film 67/68: An Anthology by the National Society of Film Critics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 268.

[7]Ibid., p. 290.

[8]Ibid., p. 301.

[9]Mark Koenigil, Movies in Society (Sex, Crime, and Censorship) (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1962), p. 88.

> a disguised worry about the audience. If we make the films go away, maybe we'll make the sensation-loving audience go away too. Few critics who worried about the violence in Bonnie and Clyde, for example, were worried about its effect on themselves; it is always the other person.[10]

Almost all the respondents in the Schickel-Simon poll feel that the only violence that warrants disapproval is that which is used by the filmmaker for purposes of exploitation. In other words, when violence is just plain bad art. To John Simon, there is no specifiable limit for violence. "Whatever serves a given artist's purpose best--provided he is a true artist--is right; whatever conveys the point to be made artistically and efficaciously is good and proper."[11]

Or as Andrew Sarris puts it: "The film will go only as far as artists take it. I don't believe film has gone too far. In sex, it has not yet caught up with literature. In violence, it still lags behind politics."[12]

And Simon concludes, "what is violence if not that which is communicated--transferred in all its painfulness from the film to us--rather than countless gory deaths and lovingly spelled-out tortures that end up by numbing or nauseating us."[13]

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[10]Schickel and Simon, Film 67/68, pp. 286-287.

[11]Ibid., p. 305.

[12]Ibid., p. 299.

[13]Simon, The New York Times, p. D17.

Thus the critics' response to violence seems to be predicated by several conditions of its use. Since film almost always attempts a realistic portrayal of events or ideas, and because violence is often the reality of the day, it seems to many critics that violence should be an integral part of the motion picture. The critics are generally receptive to violent acts which help create the realism of the film. But when violence is bad art (and critics find this difficult to agree on) or used only for its own sake, it is not critically approved.

CHAPTER III

THE AUDIENCE, THE CRITICS, AND THE VIOLENT FILMS OF 1920 TO 1958

Following World War I, Hollywood gained domination of the world film market. Subsequently, the film industry became the darling of Wall Street, and this new found source of financial power in turn resulted in more lavish and costly film productions. The big domestic films of the twenties and their highly paid stars reflected all the flamboyance of the "jazz age." The producers and the stars, unprepared for their sudden wealth, became thoroughly captivated by the times. Arthur Knight relates: "many of them began to act like children in a room full of bright new toys. . . . By 1922 Hollywood had gained the reputation of being not only the most glamorous but also the most corrupt city in the United States."[1]

The industry's own effort at self-regulation, through the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, resulted in films that were more "moral" than their predecessors, but "there was an inevitable duality, a conflict

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[1]Knight, Liveliest Art, pp. 110-111.

between thought and deed that made most pictures of the era seem basically dishonest. Drinking, petting, orgiastic parties--all these were shown in gleeful detail, but always with a compensating cluck of disapproval to indicate how proper and moral the producers really were."[2]

"The addition of the middle class and well-to-do to the movie audience, already apparent on America's entrance into World War I, was now complete."[3] And the film consumer appeared hungry for movies that depicted this lively era of American life. Lewis Jacobs continues: "So thoroughly did the spirit of the decade saturate the films that they are distinguished perhaps more for their innocent reflection of contemporary life than for their technical advances."[4]

The end of World War I brought violent reverses in American manners and morals. Jacobs writes:

> The lust for thrills, excitement, and power, the recklessness and defiance of authority condoned by governmental policy, and a general social callousness due to the war, all combined to produce a moral uncertainty and laxity unprecedented in American history.
>
> Restrained as life had been during the war days, it was now unbridled. Sexual promiscuity, faithlessness in marriage, divorce, bad manners, the hip flask, and general cynicism became popular as millions of people attempted to escape from responsibilities of all kinds.[5]

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[2]Ibid., p. 113.

[3]Lewis Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film--A Critical History (1967 ed.: New York: Columbia University, Teachers College Press, Teachers College, 1939), p. 395.

[4]Ibid., p. 395.

[5]Ibid., p. 396.

The mood of the industry and the American people may have been influential in creating the "gangster era" of films which preceded the country's entrance into World War II. There is little doubt that the films of the thirties had a profound effect on the people. Robert Warshow has written:

> the experience of the gangster as an experience of art is universal to Americans. There is almost nothing we understand better or react to more readily or with quicker intelligence. Thus the importance of the gangster film, and the nature and intensity of its emotional and aesthetic impact cannot be measured in terms of the place of the gangster himself or the importance of the problem of crime in American life.[6]

The excitement and fascination with these action stories was due in part to their uniqueness. Gangsterism and its violence was a new theme for the film. "There was a speed, a vigor, a sense of the contemporaneous scene, a realism of character and incident about these films that was in sharp contrast to the talky problem plays that surrounded them."[7]

Three of the popular pictures of the early thirties were "Little Caesar" (1930), "Public Enemy" (1931), and "Scarface" (1932). "Little Caesar" made the reputation of both its director, Mervyn LeRoy, and the leading man, Edward G. Robinson. Lewis Jacobs, in his anthology of the American film, writes:

> It was shocking, it was hard, it was not pleasant, but it was real. Lack of sentimentality, brutal assault on the nerves with gunplay, violence, chases, tense

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[6]Robert Warshow, The Immediate Experience (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1962), p. 130.

[7]Knight, Liveliest Art, p. 161.

> struggles over big stakes, callousness toward human feelings, appealed to a public suddenly insecure in their own lives, faced with a desperate struggle for survival and menaced from all sides.[8]

Films like "Little Caesar" brought from the American people a respect and consideration for the courage, daring and loyalty of the gangsters. "Realistically and objectively presented, without apology or whitewashing, the criminal leaders were in a sense exalted and their methods condoned."[9]

The title, "The Public Enemy," implies to many that gangsters, though heroic, are social evils. This film, which detailed the rise and fall of a bootlegging gangster, impressed the critics because its intentions were undoubtedly sociological. But many local citizen's groups were far from pleased with the story, sociological or not.

Paul Rotha wrote:

> Except in 'the Public Enemy,' the gangster films had avoided the social backgrounds of crime. Yet the exhaustiveness of their naturalistic detail was in effect a tacit statement that the slum, and therefore society, was responsible for uncontrolled twentieth-century crime. It was this unpleasant implication, perhaps, more than the danger that the crime film itself might breed criminals, that lay at the bottom of the boycott of gangster films by the small town civic clubs.[10]

"The Public Enemy," which was directed by William Wellman and starred James Cagney, was cited by Richard Schickel as the

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[8]Jacobs, Rise of American Film, p. 510.

[9]Ibid., pp. 510-511.

[10]Paul Rotha with Richard Griffith, The Film Till Now (revised 3rd ed.: New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1960), p. 437.

story of

> the screen's first absurd--in the existential meaning of the word--killer. Smilingly vicious, he killed merely for the pleasure of it; in the end he was rubbed out in the same pointless way. Death for no good reason is one of the central facts of existence in the twentieth century, and this was a merciless probing of the fact--the first in the movies and one of the first in any of the popular arts.[11]

"Scarface," often called the gangster picture to end all gangster pictures, brought a number of startling events which climaxed the gangster era of the film. It was "at once one of the best and most brutal of the gangster films, and was held up for months until the producers inserted several placatory scenes showing an aroused citizenry demanding action against what the film's subtitle described as 'the shame of the nation.'"[12]

Gangsterism soon became a national scandal. Although gangster films were not yet regarded as having a harmful effect on the public, many of America's powerful national organizations began to sense an unpatriotic theme in their focusing upon "America's shame."[13] "Though audiences in general did not recoil from the opened cesspool, its stench offended more delicate nostrils," and groups such as the American Legion, Daughters of the American Revolution, and national men's and women's clubs "pointed out, truly enough,

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[11]Richard Schieckel, Movies: The History of an Art and an Institution (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p. 123.

[12]Knight, Liveliest Art, p. 239.

[13]Jacobs, Rise of the American Film, p. 409.

that audiences sentimentalized the gangster and envied his life of unrestrained violence and excitement."[14]

"You Only Live Once," a crime story of the late thirties (1937) deserves attention here because of its similarity to the most controversial violent film of the nineteen sixties, "Bonnie and Clyde." This frightening story of terror challenged the society which condemns criminal offenders to ostracism. The story resembles that of the outlaw gang of the thirties which was led by Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker. The film, in spite of its violence, was hailed as a cinematic triumph. The Time reviewer said the film "sets a pace which 1937 cops and robbers sagas may find hard to beat."[15] Lewis Jacobs called it "a picture which in other hands would have degenerated into a raucous melodrama." But, said Jacobs, director Fritz Lang, "turned it into an absorbing, tense, and tragic social document."[16] Newsweek said, "despite his deep interest in the social aspects of the subject (crime), Lang doesn't sermonize in 'You Only Live Once.'"[17]

The film is the story of Eddie Taylor, an ex-convict who has married his girl and decided to go straight. But, he

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[14]Rotha and Griffith, The Film Till Now, pp. 435-436.

[15]Time, January 11, 1937, p. 56.

[16]Jacobs, Rise of the American Film, p. 464.

[17]Newsweek, January 30, 1937, p. 20.

cannot keep a job because of his record. Eventually Eddie is blamed for a bank robbery and murder and is sent to prison to die for a crime he did not commit. Eddie escapes, taking a priest hostage, and then kills the priest in his flight. He flees with his girl and is finally shot dead after a hot pursuit by the police.

Many of the critics hailed the final scene where the law takes its course and the film bares its moral. Newsweek said, "a few miles from the border, the protagonists of the finest film since 'Public Enemy' crumple under a hail of lead."[18] Lewis Jacobs wrote: "the bloody ending was resourceful and gripping. Throughout the cutting was swiftly paced, economical, urging the story to its savage conclusion."[19] The Time critic liked the use of cinematic realism. Director Fritz Lang, he wrote, "gets an extraordinary authenticity of color into his quick episodic treatment of the life and love of Eddie Taylor."[20] Pauline Kael writes: "Because 'You only Live Once' was so well done, and because the audience in the thirties shared this view of the indifference and cruelty of 'society,' there were no protests against the sympathetic way the outlaws were pictured--and, indeed, there was no reason for any."[21]

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Jacobs, Rise of the American Film, p. 465.

[20]Time, January 11, 1937, p. 56.

[21]Pauline Kael, "Onward and Upward With the Arts," The New Yorker, October 21, 1967, pp. 150-151.

The gangster's activity, depicted in the films of the early thirties, as a rational enterprise with fairly definite goals and techniques only provides a vague background to his being. The American social critic Robert Warshow describes the hoodlum's role as a kind of "pure criminality." He writes: "Certainly our response to the gangster film is most consistently and most universally a response to sadism; we gain the double satisfaction of participating vicariously in the gangster's sadism and then seeing it turned against the gangster himself."[22] Warshow sees the possibility of more serious social consequences from the gangster films after the public outcry of the early thirties which resulted in more "moral" stories as in "You Only Live Once." He writes:

> Some of the compromises introduced to avoid the supposed bad effects of the old gangster movies may be, if anything, more dangerous, for the sadistic violence that once belonged only to the gangster is now commonly enlisted on the side of the law and thus goes undefeated, allowing us (if we wish) to find in the movies a sort of 'confirmation' of our fantasies.[23]

Wars offer more violence than gangster films, and thus as the war began the film industry began to look for new themes. But the respite was only temporary. Critic Paul Rotha writes of the post war period:

> The end of the war found Hollywood once again at a loss for themes. The industry confronted a public weary of the conflict, but so steeped in violence that anything less seemed tame. The war was immediately tabued as story material. . . .

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[22]Warshow, Immediate Experience, p. 131.

[23]Ibid., p. 152.

> There was only one answer to the American predisposition to violence as a result of the war experience: The gangster film was revived with a bang, and with an accent on violence and sadism unprecedented in the Depression days.[24]

James Agee blames the film censors in part for this post-war rebirth in gangster films. Because for so many years so much had been forbidden or impossible in Hollywood, crime offered one of the few chances for vitality on the screen. Agee wrote:

> The idea keeps nagging at me that more people who think of themselves as serious-minded, and progressive, thoroughly disapprove of crime melodramas. They feel that movies should be devoted, rather, to more elevated themes. . . . They seem not to remember or not to care that in Germany, a few years ago, movies had to be constructive; stories of crime and of troubled marriage, for instance, were strictly forbidden.[25]

Of course the censors had been at work for several years before the post World War II period. But now the filmmakers were beginning to test the Code and local censorship boards as never before.

Richard Randall, in Censorship of the Movies, reported one of the earliest cases of censored film violence. In 1925 the Chicago censors were upheld by the courts for refusing to license "Deadwood Coach,"

> which featured a stagecoach holdup and a great deal of shooting. The Illinois court offered a definitive comment on depiction of violence, at the same time giving great reach to the statutory standard of 'immoral';

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[24]Rotha and Griffith, Film Till Now, p. 467.

[25]Agee, On Film, pp. 216-217.

> such pictures should not be shown unless plainly harmless; where gun-play, or the shooting of human beings is the essence of the play and does not pertain to the necessities of war, nor the preservation of law and order, is for personal spite or revenge, and involves the taking of law into one's own hands, and thus becomes a murder, the picture may be said to be immoral. . . .[26]

Local censorship boards appear to have been more effective, in many cases, in eliminating film violence than the self-policing Production Code. Randall cites Oklahoma City and Sioux City, Iowa, as examples of the "several licensing laws [which] authorize censorship of scenes which are likely to induce unlawful behavior, usually phrased as 'incitement to crime' or 'disturbance of the public peace or order.'"[27]

Crime stories, particularly those depicting juvenile delinquency, once again became quite popular in the late forties and fifties. One of the more controversial of these films was "Black Tuesday," which detailed wanton slaughter of law enforcement officers. Protests by local censors and the National Parent-Teachers Association brought concessions from the producer who cut "Black Tuesday" so only two policemen were killed on the screen.

The public outcry over these films also brought to Hollywood, in June of 1955, a Senate investigating committee, headed by Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, to probe

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[26]Richard Randall, Censorship of the Movies: The Social and Political Control of a Mass Medium (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), pp. 23-24.

[27]Ibid., p. 87.

crime and violence in movies and their effect on juvenile delinquency.

Kefauver prefaced his four days of hearings with an assurance that the Subcommittee members came to Hollywood with open minds. But the official hearing transcript reveals an overbalance on the part of the foes of film violence. For example, William Mooring, the Motion Picture and Television Editor of a Los Angeles Catholic newspaper reasoned, "the film people tacitly acknowledge the power of the movies toward public attitudes and thinking. Therefore, programs glorifying crimes and criminals, condoning loose morals or revealing low forms of living must have a correspondingly damaging effect or, at least, a potentiality that way."[28] Mooring cited the following as "among films having a potentially harmful influence on behavior problems": "Blackboard Jungle," "The Wild One," "Big House U.S.A.," "Kiss Me Deadly," "Black Tuesday," and "Cell 2455, Death Row."[29]

In a review of "Blackboard Jungle," Pauline Kael explained the concern of people such as Mr. Mooring. She wrote:

> The violence means something, it's not just there to relieve the boredom of the plot, . . . and pressure groups are right in seeing it as a threat. This violence is discharged from boredom with American life, and we

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[28]U. S. Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, Hearings, Motion Pictures, 84th Congress, 1st Session, June 15-18, 1955, p. 76. Cited hereafter as Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, Motion Pictures, 1955.

[29]Ibid., p. 76.

> have no available patterns into which it fits, no solutions for the questions it raises, and, as yet, no social or political formulations that use indifference toward prosperity and success as a starting point for new commitments.[30]

The Production Code itself was attacked by several of the Kefauver witnesses. The Code, which, according to Martin Quigley, editor of the Motion Picture Herald, "contemplated a reasoned application of the moral mandates of the Ten Commandments to the art of business of motion picture production,"[31] was thought to be inconsistent with the times. Author Ira H. Carmen reported that the Kefauver Subcommittee

> felt that most antisocial behavior caused by moving pictures could be eradicated if Hollywood's voluntary censorship code was updated; its enforcing arm was staffed, in part, by professional people from the behavioral sciences, and producers obeyed suggestions advanced by this agency.[32]

William Morring felt that the Code itself was relatively sound; the problem was one of enforcement. Mooring testified:

> It is apparent that the current trend toward excessive crime and salacious sex treatment in films is partly attributable to some failure of performance on the part of the film producers who are pledged to observe this code and the industry appointed officials whose task it is to administer it.[33]

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[30]Kael, Lost It At the Movies, pp. 60-61.

[31]Martin J. Quigley, "The Motion Picture Production Code," America, March 10, 1956, p. 630.

[32]Ira H. Carmen, Movies, Censorship, and the Law (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 248.

[33]Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, Motion Pictures, 1955, p. 89.

No actual legislation resulted from the four days of hearings in Hollywood. But demands for Code changes became more vocal on all fronts; producers, critics, religious leaders, and many moviegoers all favored changes, many of them for different reasons.

Martin J. Quigley, in a March 1956 article in America, found the code unworkable because of its attempts to maintain both prevailing moral standards and industry rules of policy and expediency. This intermingling of regulations and morals, he said,

> is questionable in theory. In practice, after the experience of years, it has been found that the procedure followed has led to unending confusion and has been the cause of the major responsible criticism to which the Code has been subjected through the years.[34]

Finally, in December of 1956, the first comprehensive changes in the Production Code since its inception in 1930 were made. Newsweek, attributing the changes to the dissatisfactions of the film producers, reported: "Illegal narcotics, kidnapping, abortion, childbirth, and prostitution--subjects formerly banned from films--may now be treated according to the restraints of good taste which the revised Code lays down."[35] At the same time, new restrictions were placed on "detailed physical violence."

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[34]Quigley, America, p. 631.

[35]Newsweek, December 24, 1956, p. 70.

But, apparently, the changes were not sufficient. Less than two years later, Time observed, "the much publicized Production Code, which once bulldogged producers and exhibitors, is being observed these days about as often as the whooping crane." The magazine cited, as examples, "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," which depicted sexual perversion, "Perfect Furlough," which employed double entendre, and the suggestive dances of "The Naked and the Dead."[36]

Another major revision took place in 1966 when the Production Code's new standards were set out in ten brief paragraphs. The only direct reference to violence in the new Code was vague and hardly definitive; it banned "detailed and protracted acts of brutality, cruelty, physical violence, torture, and abuse."[37]

From the very beginning, the Western has persisted in America's film history as a durable, yet hardly flawless, violent element.

Ever since the first Western, Edwin S. Porter's "The Great Train Robbery" in 1903, these films have been developed around themes of violence; even Porter's film included fistfights, gunplay, and murder.

George N. Fenin and William K. Everson, in The Western, explain the popularity of these films as a "vehicle through

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[36]Time, November 3, 1958, p. 78.

[37]Randall, Censorship of the Movies, p. 202.

which motion pictures and the public consorted in a remarkable symbiotic relationship."[38]

Social critic Robert Warshow, in an essay on the Western, explains their attraction as offering

> A serious orientation to the problem of violence such as can be found almost nowhere else in our culture. One of the well-known peculiarities of modern civilized opinion is its refusal to acknowledge the value of violence. This refusal is a virtue, but like so many other virtues it involves a certain willful blindness and it encourages hypocrisy.[39]

In spite of the Western's success with the audience, it has never been accepted by the major film critics. Perhaps it is not respectable for critics to review cowboy movies. Or maybe most of these films are viewed as poorly produced or unrealistic. Fenin and Everson feel that Hollywood almost always overemphasized the violent aspects of the American West. They write:

> Life in the old West was certainly a lawless one in many communities, but the generalized concept of the shooting down of endless villains and ranchers without so much as a second glance at the corpses is very much at odds with the facts. . . . Regardless of the varying degrees of justice, even taking into account a 'kill-or-be-killed' attitude among men who made their living outside the law, the taking of a human life was still not regarded lightly.[40]

Very few Westerns reached the approving eye of the critics. Two of these films were "Stagecoach" in 1939 and

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[38]George N. Fenin and William K. Everson, The Western (New York: The Orion Press, 1962).

[39]Warshow, Immediate Experience, p. 151.

[40]Fenin and Everson, The Western, p. 10.

a 1946 re-make of the Wyatt Earp story, "My Darling Clementine." Both were produced by John Ford, and, compared to other Westerns, were quite peaceful. The critics had little to say about the violence in these films, which were described as "quiet, sensitive, and a visual delight"[41] ("My Darling Clementine"); and full of "lovely, sentimental images, and sweeping actions. . . ."[42] ("Stagecoach"). Other critically accepted films included "The Ox-Bow Incident" in 1943 and "High Noon" in 1952.

The Western, like all other kinds of films, was affected by the major social upheavals in America's history. Following World War II, the cowboy movies began to take up themes dealing with sex, neuroses, and racial problems. In 1943 "The Ox-Bow Incident" was the first highly acclaimed film to pioneer what Fenin and Everson call "the new Western." It "was a successful experiment in social comment, striking out at, in the name of authenticity, the dignity of America's respect for the agony of a breed of pioneers, the whole false picture which the horse opera had presented to Americans."[43]

The early Westerns, through the traditional badman, had a built-in excuse for violence. The plots almost always included great chases and numerous fistfights and gun battles.

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[41] Ibid., p. 250.

[42] Ibid., p. 240.

[43] Ibid., p. 16.

In all his simplicity the badman had a fantastic following among the American public; he

> represented something that the audience could understand and possibly justify, although never condone, in view of the rigidly upheld code of ethics the hero represented. 'Crime does not pay,' was the ubiquitous moral these Westerns taught, but the audience was still able to indulge vicariously in various manifestations of lust and crime the screen badman presented.[44]

In spite of the audience's acceptance of these films, the critics maintained their unfavorable opinions regarding the Westerns. Pauline Kael indirectly chastises the film audience when she says it's not the quality of the film that attracts the audience, but the stature of the film's stars. They are all part of a new, meaningful ritual, Kael says.

> These men have made themselves movie stars--which impresses audiences all over the world. The fact that they can draw audiences to a genre as empty as the contemporary Western is proof of their power. . . . Going to a Western these days for simplicity or heroism or grandeur or meaning is about like trying to mate with an ox.[45]

But today the Western seems to have lost even the drawing power of the stars. Times have changed so much and the world has become so complicated that even the fascination with films of America's pioneer past seems to be waning. Larry McMurtry, whose novel, Horseman, Pass By, was successfully filmed as "Hud," says,

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[44]Ibid., p. 33.

[45]Kael, Kiss, Kiss, Bang, Bang, p. 46.

> A good mythic figure must be susceptible of being woven into the national destiny, and since the West definitely has been won the cowboy must someday fade. . . . If one agrees with Warshow--and I do--that the Western has maintained its hold on our imagination because it offers acceptable orientation to violence, then it is easy to see why the secret agent is so popular just now. An urban age demands an urban figure. . . . The secret agent has appropriated the style of the gunfighter and has added urbanity and cosmopolitanism.[46]

Pauline Kael feels the Western never really made it at all as a recognizable form of the motion picture art. She writes:

> I don't believe that there ever were the great works in this genre that so many people claim for it. There were some good Westerns, of course, and there was a beautiful kind of purity in some of them, and later even the ritual plots and dull action were, at least, set outdoors, and the horses were often good to look at. But all that was a long time ago.[47]

Thus, from the twenties to the mid-fifties the violence of the screen was altered and refined to reflect the requirements of the censors for "moral" stories, the demands of the audience for excitement, and the needs of Hollywood for a profit.

Every production of mass culture is a public act and must conform with the accepted notions of public good. Warshow writes:

> Nobody seriously questions the principle that it is the function of mass culture to maintain public morale, and certainly nobody in the mass audience objects to having

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[46]Larry McMurtry, "Cowboys, Movies, Myths, and Cadillacs: Realism in the Western," Man and the Movies, ed. W. R. Robinson and assisted by George Garrett (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1967).

[47]Kael, Kiss, Kiss, Bang, Bang, p. 40.

> his morale maintained. At a time when the normal condition of the citizen is a state of anxiety, euphoria spreads over our culture like the broad smile of an idiot.[48]

We have shown that the development of the uses of film violence before the late fifties paved the way for the controversial films of the sixties. During this earlier period the film art and its themes became more sophisticated in many ways. Technical advancements such as sound and color photography helped add to the realism of the stories. The producers seemed to be testing the audience and the censors, and critics began thinking in terms of the social consequences of film. Sometimes the test was to see how much a film could "get away with," but often the attempts to present an important message were sincere. During this period there were also feeble programs of industry self-regulation which ultimately led to restrictions which were more relaxed and relevant to the times. The Code, the censors, the people, and the producers were all changing rapidly with the times--but not all at the same pace.

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[48]Warshow, Immediate Experience, p. 128.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRITICS ON SOME OF THE MORE VIOLENT POPULAR FILMS FROM 1958-1968

The moviemakers had no central theme to focus on at the end of the nineteen fifties and they began to look deep into the American conscience for their material. As a wave of "earthy" American novels became more popular, the film producers began to focus more on psychological themes. Adaptations of the novels of Erskine Caldwell and the plays of Tennessee Williams were filmed with large budgets, big stars, and famous directors. The little amount of actual violence that was portrayed in these films was overshadowed by subtle, and sometimes direct, references to all kinds of unacceptable behavior that people knew was taking place but didn't see, and didn't expect to see, on the screen. These films had intricately woven psychological plots that many of the critics felt were often ineffective because they were too complicated for the audience, the actors, or the director.

Even in the beginning of this brief period, some of the more perceptive critics had doubts about the durability of

these films. One of the first of them was an adaptation of Tennessee Williams' "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" in 1958. In his review of the film, which suggested rape and cannibalism, Stanley Kauffmann sounded the warning:

> What keeps most of his work out of the swamp of sensationalism is his gift for evocative dialogue, his ability to give his plays a garment of poetic rhapsody, and his quick sympathy for buried emotional horror which he can often convey piercingly. But there are risks in this vein. It tends to rely on the exclusively visceral effect, it can linger so long over animalistic characters that they become repellent rather than moving, and unwavering devotion to it makes us suspect the author of exploiting the lurid rather than seeking raw emotion. All these risks are realized in 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.'[1]

In 1959, Sam Spiegel directed his own adaptation of Williams' one act play, "Suddenly Last Summer." The film, which was found "essentially moral" by the Legion of Decency, alluded to homosexuality, incest, and procuring; it also portrayed a sadistic nun and a cannibalistic orgy. The critical reaction was mixed--generally it was viewed as either ridiculous or as an adult horror picture. But none of the critics had much to say about any actual violence in the plot.

Hollis Alpert called the film a "Gothic horror piece," and gave the following reasons for the picture's acceptance by the Legion of Decency:

> The intimations of homosexuality, incest, and cannibalism were thoroughly implied, but kept relatively safe from censorial cutting. Impossibly fancy and luxurious settings in New Orleans were set against a dreamlike

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[1]Stanley Kauffmann, A World on Film (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 79-80.

> Spanish seacoast background, filmed on location, but made less real and more nightmarish by montage and editing. The picture was heavily suggestive, unpleasant, but strong, and Miss Taylor's presence in the cast was sufficient to intrigue audiences.[2]

The Time reviewer dismissed the film as "arranging all the various bits of dirt into some sort of significant mud pie."[3]

The film's violence and sex was so cloaked that Alpert wondered if the audience really knew what it was all about. "The canny direction by Joseph L. Mankiewicz left it to the audience to decide what the film was about, and no poll was ever undertaken to discover what percentage of the millions who saw the film were fully aware of the nature of its subject matter and what were the attitudes toward it."[4]

Finally, the critics grew tired of the Williams films, mostly because they all seemed to revert back to the same type of characters and plot. When Stanley Kauffmann reviewed "The Fugitive Kind," he asked his readers: How long can you and I go on being represented by riffraff? Kauffmann wrote:

> When Williams first appeared, he seared his audience because his milieu was a novel semiunderworld and because the currency of that world was violence and sex. Our urbane theatre, except in murder mysteries and sheer melodrama, takes a long time to get down to these elemental theatrical forces, if it ever gets to them at all. . . . By now, however, his almost unvaried return

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[2]Alpert, Dreams, p. 156.

[3]Time, January 11, 1960, p. 64.

[4]Alpert, Dreams, p. 228.

> to the same seamy arena, at the same cultural level, begins to make us restive.[5]

At about this same time, two other major American films dealt in different ways with violent themes. One, an elaborate Bible-fiction story entitled "Ben Hur," captured the 1959 Academy Award as the Best Motion Picture. William Wyler's film adaptation of this classic story dealt more with the physical rather than with the spiritual aspects of the story of a wealthy Jewish prince who meets Christ and is cleansed of his hate. "Ben Hur" was unusual in the sense that it carefully mixed violence and religion into a captivating story that was generally hailed by the critics, including Arthur Knight, as "spectacular without being a spectacle." Knight went even further in proclaiming, "not only is it not simple minded, it is downright literate."[6] "Ben Hur" featured two huge and spectacular scenes of violent action, a bitter sea battle and a deadly chariot race. The chariot race, commented Time, was "a superbly handled crescendo of violence that ranks as one of the finest action sequences ever shot."[7]

Arthur Knight approved of both of these violent scenes because they "serve the story; they do not exist as an end in themselves."[8]

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[5]Kauffman, World on Film, p. 83.

[6]Arthur Knight, Saturday Review, December 5, 1959, p. 32.

[7]Time, November 20, 1959, p. 55.

[8]Arthur Knight, Saturday Review, December 5, 1959, p. 32.

Even the Crucifixion was pictured in, what Time called, "a matter of fact manner, as contemporary political events."[9]

The other 1959 critical success was Stanley Kramer's "On the Beach," a fictionalized story of the end of the world after an atomic bomb attack. Although no real violence was depicted in the picture, the film was filled with horror because of the strange reactions of the survivors of the attack to the imminence of death by radiation poisoning. Kramer developed his theme, "There is Still Time Brother," by concentrating on the emotions of the final survivors rather than showing countless bodies of the already dead or dying. Most of the critics accepted this approach as tasteful, while still effective. But the Time critic labeled it a "radiation romance in which the customers are spared any scenes of realistic horror."[10]

By far the most violent popular American film of the early sixties was Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho" in which actress Janet Leigh is brutally stabbed while in the shower. The critics were almost unanimous--it was too violent. Commonweal writer Philip T. Hartung said, "Hitchcock pushes everything as far as it can go: the violence, the sex, the thrills, and the gore."[11]

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[9]Time, November 30, 1959, p. 55.

[10]Time, December 28, 1959, p. 44.

[11]Philip T. Hartung, The Commonweal, September 9, 1960, p. 469.

Moira Walsh, who noted that Hitchcock's chief source of inspiration seemed to be Krafft-Ebing and the Marquis de Sade, said the director "seems to have been more interested in shocking his audience with the bloodiest bathtub murder in screen history . . . than in observing the ordinary rules of good film construction."[12]

Time, Stanley Kauffmann, and John McCarten felt Hitchcock had destroyed a potentially good story by going too far with the violence. The Time reviewer called the shower scene "one of the messiest, most nauseating murders ever filmed," and noted, "Hitchcock bears down too heavily in this one, and the delicate illusion of reality necessary for a creak and shriek movie becomes, instead, a spectacle of stomach churning horror."[13]

Kauffmann, feeling that the film went beyond horror, wrote: "Two murders and a third attempt are among the most vicious I have ever seen in films, with Hitchcock employing his considerable skill in direction and cutting and the use of sound and music to shock us past horror-entertainment into resentment."[14]

McCarten, in The New Yorker, commented: "Hitchcock does several spooky scenes with his usual éclat, and works diligently to make things as horrible as possible, but it's all

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[12]Moira Walsh, America, July 9, 1960, p. 443.

[13]Time, June 27, 1960, p. 51.

[14]Stanley Kauffmann, New Republic, August 29, 1960, p. 23.

rather heavy-handed and not in any way comparable to the fine job he's done in the not so distant past."[15]

Despite the critical uproar, Hitchcock remained unmoved; as George Perry comments in his film history of the director, Hitchcock seems to create movies with a kind of immunity from the critics, and he appreciates a critic's knowledge of Hitchcock history rather than his criticism of the effect of his films on the general public. Perry says that "'Psycho' disturbed many film critics who felt it was too much of a vicious practical joke on the audience. They had taken the film seriously--the last thing that Hitchcock had intended. He has constantly maintained that his films were made for audiences, not critics."[16]

Hitchcock's defense of the gory scene was that he had shown literally nothing violent, that it was the audience, which, in their minds, had constructed all the violence. Hollis Alpert wrote: "The movie exemplified the very violence and sadism, so it was said, that was menacing the minds of the youth of the country. But was Hitchcock guilty of anything but using film technique for the maximum effect his story was capable of?"[17]

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[15]John McCarten, The New Yorker, June 25, 1960, p. 70.

[16]George Perry, The Films of Alfred Hitchcock (London: Studio Vista Limited, 1965), p. 142.

[17]Alpert, Dreams, p. 176.

Hitchcock himself wrote, in Coronet, "'Psycho' is perfect for children, don't you think? Too violent, you say? Well consider Jack and Jill--all they wanted was a pail of water."[18]

But with all its violence, real or imagined, "Psycho" caused little alarm among the American public.

At the same time, the foreign film was making inroads on the American boxoffice. These films were more frank, and their directors were frequently discovering that blatant acts of violence could often be effectively integrated with psychological themes. Early in the sixties, two major foreign films, "Lord of the Flies" and "The Collector," featured scenes of violence. Both were loose adaptations of relatively popular novels. And many of the critics spent much of their time comparing the books to the screenplays, usually by discussing how each differed from the other in developing the "message." John Fowles' "Collector" was the story of a sexually impotent butterfly collector who decides to move on to bigger things and captures a young lady for a specimen. It is essentially a two-character story which develops the man's psycho-sexual problems and the woman's attempts to understand his motives. In Fowles' novel, the story was treated equally from both characters' points of view, but William Wyler chose to develop the film only around the "collector." This change in emphasis from the book to the

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[18]Alfred Hitchcock, Coronet, September 1960, p. 61.

film served as the major point of discussion for the critics. Few criticized the actual theme of the story. However, Judith Crist, objecting to Wyler's treatment, wrote: "for almost two hours we watch a living creature being frustrated to death by the stolid compulsion of a madman; what sort of sadistic offering is this?"[19]

One other foreign film a few years later led to some interesting critical comment. Polish director Roman Polanski, in 1965, produced "Repulsion," the story of a homicidally psychotic girl, played by Catherine Deneuve, who wants sex, but hates it and hates the opposite sex for making her want it. The critics immediately began to see parallels with "Psycho." The Time critic, noting that Catherine Deneuve played a role essentially the same as Tony Perkins in Hitchcock's film, called "Repulsion" "A Gothic horror piece of the 'Psycho' school and approximately twice as persuasive."[20]

Pointing out that "Repulsion" is "Psycho" turned inside out, Kenneth Tynan wrote, "In Hitchcock's film we see a double murder through the eyes of the victims--in Polanski's our viewpoint is the killer's."[21]

Polanski developed the girl's world of sexual fantasies to the fullest through dream sequences and over-modulated sounds. The girl eventually becomes so crazed that she

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[19]Crist, Cowboy, p. 122.

[20]Time, October 8, 1965, p. 115.

[21]Kenneth Tynan, Life, October 8, 1965, p. 23.

brutally murders two men. Stanley Kauffmann voiced an objection to the treatment of the first murder. He wrote:

> 'Repulsion' contains as horrifying a scene as I can remember. . . . The landlord breaks into the barred apartment for his rent, is impressed by the pretty girl in her nightgown, and gets other ideas. She holds a straight razor behind her, and as she permits him to embrace her, she slits the back of his neck. We see this close up. . . . We see her slash his throat again and again as he sinks from sight. It is horrible.
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> We are today supposed to be primed for and needful of the Artaudian experience--the purge through violence, instead of through pity and terror. If this scene was so intended, it produced no purge in me, only the repulsion of the title.[22]

But to the Time writer, the gory murders were useful in developing the full character of the sexually repressed murderess. She is the tragic one, "the most pitiable victim of the evil she does." However, he wrote, "whether such a film finally serves any purpose other than to scare people silly remains doubtful, yet in the long tradition of cinematic shockers, 'Repulsion' looms as a work of monstrous art."[23]

Tynan also expressed an unusual final assessment of Polanski's skill. "Within its limits," he wrote, "'Repulsion' is a flawless exercise; it establishes Polanski as a master of the casual macabre. We know that he can scare us to death--all that remains is for him to prove that he can also warm us to life."[24]

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[22]Stanley Kauffmann, New Republic, October 16, 1965, p. 32.

[23]Time, October 8, 1965, p. 115.

[24]Tynan, Life, p. 23.

At this point in time, the foreign films seemed to have the edge over the domestic ones in carefully interwoven plots which used violence as an integral part of the character development. When American filmmakers tried the same methods their often poor imitations led to a tirade from the critics. Judith Crist, disgusted over American films such as "Point Blank" and "St. Valentine's Day Massacre," wrote: It is this exploitation of perversion and violence for their own sick sakes that justifies the current outcry and our increasing concern over the license filmmakers are exercising in their new and hard-won freedom from censorship."[25]

One film of this period, Richard Brooks' adaptation of Truman Capote's In Cold Blood, created in anticipation some concern over the portrayal of the brutal multiple murder of a wealthy Kansas farm family. Capote's book was so carefully analyzed before the film's release that many people were fearful of a sadistic or inaccurate adaptation. But Brooks surprised the critics with a film in which the excitement was not over who committed the murders or how, but why.

Arthur Knight was so pleased with the treatment that he not only commended Brooks for eliminating all the possible sensationalism, but also hailed the writer-director for imbuing it "with a quality of social responsibility."[26]

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[25]Crist, Cowboy, p. 252.

[26]Arthur Knight, Saturday Review, December 30, 1967, p. 33.

Bosley Crowther complimented Brooks for creating a mood which shocks without being excessively violent. He wrote: "Without once showing the raw performance and effects of violence, the shooting and the knifing, he builds up a horrifying sense of the slow terror and maniacal momentum of the murderous escapade."[27]

In many respects, "In Cold Blood" was a rarity of the sixties. At a time when crime stories adapted for film could be extremely violent, the film, while still retaining its morbidity, emphasized such elements as the stupidity of crime and the futility of attempted escape from justice. And unlike many of the gangster films of the thirties, its moral that "crime doesn't pay" was not tacked on to placate an outraged public or the censors, but was carefully developed as an integral part of the story from beginning to end.

Thus a great variety of types of violence appeared in the motion pictures of this period; the range was from outright shock and horror to very cloaked and subtle suggestions of violence.

All the while the audience seemed to be accepting and adjusting to any changes that were taking place in the treatment of violence. The actual violence in almost all of these films of the late fifties and early sixties was either so common or so subordinate to the plot that it drew little

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[27]Bosley Crowther, The New York Times, December 15, 1967, p. 60.

attention from the American public or the critics; they often busied themselves trying to analyze the film's message, and in most cases overt violence had little to do with the message.

CHAPTER V

BONNIE AND CLYDE

No American film of the last decade caused more critical discussion or raised more seriously the question of violence in the cinema than "Bonnie and Clyde." This adaptation of the story of a Depression Era gang of small-town bank robbers became the most controversial violent film since the gangster films of the thirties. Time, in a 1967 cover story on "Bonnie and Clyde," said, "Hitchcock's 'Psycho' inaugurated America's cinema of cruelty, with a demonic amalgam of bloodshed and violence that was not equaled until 'Bonnie and Clyde.'"[1]

The film was analyzed and debated not only by the critics, but also by social scientists and advertising and publicity men. The premiere showing of "Bonnie and Clyde" at the Montreal Film Festival in August of 1967 was so well received that the trade press soon began to accuse Warner Brothers-Seven Arts, the producing company, of a promotional hype. Variety, on December 13th, said, "many observers see an extremely clever campaign behind the release. It is recalled that when the film first showed . . . the entire W7 promotional

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[1]"The New Cinema: Violence, Sex, Art," Time, December 8, 1967, p. 73.

echelon was present. . . . Their expertise in marshalling the weight of buff opinion for the film is credited, and/or suspected."[2]

"Bonnie and Clyde" became the source of bitter arguments among critics, and the film even resulted twice in the almost unprecedented act of a major film critic reversing himself on original negative reviews. On August 21, 1967, Newsweek critic Joseph Morgenstern denounced the film as a "squalid shoot-em for the moron trade" and "an attempt at lyricism consisting of a slow-motion sequence in which the inert bodies of Bonnie and Clyde, being perforated by the law's lead, rise and fall and pitch and turn with something of the grace that Vittorio Mussolini must have seen in Ethiopia when he compared bomb bursts to rose petals." Morganstern felt the film, except for its treatment of violence, was somewhat interesting, but, he wrote, "it does not know what to make of its own violence."[3] One week later, in the same magazine, Morgenstern called his earlier review "grossly unfair and regrettably inaccurate." He apologized for his previous negative comments and then he explained why he and so many other people had found "Bonnie and Clyde" so grossly unappealing on the first viewing:

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[2]"Time Also Swallows Own Criticism," Variety, December 13, 1967, p. 22.

[3]Joseph Morgenstern, "Two for a Tommy Gun," Newsweek, August 21, 1967, p. 65.

> I had become so surfeited and preoccupied by violence in daily life that my reaction was as excessive as the stimulus. There are indeed a few moments in which the gore goes too far, becomes stock shockery that invites standard revulsion. 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.[4]

Variety, on December 13, 1967, noted that observers of the press thought of Morgenstern's action as a performance that would be hard to top. But, commented the Variety writer, "last week Time overtook the opposition--not only reversing itself, but devoting almost an entire six page cover story to a laudatory appraisal of the film, which it now calls 'not only the sleeper of the decade but also to a growing consensus of audiences and critics, the best movie of the year.'"[5]

Time, in the original review of "Bonnie and Clyde" on August 25, 1967, said both the actors and the director "tell their tale of bullets and blood in a strange purposeless mingling of fact and claptrap that teeters uneasily on the brink of burlesque. Like Bonnie and Clyde themselves, the film rides off in all directions and ends up full of holes."[6] However, less than four months later the magazine's cover story on sex and violence in the film admitted that "part of the scandal and success of "Bonnie and Clyde" stems from its

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[4]Joseph Morgenstern, Newsweek, August 28, 1967, p. 82.

[5]Variety, p. 22.

[6]"Low Down Hoedown," Time, August 25, 1967, p. 78.

creative use of what has always been a good box-office draw: violence."[7]

Stefan Kanfer, Time's motion picture editor, said, "in both conception and execution, 'Bonnie and Clyde' is a watershed picture, the kind that signals a new style, a new trend."[8] Kanfer compared it to other innovative films such as "Citizen Kane," which he cited for its remarkable character analysis and deep focus photography; "Stagecoach," which, he said, brought the western up from cowboy and Indian melodrama; and "Singing in the Rain," which Kanfer calls film's first musical comedy.

America's leading film critics became involved in an extremely heated debate over the meaning and effect of the violence in Arthur Penn's film. Moira Walsh, in America, attacked the "anti-violence" proponents because "they make no distinctions, or make unconvincing ones between gratuitous violence that merely panders to base instincts, and violence that is set in a firm enough dramatic context so that it can have a purging effect."[9] Miss Walsh also wrote that it is not a reasonable goal to expect to eliminate violence from the screen.

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[7] "The New Cinema: Violence, Sex, Art," Time, December 8, 1967, p. 67.

[8] Ibid., p. 73.

[9] Moira Walsh, America, September 2, 1967, p. 227.

Pauline Kael, in a lengthy New Yorker piece, suspected that the great disagreement over the film arose because of its absence of sadism. "It is the violence without sadism that throws the audience off balance at 'Bonnie and Clyde.' The brutality that comes out of this innocence is far more shocking than the calculated brutalities of mean killers."[10]

Like Pauline Kael, sociologist Robert Coles believed that the diversity of opinion over "Bonnie and Clyde" was a result of the film's unique treatment of gangsterism and violence. Coles wrote, in the social science journal Transaction:

> Up to now the gangster was Hollywood's safest social critic--in the end he could be done away with and arouse no alarm in any loyal citizen. . . . Well, what has 'Bonnie and Clyde' done to all that, to a virtual tradition of films? Very simply, the movie more or less follows Nietzsche's argument, rather than either Freud's or Marx's, and suggests that neither money nor therapy will quite do--but action will, action that flouts the decadent will of a corrupt society, action that exposes old and useless and rotting moralities and establishes a new one by its very example, its presence in the eyes of the hitherto deceived onlooker.[11]

The critics could not even agree whether the film's violence was presented uniquely. The New Republic reviewer, Richard Gilman, said the film begins with some exciting innovations, but after a few scenes of pistol-whipping and shooting gets "caught up in the great chase, the cops and robbers plot of American popular art. And it is here that the movie begins

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[10]Pauline Kael, "Onward and Upward With the Arts," New Yorker, October 21, 1967, p. 158.

[11]Robert Coles, "Bonnie and Clyde and the Graduate: Hollywood's New Social Criticism," Transaction, May, 1968, p. 17.

to lose them as original creations as it more and more takes on the attributes of the gangster movie as we have always known it and makes increasing use of the romantic myth as before, that of doomed young love in an inimical world."[12]

At the same time, Moira Walsh felt the film was quite different from the traditional American gangster film. Unlike the films of the nineteen-thirties, she wrote: "It is neither lurid nor sentimental but rather captures the whole spectrum of inadequacies and evils of the age so that they point up one another."[13]

Bosley Crowther of The New York Times was one of the first critics to comment on the film. In a news item from the Montreal Film Festival, Crowther attacked the film for both its violence and its historical inaccuracies. Crowther said Arthur Penn, the film's director, "evidently intended this jazzy crime film to give a historical indication of the moral laxity and despair of an age that induced two scatter-brain nobodies to take to crime as though it were a game. But he has missed the very misery and drabness of that social depression in his slap happy color film charade."[14]

Crowther was so alarmed at the film's glorification of crime and its historical inaccuracies that he quoted the

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[12]Richard Gilman, The New Republic, November 4, 1967, p. 27.

[13]Walsh, America, p. 227.

[14]Bosley Crowther, The New York Times, August 7, 1967, p. 32.

following New York Times report of the capture and death of Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker in May of 1934:

> Clyde Barrow was a snake-eyed murderer who killed without giving his victims a chance to draw. He was slight, altogether unheroic in appearance. Bonnie Parker was a fit companion for him. She was a hard-faced sharp-mouthed woman who gave up a waitress job in a Kansas City restaurant to become the mistress of Ray Hamilton, Texas bank robber. Barrow took her away from Hamilton.[15,16]

However, most of the critics of the film felt its historical accuracy or inaccuracy was subordinate to its direct or indirect commentary on American social mores. In fact, many of the critics were quick to relate the film's theme to contemporary times. Time, in its cover story saw the film as "a commentary on the mindless daily violence of the American '60s and an esthetic evocation of the past."[17]

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[15]Bosley Crowther, The New York Times, September 3, 1967, p. D1.

[16]John Toland, the author of The Dillinger Days and a war historian, in "The Sad Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde" in the New York Times Magazine on February 18, 1968, wrote:

> One cannot help wondering how Bonnie and Clyde would have liked 'Bonnie and Clyde.' I suspect Clyde would not have cared much for it, particularly the romanticized love story. He also would have ridiculed the idea of his being repelled by violence and killing. He was proud of his record: his shotgun was notched seven times. In his way, he was a realist and never flinched from what he was. Bonnie would probably have loved the movie; as her poetry writing indicated, somewhere deep within her lurked a romantic. But I think she would have liked to see one change--a new scene tacked on at the end showing the lovers doomed by a hostile society to be buried apart.

[17]"The New Cinema: Violence, Sex, Art," Time, December 8, 1967, p. 67.

Sociologist Robert Coles viewed the film's disturbing message, where law-and-order wins in the end even though the audience's sympathy is, almost without exception, with the "outlaws," as a result of the modern world's effect upon the filmmakers. "Like everyone else," Coles says,

> movie-makers live in history, and I suppose have the same trouble we all have in sorting out what is irrational, what is accidental, and what is purposeful in the politics, the news, and the tragedies of a given age. Anyway, one thing the film does provide is the protection of distance. Bonnie and Clyde have long since been dead, and they can be dismissed as 'period' characters. The country has changed, the world has changed, we all have changed--or so we can wryly say and not quite believe.[18]

Judith Crist, also ignoring the historical accuracy argument, viewed the film as a triumph because of its naturalism in characters and background. She wrote: "We are so thoroughly saturated with a sense of time and place that we are, paradoxically, compelled to recognize the universality of the theme and its particular contemporary relevance."[19]

The film critics and the American moviegoer were most at odds over whether "Bonnie and Clyde" actually glorified crime. Critic John Simon, in a follow-up review three months after the film's release, complained about the film as perpetrating hero worship of the Barrow gang. Simon also felt Arthur Penn, the film's director, was unfair in his depiction of violence. He noted: "The crimes and killings

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[18]Coles, Transaction, pp. 18-19.

[19]Crist, Cowboy, p. 244.

performed by the Barrow gang are all picturesque, humorous, cozy, or, at worst, matter of fact affairs. But the violence performed upon the gang is always made as harrowingly inhuman as possible."[20]

When Arthur Penn was asked by New York Times film critic Vincent Canby if "Bonnie and Clyde" glorifies crime, the director replied: "God, no! I think it shows the squalor, the isolation, the terrible boredom of these people. Bonnie and Clyde and the others were in constant flight. And they got none of the rewards usually associated with crime."[21]

Judith Crist saw the film not as promoting crime, but, on the contrary, as an amazingly moral motion picture with "its thesis that those who live by violence shall die thereby, its demonstration that the rewards of crime are nil, its depiction of the empty, shallow young psychopaths who captured the imagination of a Depression-ridden countryside."[22]

To Penelope Gilliat, the violence can only be understood if it is separated into two distinct classifications. There is the violence of the film's characters ("Like the kids of the present TV generation, Bonnie and Clyde unconsciously assume that blood is makeup and that bang-band-you're-dead will be over by the next installment. Bonnie and Clyde don't

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[20]Schickel and Simon, Film 67/68, p. 30.

[21]Vincent Canby, "Vincent Canby Interviews Arthur Penn," The New York Times, September 17, 1967, p. D21.

[22]Crist, Cowboy, p. 79.

really know that killing kills."[23]) and the comment on violence which the film itself portrays (The film knows that killing kills.)

The Time critic viewed the violence of "Bonnie and Clyde" as essentially that of innocents when he wrote, "although Clyde is a murderous ex-convict and Bonnie is his willing, amoral moll, they are essentially innocents, violence is something they can neither comprehend nor manage, and their dreams are always of settling down somewhere when hard times are over."[24]

The New York Times critic Renata Adler took a more unconventional approach to the film. In a column entitled "Anyone for a Good Cry?" Miss Adler lamented the fact that the American filmgoer has become so sensitized to violence on the screen that he no longer identifies or sympathizes with the characters. "Nobody cries when they (Bonnie and Clyde) are killed. . . . Everyone is attuned to (or alienated by) what a movie is trying to do, not moved by what is going on in it."[25]

Robert Coles, in his analysis of the film's disturbing effect on the American people, noted that the film is

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[23]Penelope Gilliat, "The Party," The New Yorker, August 19, 1967, p. 79.

[24]"The New Cinema: Violence, Sex, Art," Time, December 8, 1967, p. 67.

[25]Renata Adler, "Anyone for a Good Cry?" The New York Times, December 15, 1968, Sec. II, p. 3.

"grievously un-American, . . . sly, mocking, disrespectful [of] all sorts of things that all of us have been brought up to cherish." Coles concludes that "Bonnie and Clyde" brutally confronts us with "our national history of violence."[26]

Pauline Kael simplified the entire violence argument by defending its use simply as

> something that movies must be free to use. And it is just because artists must be free to use violence--a legal right that is beginning to come under attack--that we must also defend the legal rights of those film-makers who use violence to sell tickets, for it is not the province of the law to decide that one man is an artist and another man a no-talent.[27]

"The trouble with violence in most films is that it is not violent enough. A war film that doesn't show the real horror of war--bodies being torn apart and arms being shot off--really glorifies war."[28] (Arthur Penn)

The debate over brutality in the films of the sixties usually centers on a determination of the point where violence panders instead of enlightens. And, because this decision is basically an artistic judgment, it becomes affected by personal values. One person argues that films such as "Bonnie and Clyde" glorify and perpetrate crime, while another claims it is nothing more than an historical account of American life, past

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[26]Coles, Transaction, p. 15.

[27]Pauline Kael, "Onward and Upward With the Arts," The New Yorker, October 21, 1967, p. 161.

[28]Vincent Canby, "Vincent Canby Interviews Arthur Penn," The New York Times, September 17, 1967, p. D1.

and present, and merely an inevitable consequence of violent life. In fact, some critics, including Newsweek's Joseph Morgenstern argue it is nothing more than "perspective on violence we have known, and in many cases loved."[29]

The critics also disagreed over the effects of different types of violence. When experimental filmmaker Agnes Varda told John Simon she liked "Bonnie and Clyde" because it is "violent without being sadistic," Simon wrote:

> I doubt that there is much difference between the two when violence is dealt on with such clucking solicitude. At the utmost one could call such violence unconscious sadism. But that may even be more attractive to the asinine audiences that gaffaw their way through the film; overt sadism is kinky, whereas this is just rousing shooting the hell out of people.[30]

Richard Schickel concurred with Miss Varda. He commented: "Everyone concerned keeps the violence which attended their activities casual, mindless, childlike. This has disconcerted many observers, but I think it is esthetically correct, for it carries none of the sado-sexual overtones common in today's representations of violence."[31]

And then there is in "Bonnie and Clyde" what is probably the most controversial violent segment in any popular American motion picture--the final scene in which Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker are virtually torn apart in a hail of bullets

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[29]Joseph Morgenstern, Newsweek, August 28, 1967, p. 82.

[30]Schickel and Simon, Film 67/68, p. 29.

[31]Richard Schickel, "Flaws in a Savage Satire," Life, October 13, 1967, p. 16.

which Pauline Kael so aptly described as a "rag doll dance of death."[32] Some critics hailed the scene as a cinematic masterpiece, while others were astonished at its crudity and horror. The Time critic, assuming the "triumph" approach, wrote, "in what may be the most remarkable use of slow motion in cinema history, the bodies of Bonnie and Clyde writhe to earth in a quarter-time choreography of death."[33]

New Republic critic Richard Gilman viewed the film's finale as a comment on the often heavy-handed ways of eliminating "the shame of the nation." He noted: "The scene mounts up to an image of absolute blind violence on the part of organized society, a violence far surpassing that which it is supposed to be putting down."[34]

Pauline Kael defends the violence not only because of its realism, but also because our world has gone beyond good taste. "Tasteful suggestions of violence," she writes, "would at this point be a more grotesque form of comedy than 'Bonnie and Clyde' attempts. 'Bonnie and Clyde' needs violence; violence is its meaning."[35]

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[32]Pauline Kael, "Onward and Upward With the Arts," The New Yorker, October 21, 1967, p. 170.

[33]"The New Cinema: Violence, Sex, Art," Time, Vol. 90, No. 23, December 8, 1967, p. 68.

[34]Richard Gilman, "Gangsters on the Road to Nowhere," New Republic, November 4, 1967, p. 27.

[35]Pauline Kael, "Onward and Upward With the Arts," The New Yorker, October 21, 1967, p. 161.

The critical acclaim for "Bonnie and Clyde," with all its horror, seems to have resulted from the film's unparalleled treatment of our nation's past and present preoccupation with violence. Not only did many of the critics describe it as touching society's "raw nerve," but many also saw the film as putting the viewer in an extremely uncompromising position where virtue and brutality are on the same side, and where the viewer finds himself in a virtual hell trying to rationalize his response to this motion picture. Wilfred Sheed points out that the truthful observer of "Bonnie and Clyde" should realize the inescapably harsh verdict that "we do enjoy the pain, otherwise there would be no violence problem at all. But our enjoyment is monitored by pity. This is the best most of us can hope for right now."[36]

Thus, John Simon says, "'Bonnie and Clyde' was more real than most American films," and the "people frightened by it were not so much frightened by violence as by reality."[37]

Albert Johnson in Film Quarterly, writing of the film's tremendous effect of mixing emotions by making the audience both howl in laughter and groan in horror, says:

> It is this device that most distinguishes 'Bonnie and Clyde' from all other gangster films and leaves one with a confirmed awareness that the director and the writers have deliberately created a unique pseudo-documentary style by which spectators could be

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[36]Wilfred Sheed, Esquire, December 1967, p. 46.

[37]John Simon, "The Question of Violence: It's Not How Much, But How," The New York Times, March 17, 1968, p. D17.

> entertained and astonished at the same time. It is the romantic imagination in this work that makes it such a distinguished American film.[38]

Pauline Kael, although not going as far as Time in calling the film a "watershed" picture, praises "Bonnie and Clyde" for its innovation. She wrote:

> [it] brings into the almost frighteningly public world of movies things that people have been feeling and saying and writing about. And once something is said or done on the screens of the world, once it has entered mass art, it can never again belong to a minority, never again be the private possession of an educated or 'knowing' group.[39]

"Bonnie and Clyde," unquestionably the most violent and most talked about major film of the decade, sharply divided the film critics. The reviewers spent an unusually large amount of time discussing the film's effect on its audience. "Bonnie and Clyde," it could be argued, did some strange things to its viewers. Many of the critics were upset because of the film's tremendous box-office draw. How could such a purposeless and shocking movie, some critics argued, be so popular with so many supposedly sophisticated filmgoers? Other critics saw the audience as consisting in part of a type of "pseudo-sophisticate" who tried too hard to analyze the film's message. And the message itself, depending on which critic you read, took on a variety of meanings. To some it reflected the hopelessness and squalor of the Depression, while, to others, it was a reflection of contemporary times.

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[38]Albert Johnson, Film Quarterly, Vol. XXI (Winter 1967-68), p. 45.

[39]Pauline Kael, "Onward and Upward With the Arts," The New Yorker, October 21, 1967, p. 147.

"Bonnie and Clyde's" uniqueness probably comes from its departure from tradition. It was supposed to be a gangster film, but gangster films didn't make people laugh hysterically one moment and then horrify them the next. You weren't supposed to sympathize with the "bad guys," to try to understand why they robbed banks, or cry when they are gunned down but you did. To some the film was a cruel hoax--a dirty trick.

Sometimes there even appeared to be a kind of critical snobbery at work. A few critics who failed to understand the audience attraction to the film dismissed it as simply being bad for the moviegoer.

There were also many people who didn't take the film seriously. But to others "Bonnie and Clyde" looms as a watershed picture. Any popular film they argue which deals with so many diverse aspects of American life--the country's violent past, the frustration of the poor and hopeless, the rebellion of the young, and the reality of the present--cannot be easily forgotten.

CONCLUSIONS

The period of violent films from 1958 to 1968 leaves one with some perplexing thoughts. Was this the beginning of a new film era or the end of an old one?

The critics seem to be writing more and more about film violence as a reflection of contemporary times. And although the times are, without a doubt, pretty gruesome, some critics feel the films have gone too far. Is it that they feel the truth is hard to take or are they just trying to temper our exposure to additional brutality? Robert Warshow says the chief function of mass culture is to relieve one of the necessity of experiencing one's life directly. He believes "mass culture . . . seeks only to make things easier."[1]

Perhaps the censors and the Code which, some argue, have always seemed to be behind the times have now been adjusted to represent current social norms. So now, as Judith Crist says, "all the varieties of bloodletting have been explored in full and blazing color. . . ."[2]

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[1]Warshow, Immediate Experience, p. 38.

[2]Crist, Cowboy, p. 267.

At any rate, there is undoubtedly a new critical response to today's films, not necessarily because today's critics are different, but because the times and the films are different. The themes, the cinematic effects, and the audience are mostly new. Murray Schumach says the state of the film art is responsible, in part, for the dissatisfaction with film violence many people are experiencing. Schumach says: "It took sound and color to surround gruesomeness and gore with box-office halos. Now came the crunch of breaking bones, the groans and screams of the afflicted, the crack and whine of bullets. Blood was no longer a dark smudge. It was rich, flowing red."[3]

It seems to be almost a heyday for critics. Never before have they been so largely read, and they appear to like this new exposure. More of them seem to write more complex reviews because they know <u>their</u> audience likes to speculate on all the hidden meanings and implications of today's films.

It all appears to lead to this: today's films are more complex and searching than ever before and the audience is more attuned to what the films and the critics are trying to say.

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[3]Murray Schumach, <u>The Face On The Cutting Room Floor</u>, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1964), p. 171.

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