THE OUTLAW COUPLE FILM: FROM WORLD WAR TWO TO THE PRESENT

by

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ABSTRACT

Appearing periodically since the Second World War years right up to the present, the outlaw couple film (a relative of two more potentially liberal genres, the buddy and the road movie) has remained a deeply conservative genre, despite a glimpse of its possible energy in the 1960s. Unlike the male buddy film, which tends to invest both protagonists with equal capabilities and independence, the outlaw couple film almost always focalizes its narrative through the male character, and positions his female partner in a secondary role, where she can only act in relation to his goals. While the outlaw aspect of these films offers the potential to escape the more conventional requirements of patriarchy (as happens in the male buddy films), this escape is usually only reserved for the male characters, and the women of these films rarely move beyond stereotypical representations.

After a general introduction to the outlaw couple in chapter one, I look at the idea of gendered "outlawism" in chapter two, where I discuss film noir, the Western and the male buddy movie (as it relates to Robin Wood's theories of "Home") for their precursory connections to the outlaw couple movie. In chapters three to five, I look at different examples of the outlaw couple, from the forties with their portrayals in film noirs, through to the sixties with Bonnie and Clyde (1967), to recent times with films made within the first half of this decade. These films demonstrate that the outlaw couple film usually remains part of a deeply conservative genre.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE OUTLAW COUPLE FILM

The heterosexual couple has been onscreen since the beginning of cinema, seen, for example, in the early Edison film, *The Kiss* (1900). Hollywood has made the heterosexual couple an important part of its films, so much so that the conventional Hollywood film story's structure is one where the main narrative of a film is intertwined with a plotline involving a heterosexual romance. At the same time, another popular theme in Hollywood film is that of criminality, violence and "outlawism." For example, anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker has observed that South Sea Islanders have jokingly divided up American films into the two categories of "Kiss Kiss" and "Bang Bang" (14). Since the two themes have such immense staying power in cinema, it seems a likely assumption that the outlaw couple film, which combines the two elements, would make for a very popular genre.

Yet the outlaw couple film, while making periodic appearances since the 1940s right up until the present, has remained a much less popular genre than other related films, such as either the male buddy or the road movie. And while these films allow both their (usually) outlaw protagonists to question the laws of their society, the outlaw couple film rarely moves beyond being a deeply conservative genre, reaffirming the most basic of patriarchal goals. Unlike the male buddy movie, which treats the two protagonists with equal strength, the outlaw couple film almost always focalizes the story through the male character, and relegates the position of his female partner to a place secondary to his own. With such a structure, it is not difficult to see why the female character is rarely allowed any goals of her own in the outlaw couple film.

The idea for this thesis came after reading an article by Marsha Kinder called "Return of the Outlaw Couple" which appeared in a 1974 issue of *Film Quarterly*. Kinder's own inspiration came from the releases of three outlaw couple films in that year, all of which she believes are reactions to and commentary upon Arthur Penn's earlier film *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). Like me, Kinder finds the outlaw couple film to be related to the male buddy movie, a genre which
she feels is the (reactionary) response to "Gay Lib" and "the women's movement" (2). While male buddies may be more meaningful in the 1974 films—Kinder notes that the man has a relationship with another male which is often superior to his relationship with his female partner (6)—than in the films of this analysis, the relationships of men in all the outlaw couple films are more important than those among women. This is important because all of the outlaw couple films are surrounded by contemporary male-centred movies. The films discussed in chapter three were released during the film noir period of the forties, when the lone male anti-hero was popular (as I will discuss in detail in the next two chapters). 2 Bonnie and Clyde was released during the late sixties, a time which Cynthia J. Fuchs calls the "coming of age" for the male buddy movie, as it responds to the "political advent of sex and race issues, through Women's Lib and the Civil Rights Movement" (196). The recent outlaw couple films discussed in chapter five come just near the end of the hypermasculine film era of the Reagan/Bush years; as Shawn Levy remembers, "For a while there in the late eighties, it seemed as if moviegoers were doomed to be slapped silly by a tag team of buddies" (11).

If the outlaw couple film is, in part, a response to male buddy movies, then why has the male buddy movie remained so popular since its "coming of age?" Molly Haskell makes this long, but very appropriate statement about the male buddy movies' popularity:

Where are the romantic idols who made their reputations on their appeal to women, the John Barrymores and Leslie Howards to whom women offered themselves in marriage? To Robert Redford and Paul Newman, who might conceivably be thought of as their successors, women, when they bother, send only billet-doux. But like most of their colleagues, Redford and Newman would rather be "real people" than actors, and would rather be "real actors" than romantic leads. So instead of playing opposite beautiful women in love stories of
civilized narratives, they play opposite each other in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and romance takes a whole new twist (187).

While Haskell's statement (along with the rest of her book, From Reverence to Rape) may be overly-nostalgic for the "Golden Age of Cinema," she does make an albeit inadvertent point that Hollywood rarely considers women outside of a romantic or sexual relation to men. The continuing drive of "Women's Lib" since the sixties has perhaps jaded the earlier faith in such love relationships, and has led Hollywood to turn to the more "real" relationships of men. 3

These "real people" are not truly all that "real" for they seem to have almost superhuman capabilities; in the example of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969)—perhaps as quintessential a male buddy film as Bonnie and Clyde is an outlaw couple film—almost the entire Bolivian army is required to take down the two protagonists in George Roy Hill's film. The male buddy movies give the two protagonists the opportunity to show off their indubitable independence; Manohla Dargis notes that "men in the buddy movie have a relationship in order to develop their individual autonomy" (17). One very notable feature of the male buddy movies is the absence of women, and Fuchs notes that "these men without women define themselves in opposition to the (absented) other" (196). 4 While this lack of women may be necessary in order for the buddies to be "real" as well as independent, their absence, Fuchs claims, helps to "situate the male couple between the representational poles of homoeroticism and homophobia" (195). She argues, as does Kinder about the male relationships in the 1974 outlaw couple films, that these suggestions of homosexuality are always denied, such as through off-screen girlfriends and ex-wives, or diffused, by onscreen explosions or fights (196).

The fear of homosexuality may be one reason that the outlaw couple films keep appearing in the midst of male buddiness. Perhaps when the male buddy films show their protagonists enjoying each others' company just a little too much, the outlaw couple film comes along to reestablish heterosexuality. Yet while all the outlaw couple films I discuss in this thesis
are released during different historical times, these films all carry distinct attitudes towards the male buddy unit, which, in turn, reflect on the presentation of the heterosexual couple. While the films of chapter three place a strong importance of male friendships, Bonnie and Clyde of chapter four looks ironically at the male buddy unit, and the films of chapter five almost entirely dispel with any other relationship beyond that of the couple. Just as Kinder has found evidence in contemporary attitudes for the male buddies of the 1974 outlaw couple films (i.e. backlashes from Gay and Women's Lib), I have looked to current historical events as a way of explaining the different yet consistent attitudes towards heterosexual and homosocial relationships.

When I first looked into the outlaw couple film as a thesis topic, I felt that the outlaw couple film might provide opportunities for the presentation of a strong female character. Because of the outlaw couple film's strong ties to the male buddy film, it seemed possible that the female character could substitute for one of the male buddies, and take on the independence that goes along with his role. Also, because the characters are "outlaws," it seemed likely that they would be less constricted by the rules of a society, and would be able to escape the roles prescribed for them. Unfortunately, my beliefs were not substantiated by the films I analyzed. It seems that in any comparison of the male buddy film to the outlaw couple film, the emphasis tends to be on "male" and not on "buddy." Of the seven films I analyze in chapters three to five, five show women who are no more than "sidekicks" to their husbands (and, even more disappointingly, this role is played out in all three of the recent outlaw couple films). Of the two "stronger" female characters, one (Laurie, of Gun Crazy) is portrayed as so crazy that her independence seems like a curse, while the other (Bonnie of Bonnie and Clyde), although able to recognize that she does not want to be a sidekick, is not able to become a strong character.

As I have mentioned, the "outlaw" aspect of these films first gave me hope that the protagonists might not be so restricted by their societies. In chapter two, I explore the idea of "outlawism" by looking at what I consider to be the precursors to these road outlaw couple movies, the film noir and the Western. In this chapter, I note that the possibility of becoming a
"sympathetic outlaw" (a term I will explain in the next chapter) and, more importantly, the ability to question society that comes with this role, has almost exclusively been reserved for men.

In chapter three, I draw on the previous analysis of film noir and look specifically at three movies from the period, Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once* (1937), Nicholas Ray's *They Live By Night* (1949) and Joseph Lewis's *Gun Crazy* (1949). I also use this chapter to look at the road movie, which is an important part of both the outlaw couple film and the male buddy movie. In chapter four, I look at what I consider (as seemingly does Kinder) the most important outlaw couple film ever made, *Bonnie and Clyde*. While Kinder looks at this film as influential to the movies of her 1974 analysis, I look at Bonnie and Clyde as a "break" from the past, as a questioning of couple and buddy structures.

In chapter five, I look at three recent outlaw couple films, all made in the first half of the 1990s: David Lynch's *Wild At Heart* (1990), Tony Scott's *True Romance* (1993) and Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1995). While, as I note at the beginning of the chapter, the past decade has offered a great variety of outlaw couple films, I write about these three because they are most consistent with the other films (a heterosexual couple has outlaw adventures while on a road trip). In the previous two chapters, the analysis of contemporary history has been secondary to the analysis of the filmic events. I have made the historical analysis a secondary component with these films because both the film noir period as well as *Bonnie and Clyde* have been discussed thoroughly elsewhere. In Chapter Five, I provide a long analysis of the recent outlaw couple films, but also include a discussion of contemporary attitudes which may influence the films' portrayals of the couples. I feel that this issue has not been discussed elsewhere in such a manner and is therefore an important part of this thesis.

As I have mentioned earlier, this thesis presents outlaw couple films from different historical periods as a way of discovering different reasons for the presentation of this heterosexual pair. Yet, in order to be consistent, I have limited the analysis to three threads
which came up over and over again during my research: focalization ("whose story?")
homosocial friendships, and the onscreen societies (or "homes") of the couple. By looking at
these threads, along with the contemporary historical events, I have come up with a
demonstration of why the outlaw couple film, appearing in different incarnations periodically
throughout film history since the forties, has remained such a conservative genre, only briefly
achieving anything beyond the most basic of patriarchal goals.
Notes

1. In her article, Kinder looks at three films all released in 1974 and all of which deal with the outlaw couple: Terence Malick's *Badlands*, Robert Altman's *Thieves Like Us* and Steven Spielberg's *Sugarland Express*.

2. Although the "male buddy" was not fully conceived a generic term during the film noir period as it is during later years, male to male relationships still took priority over those among females. For example, a male protagonist would learn that he could have a much better relationship with a male friend than with a femme fatale.

3. This idea of "real" comes up at the end of chapter five, where I note that the three outlaw couples of the nineties seem only able to exist in a "dreamlike" world.

4. Katharine Ross may be one of the stars of the film, but she is little more than a shared object which Butch and the Kid use to express their "buddiness." As well, and luckily for the men, she desires little more than to take care of their domestic needs.

5. Granted, I have intentionally limited myself to heterosexual couples within the Hollywood system, in part so that I am able to make more generalized historical analyses which are more likely to be borne out by this conservative group. Outside these narrow restrictions, there exist possibilities for stronger female characters, for example, in films like Gillian Armstrong's *Mrs Soffel* (1984) or Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991).

6. For further exploration of issues concerning film noir, please see Clarens, Cowie, Gledhill, Frank, Hirsch, Krutnik and Schraeder; for *Bonnie and Clyde*, see Cagin, Cawelti, Free, Giannetti, Kolker, Murray and Wake.
The term “bad girl” carries a significantly different connotation than does “bad guy.” This contrast is exemplified in Lotte Da and Jan Alexander’s book Bad Girls of the Silver Screen where every single “bad girl” described is guilty of using her sex to trick someone (i.e. a man) for her own personal gain. This interpretation is not limited to their book, but can be attributed to most female characters breaking the moral codes in the films in which they appear. What does this mean? Are these women so instinctively wired that they involuntarily switch into sex-mode when they want something? Or is their sex such a powerful weapon, that to turn to anything else would be a waste of time?

Of course, the obvious answer to why these women use their sex to be “bad” can be found by looking at the well-known “madonna/whore” archetypes. Women, when viewed through this very polarized dichotomy, can only be “good” when acting within the very narrow limits of the loving (but not sexual—at least not sexual in a way which escapes the control of a male protagonist), helpful (but not dominating), always available (but not demanding) wife (or her unmarried, rather not-yet married, counterpart). Although it seems ridiculous to say that one stumble from the madonna pedestal means that a woman has signed on to a life of sexual depravity, it is a rule which has held strong in patriarchal representations of women over the years. It is also very difficult for a woman to even be forgiven for, let alone redeemed from, her “transgression.” As Peter McWilliams states, “One seldom goes from the whore category to the madonna category, but the slide from madonna to whore (at least in the eyes of the man) is fairly common” (578).

While the point about the madonna/whore split may seem a tired one, it is appropriate in understanding the reason why so few women have appeared as “bad guys” or “outlaws.” Women in film almost always fall into the trap of being judged only by their sex, while men are able to break the law and become “bad guys” for a greater variety of reasons. Keeping this in
mind, I would like to use this chapter to explore some historical ideas of “outlaws” in films whose roles I will argue act as precursors to the outlaw couple. I have chosen to discuss film noir and the western because their treatment of both the law and women can be related to the outlaw couple film I discuss in later chapters.

I. IDENTIFICATION

One common trait of film noir and of the western is that, in some examples of these types of films, their treatment of the law allows for identification with the “outlaw.” Later, I will examine ways in which these films pursue this treatment of the bad guy, but first I would like to discuss what I mean by the term “identification.” In his book Mystifying Movies, Noel Carroll argues that this term, through abstract use, has lost any original meaning, and, at best, has come to vaguely connote the idea that a viewer believes herself to be the character onscreen (246). While Carroll has no doubt that “mimetic representation can arouse the emotions of spectators and manipulate those emotions in significant ways,” he attributes the emotions felt by the viewer, not to identification, but to “parallel feelings” (where a viewer feels the same emotions, say fear, sadness, exuberance, as a character onscreen) and “pro-attitudes” (where a viewer shares a moral belief with the character, say the belief that racism is wrong, and thus has a positive opinion of that character’s attitudes or actions) (246).

I certainly agree with Carroll that the term “identification” has become diluted in meaning, but I would like to add two additional reasons for emotional “arousal” in a viewer. First, Carroll claims that characters are imbued with a sense of moral right or goodness, and this characterization leads us to develop sympathies or, to use his term, “concern” for the character (246). To this claim, I would add that very often one character’s “goodness” is highlighted by its opposition to another character’s “badness.” In mainstream films, the most common use of this opposition occurs in the protagonist/antagonist dialectic. Yet this dichotomization of audience
"concern" does not always split itself up so easily. Often, viewers will sympathize with a character who is not the protagonist (for example, a female viewer might feel "concern" for a femme fatale despite the narrative's opposing intentions). Also, "goodness" and "badness" might not be so simply manifested, (i.e. one trait in each character); instead, the opposition might appear in a more abstract way. Despite this lack of simplicity, films very frequently garner sympathy for a character by showing a struggle against opposing ideas or forces. The ability of a character to succeed in the face of adversity may induce sympathy in audience members. (I am introducing the idea of "opposition" now because it is very important in the creation of the outlaw couple characters).

My second point concerns Carroll's desire to simplify the audience/character relationship. Throughout his book, Carroll seeks to debunk particularly "mystifying" film theories. While I generally feel that Carroll has taken on a legitimate task (and does a good job of it too), in the case of character identification, I feel he has pared down his theory too far.

For instance, Carroll gives the example of a male viewer watching an onscreen couple fall in love. If, Carroll claims, this viewer "identified" with the male character, he would be jealous, not happy, when the onscreen couple walked happily into the sunset and he was left alone in the theatre. Because the viewer is not jealous, Carroll claims he is merely "looking on" (246). Carroll's attitude implies a detachment in the viewer, as if he were watching a comparable real-life event (say a budding romance between two of his office co-workers). Yet any film viewer knows that a real life event is to be interpreted differently than one which happens in a film. A film couple will have much less influence on the viewer's life than the office couple would (for example, the viewer will not have to pick up the slack if the film couple's jobs become unimportant to them). Also, a viewer is privileged to the private moments of the film couple and is therefore going to understand the subtle nuances of their relationship better than he does that of his co-workers. So, because he has more of an understanding of the workings of the screen couple's relationship, and will be less affected in his real life by their actions, the viewer can
allow himself (somewhere between consciously and unconsciously) to become more involved emotionally with the screen couple than he would be able to with his real-life office mates.

In addition to this last point, I note that Carroll, in comparing film events to real-life events (in his attempt to simplify existing film theory), tends to limit his arguments to the narrative level of an event's portrayal. So the viewer "looks on" at what happens to the film couple in the same way as he observes the actions of his office-mates. Yet the other elements of a film (music, editing, lighting, casting, etc.) are also very important in eliciting an emotional reaction from the viewer. For example, a musical swell when the couple first kiss may strengthen an emotional response from the viewer. As Christine Gledhill states, “[T]he 'convincing character,' the 'revealing' episode, or 'realistic' image of the world is not a simple reflection of 'real life,' but a highly mediated production of fictional practice” (8). While these devices may not always work the way they are intended to, even a viewer aware of the manipulation by the filmmaker can still react as expected if involved deeply enough in the onscreen events.

So, although I agree with Carroll that the meaning of "identification" has become convoluted, I do not agree with the limitations of his proposed alternatives. To say that "looking on," "sympathizing with" or feeling "concern for" a character onscreen equates with our emotional reactions to ones we might have in real life does not convey the strength of, and different reasons for, the emotions which may be brought on by the film viewing experience. So while I still feel that the term "identification" can be misleading, it is for its specific link to film-viewing and its "stronger-than- 'concern'" connotations that I feel the word cannot be so easily discarded.

It is with this sense of the word that I will say the character of the film outlaw can be divided into two types: one with whom the viewer identifies and one with whom he does not. This split is not always so easily divided into the protagonist/antagonist pair. Because the outlaw couples are chiefly characters whose plight the audience understands and sympathizes
with, I would like to discuss comparable sympathetic treatments of outlaw characters in both film noirs and westerns as possible antecedents to the outlaw couple.

II. FILM NOIR

Although film noir is usually not classified as a genre, but rather a film period, the films of this era (roughly mid World War Two to about 1955) draw upon one similar theme—namely, the activities of the inhabitants of a dark, criminal, “nightmare” world. Although film noirs use this theme in a number of ways, I will be limiting my discussion to the type of noir which employs the sympathetic outlaw (i.e. a character with whom the audience identifies) as its protagonist because this character treatment is similar to that of the outlaw couple.

In the previous section, I defined what I mean by “identify”: a character with whom the audience identifies is one for whom the audience feels a special, filmic sympathy or understanding. My definition of “outlaw” is also quite simple: an “outlaw” is a character who knowingly (although not always willingly) breaks the laws of the filmic world he inhabits. Thus, a “sympathetic outlaw” is a character who breaks the law, but does so in such a way that the audience understands why he has done so, and sympathizes with his plight. The use of this type of outlaw is by no means limited to this type of film noir, but can also be seen in the gangster movie—a close predecessor of film noir, with its popularity centering around the Depression years. A discussion which compares the protagonists of the gangster and film noir movies is important as a way to understand the nature of the outlaw in the outlaw couple films.

Foster Hirsch makes a good point about the essential difference between the two characters when he calls the gangster a “folk hero” and the film noir criminal an “anti-hero” (58). The exploits of real-life gangsters were made legendary among the people through newspapers. This idea of “larger-than-life” is evident in the filmic characterization of the gangster: he is someone who knows how to work the system in order to make his way to the top, and he will
only be brought down by his megalomania. By contrast, the film noir antihero is so oppressed by his society that his only hope for survival is to ignore the rules of the system—an act which will unfortunately also lead to his downfall. Both characters' downfalls, each governed by different stages of ever-modified production codes (though with one constant rule: a bad guy must be punished for his transgressions) have a different significance for each type of film. Robert Phillip Kolker explains the role of the gangster as such:

The gangster is a parody of the bourgeois on the make, every working man's dream of leaving his class and getting to the top. The working man had, after all, always been told he could get there—at least that he had the opportunity to—but somehow class, education, and economic situation never quite made it apparent how that opportunity could be realized. The myth of the gangster provided a reasonable surrogate (all myths are surrogates) for his own desires (43).

The escapist, Depression era audiences saw the gangster able to make his way up from the bottom, and rooted for this hard working man, until the last reel, when he had gone too far, and they were reassured that society would step in and right all wrongs. In contrast, the film noir anti-hero becomes a criminal almost by accident, because his closed, claustrophobic society offers him no place else to go; when at the end of the film he is punished, we are aware that "society" itself is still at large.

In fact, the film noir criminal's society is so much a part of his downfall that it can be placed in the role of antagonist or the "opposing force" I discussed in the previous "Identification" section. While the gangster's world is merely a backdrop for (and, at the end, resolution to) his activities, the film noir criminal's world is shown to be responsible for his condition. Take, for example, Edward G. Robinson's Chris Cross in Fritz Lang's Scarlet Street (1945). Here is a man who is literally caged in by his work at the bank, trapped in a loveless
marriage and teased when he turns to his one pleasure, his paintings. It is easy to understand why he thinks that he is in love with Kitty when she helps him create a world where he can paint without ridicule. After finally learning how she has tricked him throughout the film, Chris explodes out of his meek shell and violently stabs her with an ice pick. We not only understand where this rage comes from (years of submitting to a cruel, uncaring world) but almost applaud Chris’s violent, but passionate, human response in the face of the cold, heartless society.

One might ask why the film noir criminal is set against his society in a way that the audience identifies with him at the expense of his society’s rules. One answer lies in the political happenings of the time. Just as the gangster film fits the expectations of the escapist Depression era film, the film noir suits the angry, disillusioned mood of America in the late and post WW2 years. After being given the jingoistic, nationalistic send-off into the war, servicemen were bound to return from its horrors in a state of disillusion, and would be likely to admonish the society that sent them off in the first place. Paul Schrader makes a good point when he describes the soldier’s return to a situation where “the whole society [seems] something less than worth fighting for.” He goes on: “The war continues, but now the antagonism turns with a new viciousness toward the American society itself” (155).

Out of this “whole society,” there is one character in the film noir who takes a notable portion of this blame—the femme fatale. When a film noir protagonist becomes a film noir criminal, there is often a woman at his side, urging and assisting him towards his downfall (like the example of Kitty in Scarlet Street). Film noir men are often worried by any female character who exhibits the desire to carry out her own goals, and these men usually have their suspicions confirmed. It seems that the elevation of a female character to any type of independence from the male world brings about a whole new set of problems beyond the type of world where she stayed safely behind the scenes as a gangster’s moll, or in other auxiliary roles.

Many critics have offered historical reasons for this treatment of the femme fatale, most of which relate to the new wartime role of women in society. Women, who were told during the
war that their place in the war effort was in the factories, were now being told that they were upsetting the balance of society and to step aside. Frank Krutnik, in his remarkable book *In A Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, summarizes best the post-war treatment of women in the workplace and Hollywood’s reaction to it:

With the men returning home at the end of the war, economic and social priorities shifted once more. Women were often aggressively ejected from the workplace—there were large-scale lay-offs as well as overt discrimination—and this was accompanied by an intensive renegotiation of the wartime discourses which had promoted the idea that women could find a place in society outside the traditional home context....Hollywood cooperated in this work of ideological renegotiation, for example, by most consistently addressing the uncertainties and confusions of the postwar era in terms of the problems experienced by men (60).

Krutnik’s view is important because it gives not only historical reasons for the treatment of the femme fatale but also the understanding that Hollywood shows its biases by looking at the issue through a specific, patriarchal view.

It is probably with these biases in mind that Elizabeth Cowie calls the simple ascribing of the femme fatale’s role to wartime workforce problems “a fantasy,” and she wonders why there existed “the continuing fascination with this fantasy long after the historical period that is supposed to justify it” (123). I feel that there are two reasons which will answer Cowie’s question. The first reason involves the “madonna/whore” split I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. As I stated earlier, the “madonna” role is a very easy one from which to transgress; if women are viewed through this dichotomy, then it is very easy for them to be “bad,” no matter what the historical period.
The second reason which might answer Cowie’s question can be found in Laura Mulvey’s famous essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” where she states that character roles in the Hollywood narrative can be divided into the dichotomy of men:active/women:passive. According to Mulvey, a male character is the active force, which drives the narrative to its conclusion, while the female character obstructs this drive, arresting the male’s active pursuit by her appearance, “coded for strong visual and erotic impact,” which causes him to look at or “gaze” upon her (33). If Mulvey’s theory is true, it would seem likely that an active female character who is not a passive spectacle (or at least not only a passive spectacle) would be breaking a “rule” of the narrative, and should therefore be punished. A woman pursuing her own narrative goal might come in conflict with a male protagonist pursuing his, and would therefore be seen as “bad.” This view puts the answer in the realm of the narrative, and removes the question from a historical context.

I certainly do not disagree with critics (such as Krutnik), who read the role of women in cinema as reactionary responses by Hollywood to contemporary historical or political occurrences. It is undeniably true that current events will fuel the desire in a cautious media like Hollywood for restatements of existing biases, or even prompt “backlashes” as critic Susan Faludi suggests. Yet these events only prompt restatements, as the whole system tends to be very conservative in its approach, and it is not merely historical events which urge certain readings of women. I will discuss more general reasons for the idea of woman as “antagonist” or “other” in a later section of this chapter called “Home.”

III. THE WESTERN

Many female critics admire film noirs because they at least provide an opportunity for a good portion of screen time to be devoted to showing actively independent women, even if these portrayals are usually not positive. If the film noir is notable for providing interesting roles for
women, then the Western might be noted for its conspicuous absence of any type of important female character. The Western is nearly exclusively populated by male protagonists, with women filling in gaps or providing motivation for the storyline. As John Tuska states about the female in the Western, "She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concerns he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does" (224). In this section, I will discuss the role of the outlaw versus society in this predominantly male space.

The stereotypical idea of the Western does not seem to provide an avenue for complex ideas of outlawry, as the films of the film noir period do. In the most simplistic of Westerns, the good guy wears white and we know that he is on the right side (and our side) of the law. The bad guy wears black, and we spend the whole film cursing his thwarting of the hero until the end of the film, when he submits to the hero's bullet. While the roles of good guy and bad guy in many early Westerns can be summed up as simply as this, the distance between the hero and his society, a constant in this genre which celebrates individuality, offers the possibility for a more complex study of good and bad.

One notable portrayal of this type of hero is exemplified by the Western heroes played by John Wayne, especially as Ethan in John Ford's The Searchers (1956). Although this character is well able to conduct himself properly amongst other people (nearly the whole family, excepting the father, is thrilled when "Uncle" Ethan returns to the homestead), he consistently shows himself unable and unwilling to become a part of this society. Perhaps he only finds this return to society tolerable with the gradual reduction of the posse to two men (Ethan as leader with nephew-sidekick) and the absence of the women in the family, who are kidnapped or killed (this necessary lack of women is shown when the nephew's life becomes comically intolerable after he accidentally marries an Indian "squaw"). Many times, the film will show Ethan acting in a manner which initially seems confusing or even counter-productive but is soon revealed to be the most promising solution to the group's problems. For example, he insists to the point of absurd motherliness that his nephew sleep near the roaring fire he has built. This is annoying to
the nephew, and confusing to us, but we soon learn that Ethan is setting up a target to lure untrustworthy accomplices into his range of fire. The structure where Ethan’s competence is continually questioned then reaffirmed, not only builds up trust in his ability to act for good purposes, but establishes that this type of behaviour, which the film upholds as proper and necessary, requires him to remain apart from society. This attitude is reflected in the final moment of the film, where the framed shot, often used to show the limits of the characters it surrounds, instead separates us from Ethan as we watch him walk off alone into the horizon.

This type of Western hero has gone through many incarnations, such as Clint Eastwood’s angry, and at times, vengeful characters, or Mel Brooks’s parody of this type (seen in Gene Wilder’s character) in Blazing Saddles (1974). While these examples of conflicting male space and society occur on the side of “good,” this convention of the genre does offer the potential opportunity for the type of outlaw discussed in the previous section. Sam Peckinpah’s The Wild Bunch (1969) is a film which uses this “anti-society” attitude to explore a more complex version of good and bad.

This film presents two groups of men: a band of outlaws and the posse that has been hired to catch them. What is interesting about the film is that both sides have likeable and dislikeable characters so it is difficult to split the two groups into protagonist and antagonist categories. We sympathize with the outlaws, understanding their goals (we are told that this is their final job before they retire) and we are even witness to the gang’s personal moralities, which are not forced on them by any law (such as in the famous final scene, where the gang returns for the member kept by Mapache whom they originally gave up, doing so only out of a sense of honour or duty). By contrast, the posse hired to capture the outlaws are themselves jailbirds, and are only pursuing the outlaw bunch under threat of being sent back to jail. The “leader” of the posse, Thornton, is the only sympathetic character, and is often shown at odds with the other dull-witted members of the group. At the end of the film, after having seen his former friend Pike and his gang torn to bits by bullets, Thornton takes no comfort in the law’s
ultimate victory, and does not return to society a "free" man who does not have to return to jail. Instead, he sits pensively against a rock as his fellow posse-mates head home, and tells them that he will not be returning, but has decided instead to head off somewhere else by himself.

What Peckinpah's film shows is a clear privileging of male independence over societal laws. The men who are independent of societal laws, in this case the outlaw bunch, do still act within their own codes of morality (such as returning for the captive gang member). By contrast, the men who are bound by societal law, the posse, are incapable of making any kind of decision on their own (with the exception of Thornton who understands the captive nature of society). Thus, the outlaw, who subscribes only to his own laws, is much more at liberty than the man who slavishly follows the laws of his society. In this sense, the society of the Western takes the same role of antagonist (i.e. obstructor of the protagonist's goals) as the society of the film noir movies. And while an argument for personal freedom is certainly noble, a note of hypocrisy sounds in this depiction of "man" versus society—namely that it is "man" who is free and other members of his society who are paying the cost of his freedom. Certainly The Wild Bunch does not worry about the personal freedom of the Mexican woman who chooses to "sleep with the enemy" and is killed without so much as a narrative blink.

As Peckinpah has demonstrated in his film, the open space of the Western allows a different take on the outlaw versus society ideology seen in the film noir. While the film noir outlaw is so hemmed in by his claustrophobic society that he is practically forced into outlawism, the western outlaw has much more space to actively question the laws of his society. Again, using the famous final scene as an example, the outlaw bunch could simply leave the Mexican gang member with Mapache, but return for him solely out of a sense of honour. In this sense, when the Western outlaw returns to a society for a final showdown (when he could locate himself in another of the plentiful spaces of the Western), he shows an active questioning of the laws of his society, as opposed to the provoked reaction against society seen in the film noir. Both these types of questioning of society appear in later "road movies" (which have strong links
to outlaw couple films) where the open space of the road gives this genre the feel of the Western, while the contemporary setting, along with the idea of the “chase” by the law (society), gives these films the paranoid tone of the film noir. I will discuss the road movie in the following chapter.

The question remains, however, why is the “freedom” and “space” of the Western always male? I will discuss this issue in detail in the final section of this chapter, “Home,” but would like to make one final point about the space of the Western. Jane Tompkins offers a very good argument for the gendered space of the Western in her book West of Everything. She discusses the “evangelical reform Christianity embodied by the popular fiction of the mid-nineteenth century” (37) and has this to say about its relation to the slightly later Western novel: “The female, domestic, “sentimental” religion of the best-selling women writers...whose novels spoke to the deepest beliefs and highest ideals of middle-class America is the real antagonist of the Western [novel]” (37). Tompkins’s argument is so precise in its point by point distinctions between the evangelical and Western novels, that it can be summarized with the following columns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAIT</th>
<th>WESTERN</th>
<th>EVANGELICAL</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>other main characters</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>space</td>
<td>outdoors</td>
<td>indoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>struggle between</td>
<td>public (saloons, liveries)</td>
<td>private (parlours, kitchens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td>few words</td>
<td>emotions expressed freely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>death</td>
<td>public, sudden (murder)</td>
<td>at home, long and drawn out illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nature</td>
<td>awesome, powerful, dwarfs people</td>
<td>pastoral, benign</td>
</tr>
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The clarity of Tompkins’s argument makes a good case for the idea of the Western as a reaction to the earlier Evangelical novel, and is similar to the argument made by critics who call the film noir a reaction to the working women of World War Two. Tompkins’s argument can be strengthened by branching out into these novels’ contemporary society, looking at the efforts of the late nineteenth century feminists to wipe out the “corruptness” of society as embodied by
saloons or other male arenas and replace them with home and church. These efforts certainly did create a possible threat to male spaces, and provided an opportunity for the status quo to react by reasserting itself. I feel the conflict between the two spaces can be generalized even further (beyond a historical realm, as I suggested in the previous section), and will discuss this idea in the final section of this chapter.

IV. HOME

In the chapter “From Buddies to Lovers” in his book Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan, Robin Wood discusses the concept of “home” as it is applied in the 1970s crop of male buddy movies. His discussion is helpful to my own thesis due to the close relationship of the outlaw couple film to the male buddy movie. As his idea of “home” is very important to the outlaw versus society theme presented in this chapter, I will now provide a brief summary of Wood’s definition.

Wood defines home as “to be understood not merely as a physical location but as both a state of mind and an ideological construct, above all as ideological security” (228). This concept of “home is often embodied by the idea of “America” or what Wood terms “normality” (229). As “[patriarchy depends on the separation of the sexes...in order that masculinity and femininity may continue to be constructed,” women are almost always left behind at “home” (and held responsible for all its negative connotations) when male characters feel the need to escape its trappings (223). About this absence of women, Wood says, “If women can be dispensed with so easily, a great deal else goes with them including the central supports of and justification for the dominant ideology: marriage, family, home” (227).

It is for this “loss” of the dominant ideology that Wood considers the male buddy movie to be progressive. The “outsider” heroes put themselves “outside the pressures of patriarchy, which are all that stand in the way of the recognition and acceptance of constitutional
bisexuality” (230). This “bisexuality” is not necessarily an actual sexual practice, but is instead a way of escaping the binary of the separated sex roles demanded by patriarchy. He feels that this lack of trust in “home” (i.e. American values) is a result of the Vietnam war; in fact, the impact of this war is so great that “the heroes of American culture can now exist and operate only outside the confines and norms of the American establishment” (233).

I do agree with Wood’s basic premise: the male buddies become discontented with “home” and, after escaping its confines, define themselves positively against their negative concept of “home.” I feel this statement fits into my own concept of the “sympathetic outlaw” and his relationship to the law and society. I cannot say that I agree with much more. While I can see how he might be correct in calling the male buddy movie progressive for men who wish to escape their own restrictive sex roles, I do not feel that “progressive” is accurate when the women of the films are paying such a price. Melanie Nash states a similar criticism of Wood’s definition quite aptly:

[T]he buddy movie’s dismantling of the viability of the concept of “home” and all the social constraints it implies is certainly not a progressive step for feminism if the women are given no choice but to stay behind—at home, and embodying “home”—and are thus excluded from participation in, or benefitting from the abandonment of traditional social roles (30).

Nash is indeed correct, and I will add that it is quite hypocritical to call for the throwing off of societal shackles in the name of individual freedom, when this requires that a significant number of people stay back in order to define the society left behind. I would argue that this means that these male buddies are not escaping patriarchy but are, in fact, perfecting it. Throwing off what one does not like about patriarchy (in this case heterosexual love, marriage) does not mean that one is fully escaping or ceasing to benefit from its goal (i.e. to privilege men over women). In
this sense, the male buddy film seems less bisexual but unisexual, and the escape from “home” still only benefits one half of the population, just as I found to be the case in the earlier examples of the film noir and the Western.

My second point is not as much a complete negation of Wood’s argument as my previous point, but rather a suggestion of the limitations of his reasoning. He claims that the Vietnam war was so disruptive to society that its confidence in American values was forever shaken, and, as a result, American film protagonists ever since share the same mistrust of “home” (233). First, this argument suggests that the American protagonist had complete faith in American values before the Vietnam war; the discussion of the film noir in this chapter shows a very similar disillusionment thirty years previous. I feel that in this sense, Wood is limiting himself to a present-day frame of mind, and misses out on comparisons with other earlier examples.

Second, it is undeniable that such an event as the Vietnam war had a profound impact on American society. Earlier in this chapter, I made a similar statement when discussing the influence of the war-time working woman on film noir’s femme fatale. Yet it is somewhat dangerous to limit film to the role of mirror to contemporary political occurrences; this suggests that in non-crisis times, all representations run smoothly. Stated otherwise, and in an example relevant to my thesis, the limiting of film representation to this reactive role, assumes that there are points in history when women onscreen have been represented accurately and unproblematically. This certainly is not the case, as we can see by films made about women in relatively “safe” times (for example the women’s films of the mid-seventies and early nineties) where the portrayal of women, while relatively positive, can still be somewhat troubling. I am not saying that historical analyses are unimportant film tools, but just the opposite; as all films are made and viewed by humans who are living out history, it is impossible for these films not to be considered part of history. But it is important not to limit the themes of films as mere reactions to current events. I have used devices such as the madonna/whore archetypes and
Mulvey's narrative rules as a means of reasoning why women in film have been treated so consistently inconsequentially, and have used these devices in addition to the historical analyses. I would like to add a final point by Nash which nicely sums up this paragraph:

[I]n reality, [the films] more often seem to self-indulgently glorify the tragic rebellion of two men against the rules of a world they themselves have created, while blaming or abusing women along the way, because women have been constructed under patriarchy as representatives of the social rigidity which the buddies...have come to resent (30).

I close this section with Nash's statement because it describes so well the self-glorification (of which Wood's comparison of male buddy movies to a most tragic war might be an example) behind which the real construction of events hides. While Wood links his concept of "home" to ideas like the "American establishment which caused the Vietnam war" against which his buddies rebel, I have not provided such concrete connections to my own definition of "society." The numerous examples from different genres show that the role of society as antagonist does not have to come from a specific historical moment, but instead can be called up as a vehicle against which the hero (or group of heroes) protests. Nash is indeed correct to point out that the male buddies are not rebelling against "home" but instead against "the rules of a world they themselves have created"; in this statement she makes clear that it is not necessarily the society which causes the buddies to react, but rather their perception and creation of it.

V. CONCLUSION

I opened this chapter wondering why there have been so few true examples of female outlaws in film history. It seems to me that the limiting of woman to a sexual role (the
madonna/whore archetypes) and the confining of her chances to fulfill narrative goals (Mulvey) give female characters very little opportunity to become outlaws. I chose to look at examples of male outlaws, limiting my discussions to "sympathetic outlaws" in film noirs and westerns, as the qualities of these outlaws will be most relevant to my later discussions of the outlaw couple film. In these sections, I found that an outlaw gains sympathy when he is perceived to be just in breaking the laws of his society, and, in order to foster audience identification, films will often set up an antagonizing relationship between society and the outlaw. Women are almost always delegated the responsibility of giving meaning to the definition of "home" and, as such, never have the opportunity to break away from this society. The freedom away from home, which is the only space in which a "sympathetic" outlaw can exist, seems so far to be an exclusively male-space, off-limits to women. By using several different filmic examples, I will, in the next three chapters, look at how a female protagonist fits in the outlaw role when she joins her male partner on the road in the outlaw couple movie.
Notes

1. In the introduction to her book *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression*, Lynda Hart notes that the stereotyped traits of “woman” make it impossible for her to be a criminal: “Boys will be boys, say the masculinity theorists, and girls will be girls unless they do become criminals, in which case they are likely to be masculinized women” (13). As usual, women’s morality hinges on their sexuality.

2. Some characteristics of film noir are: investigative but convoluted narrative, voiceovers, shifting points of view, urban locales, night for night shooting, contemporary settings and characters with psychologically perverse motivations. Elizabeth Cowie claims that despite these similarities, “all this does not add up to a genre, however, at least not a genre in the sense...[of films which have] a specific iconography of objects and milieux as well as a limited set of narrative themes or problematics” (193).

3. Although I just insisted that “identifying” is more than “sympathizing”, I have yet to find an adjectival form of the word identification. Due to this, I will be substituting the word “sympathetic”.

4. I am limiting my discussion to sound movies, even though the gangster has appeared on film since the early silents. I am imposing this limit for stylistic reasons, but also because the Hays Code, which was implemented in the early 1930s, had a very important influence on the portrayal of the bad guy.

5. The popularity of real-life gangsters on film was seen to be such a problem that in December of 1946, Joseph Breen added this clause to the MPAA code: “No picture shall be approved dealing with the life of a notorious criminal of current or recent times which uses the name, nickname or alias of such notorious criminal in the film, nor shall a picture be approved if based on the life of such notorious criminal unless the character shown in the film be punished for crimes shown in the film committed by him.” (Clarens 192).

6. Some newer Westerns do show a female character in the role of main protagonist, such as the Sharon Stone vehicle *The Quick and the Dead* (Sam Rami, 1994). Such a film is a conscious reaction against earlier male-centred films and, while still an important Western, can only be viewed as an attempt to step outside the genre.

7. I can enlighten this idea with an example—Oliver Stone. Here is a director who uses his big-budget films to address the most “important” topics in American history: the Vietnam war, the Kennedy assassination, the life of one of the biggest rock stars in history, etc. Often the downright absurdity of his films is hidden behind the “importance” of his topic—not to mention the fact that his attitude assumes that only certain topics are “important” enough to merit high financing.
CHAPTER THREE: CONTAINING THE FEMME FATALE: THREE FILM NOIR COUPLES ON THE ROAD IN FRITZ LANG'S YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE (1937), NICHOLAS RAY'S THEY LIVE BY NIGHT AND JOSEPH LEWIS'S GUN CRAZY (1949)

In the previous chapter, I discussed film noir as a type of film whose narrative is frequently limited to the actions (or more accurately, paranoid reactions) of a male protagonist. The films You Only Live Once (Fritz Lang, 1937), They Live By Night (Nicholas Ray, 1949) and Gun Crazy (Joseph Lewis, 1949) can all be considered to be part of the film noir canon. Yet all three show a female lead as one of the two main protagonists, which changes the dynamics of a film type that often deals with a lone anti-hero (who is frequently wary of the women in his world). In this chapter, I will look at how the inclusion of a woman on the road affects the storyline of these three film noirs.

I. THE ROAD

Earlier, I pointed out that film noirs and westerns are related to the outlaw couple movie by both their attitudes towards outlawry and their precursory connections to the road movie. As previously stated, the questioning of society in these two types of films appears in the road movie, where the open space of the road lends the film the heroic individuality of the western, while the "chase" by the law, bringing the urban milieu into the rural locale, gives the road movie the paranoid tone of the film noir. And, like the film noir and the western, the road movie is usually reserved for men as their vehicle to escape and question societal laws, as Timothy Corrigan notes in the chapter, "Genre, Gender and Hysteria: The Road Movie in Outer Space" of his book, A Cinema Without Walls.

Corrigan's discussion of the road movie is quite similar to Robin Wood's chapter on the male buddy movie; in fact, Corrigan notes that the "drivers" of the road movie usually are male buddies (144). Like the male buddies of Wood's discussion, the protagonists of the road movie are men who have been turned away from their society by the decreasing respect for old forms
of patriarchy. As a way of re-finding this lost space, the protagonists take to the road, which Corrigan sees as a sort of male quest or testing in the Bildungsroman tradition (144). He finds that these quests "will only be distracted or, at best, complemented by the women who intrude from time to time" (144). This absence of women is due to the deterioration of the ideal represented by the family; this ideal (of which women were a part) can now only exist in memory, and thus can no longer be explicitly represented onscreen. Corrigan locates this breakdown as occurring during World War Two (for historical reasons like the ones I mentioned in the "Film Noir" section of the last chapter) and notes that "the most secure and likely replacement for that heterosexual unit is the male buddy group left over from that war" (147).

This last comment by Corrigan is a handy starting place for me; if World War Two was a time when the heterosexual couple gave way to the male buddy unit, what does this mean for the three outlaw couples in the films of that period? For many reasons (e.g. style, tone, narrative), these films can be classified as film noirs, yet the role of the lone male anti-hero must change somewhat if he brings his female companion along for the ride. As Corrigan notes, women are usually relegated to secondary roles in road movie narratives: either as momentary (usually sexual) points of interest in the male narrative or as representatives of the ideal heterosexual family unit, which is no longer workable and thus has been left behind. Corrigan's division reflects that of the madonna/whore split, and I will look at how the female half of the outlaw couple reflects this dichotomy. As well, if, as Corrigan suggests, the road movie is a sort of "Bildungsroman" where the protagonists develop as characters in their quest to escape the confines of the law, how does the female protagonist relate to this structure? I will look at how she acts in relation to the law of the films, and how her actions contribute to the couple's goals (i.e. whether she has the same capacity as the active male protagonist to drive forward the story, or, following Mulvey's suggestion, whether she remains an obstacle to the narrative). The rest of this chapter will deal with these three outlaw couples: Eddie and Jo of You Only Live Once, Bowie and Keechie of They Live By Night and Bart and Laurie of Gun Crazy.
II. NARRATIVE GOALS AND PERSONAL HISTORIES

While the basic goal of each half of the couple (i.e. to escape the law) is the same, there are points in the narrative where the protagonists disagree with each other. In this section, I intend to look at how the woman's goals measure up to the man's, namely by looking at how much validity her desires are given in comparison with the man's. While the two characters are supposed to make up the main protagonist of the outlaw couple film, the story is often shown to belong to or be "focalized" through the male half of the couple. One way this can be seen is by looking at how much story time is devoted to each character's personal history (which helps lay a foundation to understand a character and to foster identification with his or her desires).

Although Jo appears without Eddie in the first two scenes of You Only Live Once, we learn nothing more about her than that she, through the help of her District Attorney boss, has gotten her fiancé pardoned from his jail sentence. Eddie first appears, without Jo, as he is being released from jail, and we hear the parole board list through Eddie's past criminal activity. Later, on their honeymoon, Eddie and Jo discuss their pasts together. Jo describes how she fell in love with Eddie at the dance where they first met, while Eddie tells Jo about beating up a boyhood friend and being sent to reform school. These insights into each character's past set Eddie up as the primary motivator for the outlaw storyline. On the other hand, Jo's presence in the story seems only important for her relationship to Eddie.

Both They Live By Night and Gun Crazy not only show their male protagonists first, they also reveal information about the men's criminal pasts in these early scenes. After the opening credits of They Live By Night, we see Bowie and his two jailbreak associates, Chicamaw and T-Dub, speeding away in a car. The car breaks down, and as the other two men head off on foot, Bowie hangs back with a sore ankle, insisting that the two men return for him as soon as possible because he's got "a lawyer in Tulsa" who will help clear his name. Later, in his first private conversation with Keechie, he tells her how he was sent to jail in the first place. As they
talk, Keechie tells Bowie that she does not like her father; Bowie sympathizes, telling her about his bad relationship with his parents. Although we learn something about Keechie's personal history from this chat, this information really only serves to set her up as a sympathetic ally to Bowie. In contrast, the narrative, through this conversation and the early introduction to Bowie, gives us insight into his relationship with the law, and thus sets up the flight from the law as primarily his own (to which Keechie can only be an accomplice).

While Gun Crazy likewise opens by first presenting its male protagonist, the depiction of Bart's life before meeting Laurie lasts much longer than Bowie's introduction. Bart's lifelong obsession with guns is told through flashbacks during the long courtroom scene, and we learn more about him in young adulthood, when he returns to his hometown after reform school and the army. It is not until after this lengthy introduction that we finally see Laurie for the first time, when Bart attends the gun show at the carnival where she works. Interestingly, especially so after the thorough details of Bart's past, the narrative makes almost no effort to delve into Laurie's personal history. We learn something about her when her boss, Packy, introduces her to the crowd but it soon becomes apparent that Packy, as part of the "crookedest little carnival around" is probably not being honest about Laurie's past. Soon after this, it is revealed that Packy tries to control her through a secret he knows about her past. It is not until near the end of the film that Laurie tells Bart what the secret is—she killed a man in St. Louis—but even so, the details of and reasons for her crime are quite vague and do not reveal anything about her like the insights into Bart's past show about him. And, unlike Jo and Keechie, the lack of personal history does not make Laurie a better accomplice to Bart; instead, this absence helps to characterize her as "unknowable" which in turn helps locate her in a somewhat antagonistic relationship to Bart (as I will show later in this section). The three films are alike, however, in that, through this presentation of the personal histories, the narratives centralize the man's story, while putting the woman's story in second place, and giving her a role where she acts more like a
sidekick (Jo and Keechie) or antagonist (Laurie) rather than equal partner (and therefore, not as a character whose goals are of primary importance to the narrative).

As I have just shown, each film's narrative is focalized through the male protagonist so that his goals are of primary importance. Although each male protagonist has a different attitude towards his position as lawbreaker, a generalization can be made about the goals of all three men: each wishes to escape the confines of the law and acts in a way that this goal might be achieved. As I just mentioned, the female half of the outlaw couple shows her position in the narrative by the way she acts in relation to the man's goal. Since the man's goal is of primary importance, the woman's actions are usually confined to helping him with this goal, or hindering it.

Playing a sort of sidekick role, neither Jo nor Keechie tends to act in a way which would hinder the goal of her husband. Jo is probably the least independent of all three women. She rarely acts against Eddie's wishes; the only time she does, he is sent back to jail. Here, Eddie, knowing that he will be wrongly charged with bank robbery, wants to flee, but turns himself in on Jo's advice, as she naively thinks he can clear his name. She turns out to be wrong and Eddie is sentenced to death. Eddie escapes from jail a few hours before his scheduled execution and he and Jo head off for the safer space of the road. Although Jo is right that Eddie could have proven his innocence (a pardon, although last minute and too late to convince Eddie, is granted), this is too close a call for the couple, and Jo takes on Eddie's way of thinking. She even begins to break the law herself (breaking into a drugstore for supplies) when Eddie, who has been shot during his escape, is too unwell to take care of the pair. Although Jo takes on this more active role during the last part of the film, she is only behaving as her husband has taught her to, and in his place when he cannot.

Like Jo, Keechie would never do anything that might cause her husband to have to go back to jail. Yet, unlike Jo, she does not fully submit to her husband's plans of how he should escape the law, but instead has her own ideas about how he should clear his name. She states
this from the beginning: in their first conversation, when Bowie says he is pulling another bank job so that he can get enough money to see a lawyer, Keechie tells him, "You'll get in so deep trying to get square, you'll have enough for two lifetimes." Later, after the couple has married and is settled in their cottage, they have a heated argument when Chicamaw returns and proposes another bank robbery. Bowie tells Keechie that he is committed to T-Dub and Chicamaw and therefore has to help them with this job. But, no matter how much he argues, he cannot convince her that he is right. Instead, Keechie remains loyal to her own ideas about how Bowie should go straight, telling him about the ex-outlaws she's heard of, who have lived quietly for several years, then turned themselves in, only to be let go, "because they proved they can live right like other people." Although Bowie does not listen to Keechie and joins in the robbery, the events caused by the crime (both T-Dub and Chicamaw are killed, and Bowie and Keechie must turn to the road in another flight) show that he would have been better to listen to Keechie's advice. Keechie, in that she lacks a personal history, is really not much more than a faithful sidekick, who always thinks with Bowie's well-being in mind (in a story, she compares herself to a good dog who obeys no one but his master). Yet, she is so steadfastly determined to keep Bowie safe, that her own goals (how to keep him out of jail) take on as much importance, if not more, than his own goals do. It seems that the narrative allows Keechie to be a strong character, as long as she keeps her own goals confined to protecting Bowie.

The narrative of *Gun Crazy* follows a different path than the other two films. While in those films, the man is in trouble when he meets the woman, in *Gun Crazy*, Bart has already recovered from a youthful brush with the law when he meets Laurie. Instead, she is the one who instigates the outlaw action. When they are broke following a honeymoon spending spree, it is she who suggests that they get money by holding up stores. Bart protests, offering several other suggestions about how they can make enough money to live on, but Laurie refuses, and threatens to leave until he agrees to go along with her. He finally does assent, and from that moment on, the narrative deals with Bart's struggle to keep Laurie happy while keeping her
from going too far. Finally one night, while stuck in a Montana snowstorm, Bart tells Laurie that he cannot continue breaking the law and wants to quit. Surprisingly, she agrees, and Bart is relieved until she reveals that she wants to finish off their crime spree with one last job so they can retire nicely. Bart is upset but, after much convincing, finally agrees. They rob a meatpacking plant, but not without Laurie killing two employees. Bart finds out about the deaths much later and he becomes angry with Laurie. His anger soon turns to remorse, however, when he decides that he is responsible for the killings because he allowed the crimes to happen in the first place. What Bart's response shows is that although the action and the goals come from Laurie, the story still belongs to Bart. Unlike Jo and Keechie, who act only in support of their husbands, Laurie has her own goals, and could exist independently of Bart, as she suggests several times. Although the narrative is driven by Laurie and her desires to lead a life of crime, we understand these events through the reactions of Bart, whose own goals (to give up the outlaw life) come into conflict with Laurie's desires. Because her goals oppose those of Bart, through whom the story is focalized, Laurie's relationship to Bart takes on an antagonistic quality, contrasting her to Jo and Keechie and their helpful relationships with their husbands.

In this scene where Bart learns about Laurie's killings, he is remorseful for what he believes are his actions. Laurie, on the other hand, shows no feelings for the people killed, but instead tries to explain to Bart why she did it. In the previous chapter, I discussed character identification bringing up Noel Carroll's point that a viewer can gain sympathy for a character through "parallel feelings" and "pro-attitudes" (246). As I have stated, the films, through personal histories and privileging of goals, show their stories to belong to the male protagonists. The films also do this by making him a sympathetic character; the men of all three films easily fit my description of "sympathetic outlaw," where the audience understands why the protagonist must commit his crimes. In the final part of this section, I will discuss how the films set up the male character as a sympathetic outlaw, and how the woman fits into this character identification.
Both *You Only Live Once* and *They Live By Night* take great pains to show that their characters are not fully responsible for the crimes they commit. Eddie is pardoned for both crimes he commits within the diegesis of *You Only Live Once*; also, he tells how he got his first "rap" for beating up another boy who was torturing a frog. This boy's mother had him sent to reform school, which suggests that Eddie was only convicted because he did not have anyone helping out on his side. Eddie's unfair disadvantage in the world is presented several times, such as when his boss at the trucking company, who has repeatedly stated that he does not want a "jailbird" working for him, uses Eddie's lateness as an excuse to fire him. After pleading for his job back, Eddie punches the boss, directly blaming him for the situation, growling, "And I wanted to go straight." Throughout the film, Eddie's society is shown to be unfeeling towards him and thus, causally connected to his crimes. This view helps absolve Eddie from the most serious crime he commits within the film: after shooting Father Dolan during his confused jailbreak, Eddie cries to his wife, "They made me a murderer!"

Like Eddie, Bowie is also treated sympathetically by the narrative in relation to his crimes. He has been falsely accused of murder before the film opens and his subsequent crimes (the two bank robberies) are both coerced out of him by Chicamaw and T-Dub. The second robbery is especially indicative of Bowie's innocence: he responsibly saved most of his money from the first robbery, but is forced into the second by the two other men, who beat him up and threaten him. It is obvious that in his relationship with these two older men Bowie is the least aggressive of the three. It is this status that helps portray Bowie as victim and thus makes him a more sympathetic character.

It is also this standing which evens out Bowie's relationship with Keechie. During the argument over the proposed second robbery, Keechie presents several good reasons why Bowie should not carry out the crime. He tries to argue back, but when it becomes clear he cannot defend his decision, he stops talking and leaves without answering Keechie's final plea: "Just promise one thing: that you won't rob that bank." Although Bowie seems callous for ignoring
Keechie, it becomes clear in the following scene, when the two men threaten him, that Bowie has no choice but to rob the bank. Yet he does not gain audience sympathy at Keechie's expense, for the narrative does not portray her as stupidly misunderstanding his goals. Although she does argue with him, when it becomes clear that he is not going to heed her advice, she steps back from her position and tries to reconcile with him (in this case, she tells him the time in reference to their first romantic encounter; after a later argument, she reassures him that she will have their baby). Keechie does not stray too far from Bowie's own goals, backing off from her own desires as soon as Bowie is clearly not heeding her and, thus, by remaining in Bowie's shadow, gains audience sympathy for the same reasons he does.

Jo, too, also gains audience sympathy through her association with Eddie. As mentioned earlier, Jo only argues with her husband once (over his turning himself in), and is convinced by the outcome of this argument that she should always follow Eddie's plans. Because she is so helpful to Eddie, who has already been established as a sympathetic character, it is easy to bestow the same status on Jo. It is interesting to note that although the two female protagonists are very different (Jo is a stylish city secretary; Keechie is an Arkansas hick), both women function similarly in the narrative (as helpful wife) and their status as sympathetic character depends almost entirely on how well they perform this role. This becomes more evident when these two women are compared to Laurie.

I have already observed that Laurie is a much different character than the other two women in that she pursues her own goals despite her husband's desires. It is interesting to note that Laurie is the only true outlaw of the three women; the other two only break the law by associating with their husbands. Unlike Jo and Keechie, who act as helpful "sidekicks" to their husbands, Laurie is often at odds with Bart, which, because the story is clearly Bart's, puts her in the role of his antagonist. Along with the conflicting goals of the two protagonists, the constant reminders that she really does not need to be committing these crimes decrease audience sympathy for Laurie. In the other films, we are told many times that the protagonists are forced
to act as they do (Eddie's society will not give him a fair shake; Chicamaw and T-Dub consider Bowie an "investment" and force him into the robbery). By contrast, in Gun Crazy, Bart constantly reminds Laurie that they do not need to be outlaws. When they run out of money after their honeymoon, Bart gives several suggestions as to how they can earn money. He offers to get a job, and even to sell his beloved guns (showing, by the fact that he would part with something so important to him, that he truly does not want to turn to crime). Laurie, on the other hand, insists that, "Forty dollars a week is too slow" and she wants a guy who will "win the world" for her, showing the selfish nature of her desires. Later, after Bart learns of the deaths during the meat-packing plant hold-up, he reprimands Laurie, "People are dying just so we don't have to work!" Laurie shows no pity for the deaths, but instead offers several explanations as to why she killed. Her reasons ("They would have killed you, Bart!" and "I just got scared") are defensive, uncompassionate and too abstract to really make sense. While throughout the film we understand Bart's goals (through his personal history and the fact that he can rationally explain himself), we do not understand why Laurie acts as she does. Because her goals are in conflict with Bart's (making her his antagonist), because she is shown to be acting selfishly, and because the true reasons for her actions are unknowable, Laurie becomes quite a distant character in relation to audience sympathy.

In this section, I have discussed how the films position each of the three women through the goals of the narrative and how their actions are interpreted in relation to audience sympathy. Interestingly, although all three films have been labelled outlaw couple films, the narratives are primarily focalized through the male character. As such, the female protagonist can only act in relation to him, be it in favour of or in conflict with his goals. Jo and Keechie, who rarely stray from their husbands' desires, are seen as good, loving wives while Laurie, who pursues her own goals, is portrayed as uncontrollable, unknowable and aggressively sexual. Interestingly, the distinction between these characters reflects the madonna/whore split. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss how the films further position the women within these roles.
III. THE ROLE OF THE FEMALE

A similar moment occurs in all three films: at an early point in the narrative, each of the three couples gets married. The marriage scenes themselves are all quite different: in You Only Live Once, Lang simply shows us Eddie and Jo's marriage certificate; in They Live By Night, Bowie and Keechie impulsively jump off a bus and head for a small-town justice of the peace; in Gun Crazy, Bart proposes to Laurie while driving away from the carnival from which they have just been fired, by offhandedly suggesting they stop at the next town to get married. The difference of the moments shows the differing attitudes of the protagonists (Jo and Eddie have long meant to get married; Bowie and Keechie's love develops after getting to know each other; Bart is more traditional in his attitudes than is Laurie), but it is interesting to note that the marrying of all three couples seems to be a requirement of the narrative—seen especially when these films are compared to the later outlaw couple movies, where the characters are not as likely to be married. 3 While the inclusion of the marriages may have been influenced, at least in part, by the Hays Code, this does not take away from the fact that each narrative has used marriage as a means of legitimizing the relationship of the couple. This effort by the film helps render the woman "safe" (helping to locate her on the madonna side of the dichotomy). In You Only Live Once and They Live By Night, the marriages function in favour of Jo and Keechie, who fit nicely into the roles of good wives. By contrast, Bart's proposal serves to render him safe; the marriage (which Bart initiates and Laurie resists) helps show Bart's intention to make Laurie a good woman and that any transgression from this role cannot be blamed on him. 4

In her article, Kinder notes that the female half of the couple usually "cannot see beyond the narrow limits of the nuclear family" (7). But while the limitation of the female protagonist is described negatively by Kinder, 5 it is held up as an ideal for the female protagonists of the film noirs. In all three films, the heterosexual relationship is shown to be very important to both
characters. Because of the obsessive nature of the female protagonists in the films of Kinder's analysis, it is easy to understand why the men of those films would have a relationship with another male which is often superior to the one with his female partner (6). The heterosexual relationships of the film noirs are very important, and no relationships with other characters could be described as "superior." Still, a comparison of the man's relationship with other characters to those of the woman helps to reveal the nature of each protagonist's role in the narrative.

Jo and Eddie's relationship is the most ideally presented of the three. Each character's devotion for the other is uncompromising and it is clear that no relationship could supersede this one. Although their relationship is primary, and no other one comes even close to matching it in narrative importance, because the story belongs to Eddie, we are witness to many more of his other relationships than Jo. With one exception (Monk, the man who frames him), all of Eddie's male homosocial relationships are positive (with Mugsy, Father Dolan and even Rogers, his guard on death row). These relationships can be contrasted with Jo's one female homosocial relationship—that with her sister, Bonnie. At first, Bonnie seems to good-naturedly rib her sister (calling her "wacky") and Eddie (teasing him as Jo speaks with him on the phone). When the crisis occurs, Bonnie's character turns darker, as she shows when she wishes Eddie would die so that her sister would be rid of him. Her attitude can be contrasted to Stephen Whitney's (Jo's old boss), who is also present when Jo returns home for the last time. While Bonnie wants to turn Eddie in and send her sister off to Havana to clear her name, Stephen, who at first sides with Bonnie, soon gains a deeper understanding of Jo's problem and offers her money and his car to help her escape with Eddie. By comparing Jo to Bonnie, who is older and still unmarried, we can see that Jo is only safe in this male world through her association with her husband.

Unlike Jo, Keechie has no friendships with other women. The only other female character in the film is Mattie, who is cold and not at all friendly to Keechie. Unlike Bonnie, Mattie is married, but her relationship with her husband barely exists, as he is still in jail. She
shows her contempt for men when she tells Keechie that the girl would be better off if Bowie got himself killed during the bank robbery. Because Mattie is shown not to be a good wife (her husband barely looks at her when she gets him out of jail), this statement seems to be made out of nothing more than bitter resentment towards Keechie (at least Bonnie was looking out for her sister). Like Bonnie, Mattie is an example of what might happen to Keechie if she weren't safely attached to Bowie by a loving relationship.

Bowie's male homosocial relationships are also telling of his role in the narrative. Unlike Eddie, whose male friends always act for his benefit, Bowie is less able to rely on Chicamaw and T-Dub. As already pointed out, these two men treat Bowie as an "investment" (since they could have helped anyone else in jail to escape) and abuse their perceived authority over him to demand that he participate in the second robbery. During his argument with Keechie over this robbery, Bowie tries to defend the importance of his relationship with the two men by telling her about their deep bonds while in jail ("When we weren't allowed to speak, we'd make signs at each other!"). But Bowie loses the argument, and it becomes clear that the special bonds he found in the all-male environment of jail are no longer relevant in the real world. Like Eddie, whose male relationships are always shown as less important to his marriage, Bowie learns that his male friendships are not as trustworthy as his relationship with Keechie. Even T-Dub (who is much less objectionable than Chicamaw) shows this realization, telling Bowie, "If I could find the right girl, I'd rear back into those Missouri hills." Each film holds up the right kind of heterosexual relationship (where each partner acts within the prescribed role) as an ideal.

Bart, too, tries very hard to maintain this attitude, but finds it strenuous with a wife like Laurie. Perhaps it is because of the difficulties in his marriage that Bart has such good friends as Dave and Clyde ("good" to such a degree that they become flat, and rather boring characters). These friends show their loyalty to Bart in any situation; when Bart returns to his hometown as a wanted criminal, Clyde, who is the town's sheriff, does not bring his gun when he and Dave try to get Bart to peacefully surrender. Bart returns his friends' loyalty, when he shoots his wife,
who is nervously (almost psychotically) threatening to kill his friends. Bart, who has, throughout the film, tried to see Laurie as material for a good partner, finally realizes that he cannot have his wish, and chooses his male friends over Laurie.

While Bart has almost ridiculously happy relationships with Dave and Clyde, Laurie (unsurprisingly, since she is portrayed as so psychotic and unknowable) has no female friends. The only contact we see her have with another female occurs when the couple hides out in Bart's sister Ruby's house. Laurie instantly dislikes Ruby, and does not trust her (not letting Ruby be alone in the same room with a phone, or locking her in the back shed while she and Bart make their escape). Ruby, by her marriage, her house and her children, acts out the ideal which Laurie fails to live up to. However, Laurie completely misunderstands this: when she first meets Ruby's family, she can only mutter, "What cute kids" as a mixed look of complete bewilderment and horror crosses her face. (Later, as she and Bart go to escape, she suggests that they bring along Ruby's baby to avoid the police shooting at them).

At the same time, however, while Ruby does represent the ideal to which Laurie should look, her exhausted appearance and her stifled anger at her children's noise suggest that her situation may not be so ideal after all. Moments which show the problems of this "ideal" woman occur in the other two films. When Bowie finds out that Keechie is pregnant, he becomes angry, to which Keechie, implying that she may choose not to have this baby responds, "You don't see me knitting anything." Jo, who has been a perfect wife for the whole film, and seems to be a good mother, surprises her sister by leaving her baby behind as she makes her escape. Although these moments show gaps in the role of the "ideal" woman, they are fleeting (Keechie soon announces that she will have her baby; Jo is only leaving to save her perfect heterosexual relationship and will send for her son as soon as possible). While Ruby's presentation show the problems with the interpretation of the ideal woman Bart seeks, there exist no other examples of women in the film, suggesting that the world of Gun Crazy may not have room for women at all. While both Jo and Keechie act as successful representations of this type of women, they are still
acting within the very strict confines of the madonna/whore split, and show that the promises of freedom, offered to the men by the outlaw narrative, are not available, at least in these three films, to the female protagonists.

IV. CONCLUSION

As I stated in my last chapter, film noirs often deal with the reactions of a male protagonist to a cruel world which acts as his antagonist. In You Only Live Once and They Live By Night, the female protagonists, having no real identity of their own, latch onto their male partners and thereby acquire more or less the same audience sympathy as the men have. By contrast, Laurie, by ignoring Bart's goals and pursuing her own, takes on the role of his antagonist, and steps into a similar role of that of the femme fatale. Timothy Corrigan points out that the men of the road movie have been turned away from their society by its disrespect for patriarchy. Neither Eddie nor Bowie have any reason not to bring their wives along with them on the road; these women are good models of what patriarchy requires of women. Bart, on the other hand, mistakenly believes that his wife can fulfill this role too, and the road, instead of a haven for patriarchy, becomes a dangerous female space when Bart realizes his mistake. In all three films, the narratives do not deal with the question of how an active female protagonist might act on the road; instead, the films all place the women within or against the madonna/whore dichotomy. It is not until nearly twenty years after the last of these three films that we see a more positive portrayal of an active female outlaw, in Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde (1967), which I will discuss in the next chapter.
Notes

1. These three films have been described in many places as film noirs. See Silver and Ward.

2. Jo does break into a drugstore near the end of You Only Live Once, but as I have mentioned, she only does so because her husband is too unwell. She is not really an outlaw like Laurie, who independently decides to break the law.

3. For example, the only character in Bonnie and Clyde who looks negatively at the couple's unmarried relationship is Blanche Barrow, whose opinion is not highly respected by the narrative. See chapter five for a discussion of marriage in recent outlaw couple movies.

4. Related to their attitudes towards marriage is the women's attitudes towards children. Laurie, confused by the presence of Bart's sister Ruby's children, is an unlikely candidate for motherhood. By contrast, Jo has a child and, although she plans to temporarily give it up, intends to set up her family outside of America and send for her child. These two women, unlike Keechie, who is pregnant, die by the end of the narrative. Perhaps, unlike Jo, who has fulfilled her duties as wife and mother, or Laurie, who cannot, Keechie remains alive at the end of the narrative in order to carry on Bowie's name.

5. For example, in Steven Spielberg's Sugarland Express (1974), the wacky female protagonist's obsessive desire to get her baby out of a foster home leads to a whole string of outlaw activity. Her actions are treated with careful condescension by the director and male protagonists.
CHAPTER FOUR: POSSIBLE REVISIONS: ARTHUR PENN'S BONNIE AND CLYDE (1967)

Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde (1967) seems to be the quintessential example of an outlaw couple, as well as being a notorious film in its own right. The film opened to massive controversy; many film critics, such as The New York Times's Bosley Crowther, panned the film because it "glorified violence and lacked moral uplift" (Murray 165), or because it presented the Depression in a historically inaccurate style (Free 222). It is certainly true that this film, released at a time when older forms of censorship were being dropped (for example, the Hays Code was replaced by the ratings system), presented a more graphic type of violence than that to which audiences of the time were accustomed. It is also true that Bonnie and Clyde is certainly a product of its time, reflecting such sixties attitudes as the sanctioning of "victimless criminality" (Cagin 21), or the "ripening of a rebelliousness" against authority (Kolker 43). While it is admittedly easier to analyze a film thirty years later, without the direct influence of its contemporary events (for example, its violence is tame compared to what is on screens today), it is still important to recognize that the film is a break from the past. It is the influence on the film of the sixties' questioning of authority which allows Bonnie to become a much more interesting character than the women of the film noirs (and of the nineties' outlaw couple films, as I will argue in the next chapter).

In the last chapter, I argued that the goals of the three women are only regarded by the outlaw narrative as important as long as they relate to their respective husbands. Jo and Keechie are sympathetic characters because their actions are always meant to help their husbands; conversely, Laurie is a very unsympathetic character because she acts out her own desires, despite these being against Bart's wishes. It is also interesting to point out that the "good" women are not actually outlaws themselves (Jo only helps out Eddie when absolutely necessary), while "bad" Laurie not only breaks the law, but remains too "crazy" to understand the real-
world consequences of her actions. The portrayal of these three women does not stray too far from the madonna/whore dichotomy or the other limiting roles often assigned to women.  

By contrast, Bonnie Parker is a much more complex character. Undeniably, the narrative treats her goals with the same importance as Clyde's. She is an active and necessary participant in all the gang's outlaw endeavors; furthermore, we see from the beginning of the film what propels her to commit these crimes (which differentiates her from the "unknowable" Laurie). In the last chapter, I discussed the use of personal histories, homosocial friends, and Robin Wood's idea of "home" as devices which help to make the three films primarily the man's story. In addition to her role as active pursuer of the Barrow gang's goals, these devices help locate Bonnie, as John G. Cawelti states, as "the true protagonist of the film" (45).

I. PERSONAL HISTORIES AND CHARACTER IDENTIFICATION

The three films discussed in the last chapter devote a good portion of screen time to the personal histories of the male protagonist as a way of helping the audience understand the reasons for his criminal actions. The films do not provide the same degree of detail for the female characters, which help subordinate their position in the narrative to that of their respective husbands. In contrast, we are witness to a great deal of Bonnie's personal history and private thoughts. Although she and Clyde act with equal care to achieve the gang's goals (their teamwork steadily improves throughout the film, seen in their bank robberies and gun battles), it is through her personal history that we "get to know" Bonnie better than Clyde.

Immediately following the opening credits, we see a still photograph of Bonnie alongside a short summary of her pre-criminal career, which is followed by a similar portrait of Clyde. This introduction to each character suggests that Penn is willing to devote an equal amount of time to each character's personal history. Following these photographs, we move to the scene in Bonnie's bedroom, where, all alone, she paces about in frustrated boredom. The
extremity of her discontent gives us an understanding of just how dull Bonnie's life is and why she would be so willing to stand naked in a window before a man who is stealing her mother's car, and then run off with him after a short acquaintance.

After the first robbery, Bonnie and Clyde go to a diner where he impresses her with his accurate account of her personal history, which gives us yet another chance to get to know Bonnie. Perhaps the most important piece of information revealed is that she quit school because she was "smarter than everyone else," which again gives us an understanding of why Bonnie is so dissatisfied. This scene is also telling of Clyde's personality, showing the sharpness with which he is able to read Bonnie so exactly. Bonnie is obviously impressed with Clyde's suave airs when she hears him say that she "may be the best damn girl in Texas." When she asks when he "figured all this out," he answers her, "The minute I saw you!"

Although Clyde offers information about Bonnie's personal history in these early scenes, he is less open about his own past. As he and Bonnie have their first conversation walking into town, they ask each other about their jobs. He teases her, pretending to guess her job ("a movie star? a lady mechanic?") before giving the answer he obviously knew all along. He is much more vague about his own job and answers Bonnie's query with: "I'm looking for suitable employment right now." When pressed, he tries to scare Bonnie by telling her that he was in jail for armed robbery. This, along with his disclosure that he cut off some of his toes to avoid work detail, is all we learn about Clyde's personal history in these early scenes. Whereas with Bonnie we have some insight as to why she wants to leave her boring West Dallas life, we have no idea what Clyde's motives were for committing armed robbery, or what first propelled him to a life of crime.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Clyde's "unknowable" personality is his mysterious sexual problem. We not only do not know why he has this problem, we hardly even know what the problem is exactly (other than something like impotence which miraculously cures itself at the end of the film). This obstacle causes strife between Bonnie and Clyde. Although her
reaction to the first robbery is a bit unrestrained (she passionately throws herself at Clyde), the boredom she displayed earlier helps justify her actions. By contrast, Clyde's own reaction is extreme: he pushes Bonnie away in frightened anger, and gives her a very strange reason for his actions: "I ain't much of a lover-boy....I never saw no percentage in it!" The later episode where the two try to make love after the second robbery reveals more about their characterizations.

Again Clyde is very uncomfortable with the situation and, after a patient attempt, he ends up roughly pushing Bonnie away. Once more, he offers a strange explanation for his actions: "At least I ain't no liar." On the other hand, Bonnie's reaction this time reveals her as a much fuller character. While after the first sexual attempt, she is (understandably) angry and embarrassed, this time she, although obviously ruffled, gives Clyde a gracious "don't worry" shake of her head. Here Bonnie, who has shown that she wants both excitement and a close relationship with Clyde, is willing to put aside her own feelings in order to maintain harmony in the relationship.

Unlike the women of the films of the last chapter, whose desires are simply not presented, Bonnie is shown to experience very strong desires, which she must boldly suppress—an act which fosters sympathy for this character who cannot act out her wishes. By contrast, Clyde remains "unknowable" due to his mysterious sexual problem.

In the last chapter, I discussed Laurie's "unknowable" nature as a tool which aids her crazy, antagonistic characterization. This state does not always have to be negative, however; for example, in chapter two, I mentioned John Wayne's Ethan who is "unknowable" because his intelligence and capability is beyond the other men of the film. Penn seems to be suggesting this type of character for Clyde at the beginning of the film. For example, how does he guess correctly all the information about Bonnie?

Yet as the film progresses, it soon seems more likely that Clyde is not hiding anything, but rather is not a very complex person. He coaxes Bonnie into outlawry by suggesting that one day she could "go walkin' in the dining room of the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas wearing a nice silk dress and hav[e] everybody waiting on [her]." At this early point in the film, this is enough
encouragement for her to leave West Dallas, but unlike Clyde, she soon grows out of this fantasy. Her attempts to deepen their relationship ("Why honey, don't you ever just want to be alone with me?") are brushed off by Clyde who cannot understand ("Well, I always feel like we're alone"). The episode which is most revealing of their differing characters occurs at the end of the film when the two finally consummate their relationship. Bonnie has already come to understand the tragic futility of their lives (earlier she said to Clyde, "When we started out, I thought we was really goin' somewhere. But this is it. We're just goin', huh?") and she makes this the final point of her poem ("It's death for Bonnie and Clyde"). Clyde misses this point, and instead becomes excited at this new presentation of his outlaw fame ("You know what you done there? You told my story!") which propels him to finally make love to Bonnie. Edward Murray notes, "That Clyde cannot even imagine such an existence [beyond his status as outlaw] suggests the measure of his failure as a human being. Far from applauding him, the film shows how empty the man's life remains" (162). It seems that Clyde is finally able to achieve this "true" communication with Bonnie because he feels she finally "understands" who he is. Just as he promised her the fancy entrance into the "Aldophus Hotel," she now returns the "favour" by giving him a similar level of glamorous outlaw fame. The irony is not only that he has missed the real point of her poem, but that, unlike Bonnie who has come to expect more from life than outlaw celebrity status, Clyde sees no reason to move beyond the same, immature dream.

When the two are finished, Bonnie sits back with an air of complete bliss, while Clyde cannot stop asking questions about his performance. As the screenwriters point out, "He's waited twenty-three years to talk about this, and he's got the perfect audience" (Wake 156). In their first conversation, Bonnie and Clyde engage in a witty repartee which gives us respect for each of these characters as individuals. This type of "one-up-manship" banter is a device often used in male buddy movies as a friendly way of disallowing the dominance of one character over another. In this scene, Clyde seems unable to resort to any other type of conversation as he carries on about his performance. Unlike Bonnie, he does not move beyond this superficial level
of conversation until seconds before his death when he and Bonnie exchange wordless but profound glances.

Bonnie is so overwhelmed by getting that for which she has been waiting so long that she is able to either forgive or ignore Clyde's ramblings as she settles back in post-coital rapture. It seems likely that the two might finally connect on a deeper level after the long awaited sexual encounter, and Bonnie is able to maintain this illusion until later that night when the two are chatting in bed. She asks him, "What would you do, if some miracle happened and we could walk out of here tomorrow morning and start all over again. Clean. With no record and nobody after us?" Clyde begins to formulate his plan: "First off, I wouldn't live in the same state where we pull our jobs." He goes on, but this is all Bonnie needs to hear and a sad expression crosses her face as she comes to understand that Clyde will never be a deeper character than his outlaw hero persona. Clyde, on the other hand, has no capability for understanding Bonnie other than through the image he got of her "the minute" he saw her.

Throughout the film, we have come to know Bonnie better than we do Clyde. But this is not entirely due to unequal devotion of screen time to personal histories, as is the case with the lack of characterization of the women in the previous chapter. As suggested by the thumbnail sketches of each character presented after the credits, the film at least provides room to pay equal attention to both Bonnie and Clyde. This effort makes it even more clear that Clyde is simply not as complex a character as Bonnie.

II. HOMOSOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

In the previous chapter I noted, following Kinder's suggestion, that the three films privilege the relationships among men over those among women. Like the portrayal of personal histories in those films, the preferred treatment of male over female homosocial relationships is
another device which helps to locate the film in a "male" world. Penn makes reference to this set-
up in *Bonnie and Clyde* (where, in fact, other characters are even more important to this film as the couple take along their buddies on the road) but subverts it in order to call attention to Bonnie's position in the narrative.

The most striking similarity between *Bonnie and Clyde* and the three earlier films is the poor relationships women have with each other. While the female relationships in the film noirs are fleeting and do not make up a significant part of the script, Bonnie's relationship with Blanche Barrow causes great distress for both women (and the whole gang) which is apparent from the moment the two women meet. Blanche really has only one reason for disliking Bonnie; Cawelti points out that Blanche, in her goal to be as respectable a "hausfrau" as she can, has great scorn for Bonnie and her licentious relationship with Clyde (46).

Like the women of the three film noirs, Bonnie and Blanche do not get along because they are different "types" of women. While the secondary female characters in the earlier films serve as models (whether as examples of "good" or "bad") of how the female protagonists should act, Blanche is notable for being the type of woman which Bonnie herself does not want to become. While we have many opportunities to see Blanche act in ways which Bonnie despises, the best example occurs during the first gun battle with the police in Joplin. After learning that the "laws" are outside, Blanche can only throw her hands up in the air and scream. While the other four scramble into action to fight their way through the barricade, Blanche continues to shriek as she madly runs through the police line. And, adding to Blanche's already extreme actions, Penn touches the scene with some symbolism, adorning Blanche in an apron and arming her with a spatula. Somehow, she makes it through the police line and is rescued by the gang. In the car, not even Buck can disagree with Bonnie when she finally explodes at the woman she loathes so much: "You almost got us killed!"

But it is not merely that Bonnie does not like Blanche for her put-on airs of respectability. She seems more to loathe, and rightly so, the unfair comparisons that are made between the two
women. This is apparent when Bonnie first meets Blanche. The group decides to take pictures of each other and Blanche fusses over her appearance before finally consenting to be photographed as she demurely cuddles with her husband. Bonnie watches this performance in disgust. When it comes her turn to be photographed, Bonnie poses with her gun, just as Clyde has done, and refuses to smile for the camera. Here, she is consciously aligning herself with Clyde's style as a way of discrediting Blanche's.

However the best example of this type of dislike occurs after the final bank robbery when Clyde is dividing up the loot. Blanche whispers to her husband that she should get a share, and Buck, although clearly embarrassed, voices his wife's request. The enraged Bonnie protests, sending Blanche off into a reproachful defense: "I coulda got killed same as everybody, and I'm wanted by the law same as everybody!" She may have a point that although she is not helping with the robberies, she is still being put out by the gang's activities and deserves at least something. But it is what prompts her initial request ("I want my share. If Bonnie gets a share...") which seems to really enrage Bonnie. Blanche's comparison ignores the fact that Bonnie has done as much work as Buck or Clyde and demotes her from core member of the group to accessory by mere virtue of her sex.

Other members of the group also ignore Bonnie's hard work on the basis of her sex. Just before she and the two Barrow brothers leave the scene of the final bank robbery, Buck hollers out, "We're the Barrow boys!", and completely ignores Bonnie's participation in the crime. Buck's gleeful shout shows that he has a decidedly male-centred perspective on how the gang's activities run. Unlike Blanche and Bonnie, Buck and Clyde have a good relationship, which is in keeping with the other male-focalized outlaw couple films. Yet Penn reveals this male homosocial relationship, like he has with Clyde's personal history, to be quite empty.

Because there is a sufficient lack of detail about Clyde's personal history, we do not know about his brother until his arrival at the cabin. Clyde is overjoyed at his brother's visit, and the two express their affection by roughly playfighting. Soon after, as the gang takes pictures of
each other, Buck mentions that he'd like to have a "chat" with Clyde, implying he has something important to discuss with him. When the two go inside to talk, Buck asks Clyde about Bonnie, "Is she as good as she looks?" to which Clyde lies, answering, "Better." They then ask questions to clear up the rumours they have heard about each other; Buck only wants Clyde to agree that he had no choice but to kill the bank teller and then asks that no one else know that Blanche forced him back to jail after an escape. A silence then falls over the two, which Buck, after looking confused, breaks by bellowing, "We're going to have ourselves a time, boy!" which is followed by another pause, while the two wonder what they are going to do. The purpose of Buck's chat has been to establish each in the other's eyes as the right type of outlaw hero (e.g. it does not really matter why Clyde killed the teller, as long as he tells Buck the right answer) and to indulge in some male bonding (by discussing women and planning festivities). The insincerity on which Clyde and Buck's relationship is based is another example of the emptiness in the male world of the film.

This emptiness complements Bonnie's own desires. She finds that she is unable to have the deep relationship she hopes for with Clyde. This is not because Clyde is spending his intellect on a meaningful relationship with his brother, but rather because he seems unable to have anything beyond a superficial bond with anyone. Bonnie's relationship with Blanche makes a similar comment. In the earlier films, the poor relationships among women were confined mostly to the conflict between "good" and "bad" women. Bonnie, by contrast, is angry at Blanche's determination to confine herself to these stereotypical female roles. Both the male and female homosocial relationships in the film provide opportunities to show the limitations Bonnie encounters while on the road with the Barrow gang. Interestingly, a very short segment in the Parker family picnic montage shows Bonnie in a tender moment with her sister, revealing that Bonnie is capable of a good female friendship. This moment also shows a different concept of "home" than was constructed in the earlier films, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.
III. HOME

The idea of "home" is presented very differently in Bonnie and Clyde than in the film noirs. In those films, "home" is a very homogenized locale which exists only in relation to the protagonists' activities (either by forcing them into a life of crime, or, in Bart's case, serving as an example of "good"). "Home" is a much more variegated and complex structure in Penn's film, a great part of which is in remembrance of the widespread fear of "homelessness" of the thirties. 

Clyde creates his identity out of this understanding of home after he meets the evicted sharecroppers. After learning that the house has been repossessed by the bank, Clyde shoots out its windows, then offers his gun to the other men in the scene, and the three shoot at the house in a sort of mutual anger towards the bank. Yet this "bonding" is not enough for Clyde, and he seems to be offering his own type of solution to the problem of homelessness when he calls out after the family: "We rob banks!" The family looks back in confusion, but he continues to grin back optimistically and does not vary from his "solution" for the rest of the film. Unlike in the earlier films, where "home" only exists as a reflection to the activities of the characters, "home" is a much more complex structure in Bonnie and Clyde, existing as a separate entity from the protagonists, undermining their centrality to the story. 

Despite this complexity, Clyde interprets "home" very simply and this emptiness, as in the other devices I have just discussed, reflects on Bonnie's position in the narrative.

As mentioned earlier, Bonnie is, at the beginning of the film, very bored by her home life, and easily tempted by Clyde into a life of crime. She soon, however, realizes that this life is not the antidote for her career as a West Dallas waitress. She tries to remedy her discontent by deepening her relationship with Clyde, who, as I discussed earlier, is unable to live up to Bonnie's expectations. As I showed in the previous sections, this relationship does not work, not only because Clyde is quite an "empty" character, but also because he almost always refuses to read Bonnie with any more complexity than with his judgement "the minute" he saw her. He has
ideas about how she, as a woman, fits into the dynamics of the group, which is evident in his ideas about her relation to "home." For example, after the gang accidentally kills a bank teller, Clyde offers to put Bonnie "on that bus back to [her] mama." Bonnie, upset by the proposal that she is not part of the group, cries out, "No!" which pleases Clyde, and he goes to kiss her.

After this connection, Clyde seems to forget that Bonnie has any relation to her home. This comes out in the scene where the gang divvies up the money from the third bank robbery. Clyde chases after Bonnie, who has stormed off after her argument with Blanche, and tries to reason with her: "Listen, now, honey, I guess I have to keep saying this: Blanche is married to Buck and Buck is family." Clyde's statement shows that he has made this argument to Bonnie many times before, and that he clearly believes his family to be Bonnie's. This attitude shows that Clyde expects Bonnie to take a similar position to those of the film noir women, who fully merge their lives with those of their husbands. Bonnie resents this implication, and retorts back, "My family could use some of that money." Their argument is broken off by C.W.'s shout that the car is losing oil, and it is not until later, when Bonnie runs away from the gang, that Clyde understands how important Bonnie's family is to her (and it is indeed not only for reasons of love, but also as a way of distinguishing herself from the Barrow family, with whom she does not fit).

The sequence of the Parker family picnic is presented as a hazy, dreamlike montage which certainly seems to live up to Bonnie's nostalgic expectations. The picnic, while it lasts, is certainly a thing of beauty, but it is Bonnie's own mother who introduces a sad note of reality at the end of the scene. As the picnic breaks, Bonnie, not willing to let her mother leave, begs Clyde to help convince the woman to stay. He ebulliently tries to put Mrs Parker in a good mood, but keeps putting his foot in his mouth by mentioning just how dangerous their lives are. He thinks he has finally hooked her by saying that he and Bonnie plan to live no more than three miles from her "as soon as hard times is over." Mrs Parker, who has not been very tenacious during this conversation ("I'm just an old woman and I don't know nothin'") suddenly changes her tone:
"You try to live three miles from me and you won't live long, honey...You'd best keep runnin' Clyde Barrow, and you know it."

Mrs Parker's statement plunges Bonnie into a deep sadness (later, she curls up to Clyde and moans, "Oh, baby, I got the blues so bad"). Her mother has made her realize that she no longer has a home and that she is stuck with her life on the run, which as she herself realizes, is not "goin'" anywhere in particular. Furthermore, the picnic has made her realize that this loss of home is not due to a fault on its part, but rather a result of her own actions (and the rest of the gang's). This view of home is much more complex than in the other outlaw couple movies, or, by extension, the male buddy movies mentioned in Wood's article, where home merely acts as a scapegoat for or antagonist to the actions of the characters. Bonnie, after this realization, tries once more to achieve a deep bond with Clyde, but is reminded of the impossibility of this when she learns from their bedtime conversation that he still only thinks of himself as an outlaw hero. She is obviously saddened by this realization, but chooses to distract herself with simple memories of home before the inevitable tragedy which she knows is coming ("It's death for Bonnie and Clyde"). Just as she throws herself into a movie, Golddiggers, as a conscious method of distraction after the death of the bank teller (to remind her that "she's in the money"), she now purchases a cheap statuette of a shepherdess as a souvenir of her old home life to which she can never return. By the end of the film, Bonnie, more than any of the other characters, seems to recognize that there is a more complex idea of home. At the same time, she is aware of the futility and impossibility of such a goal, and instead consciously chooses to divert her attention from these thoughts until the tragic end which, as she seems to be the only one who understands, cannot be avoided.
IV. CONCLUSION

In the last chapter, I argued that the three films use concepts of personal history, homosocial relationships and ideas of "home" as methods for focalizing the narrative through the male half of the outlaw couple. In Bonnie and Clyde, Arthur Penn focalizes the story through Bonnie, but not merely by giving her a similar role to the men of the earlier films. Instead, he shows through the homosocial relationships and the ideas of home that the narrative and the other characters locate Bonnie in the position of the women in the earlier outlaw couple films. It is, however, through the presentation of her personal history and through her understanding of the events (e.g. with her poetry) that she becomes a sympathetic character, whose potential is greater than her restricted destiny. It is, in part, the other characters who limit her; although Bonnie is as much a capable participant in the gang's crimes as are the men, she is often perceived to be not as important a gang member, simply because she is a woman. As I mentioned in the introduction, the sixties' defiance towards authority was a great influence on the film; Bonnie is the only character in the film who recognizes the insufficiency of the older roles. And, while the film is negative in that it does not show Bonnie able to escape her role (instead sadly submitting until the end of her life), it is at least in keeping with the attitudes of other contemporary films; Louis Gianetti notes about the period, "For the first time in history, American movies with downbeat and pessimistic themes [are] the rule rather than the exception" (358).
Notes

1. The puzzled look softens on the face of someone who asks me the topic of my thesis when I give Bonnie and Clyde as an example.

2. Crowther was so upset by this film, he reviewed it "no less than three times" and remained adamant about his original view (Murray 165).


4. See, for example, Sarah Kofman's interpretation of Freud's view of women as inherently criminal (which he feminizes as "hysterical") and not ethically mature enough to understand the nature of their criminality (65).

5. The writers of the film screenplay, David Newman and Robert Benton, were determined to give the filmic Clyde a sexual problem (as the real-life Clyde was rumoured to have "homosexual tendencies" or another sort of "deviancy"). The writers originally wanted to portray Clyde closer to his real-life twin, but found these problems in doing so:

   once you label your hero as a sexual deviant, no matter how much you stress his emotional love for the heroine, no matter how little film time you give to that aspect of him, it colours the character forevermore in the minds of the audience. Worse, it turns them off (Wake 28).

Newman and Benton's comments show that they were trying to maintain Clyde's status as a sympathetic character by erasing his sex life rather than "perverting" it.

6. Cawelti notes that "Bonnie's poem is the one significant attempt either character makes to gain some larger awareness of his life" (45).

7. So many examples of this banter exist that it hardly seems worthy mentioning any films. George Roy Hill's Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969) is a good comparison as a contemporary of Bonnie and Clyde. The two protagonists never stop trying to impress each other with their jestings even right before they are killed by the Bolivian army.

8. Interestingly, this scene of boisterous physical affection occurs right after Bonnie and Clyde's second failed lovemaking attempt.

9. The "homeless" are surely going to have a more complex understanding of home than are those who take it for granted.

10. Many examples exist where we see activity independent of Bonnie and Clyde's actions, but perhaps the most notable occurs while the pair walk down a strangely deserted "Main Street." Aside from the two, the scene is empty except for one black man, who sits alone on a bench. Being the only other character in the scene, he stands out as important, but has nothing to do with Bonnie and Clyde, which makes us wonder about his separate existence from the couple.

11. Of course, this more complex understanding of home is quite consistent as a product of the Depression and can be seen in films like John Ford's Grapes of Wrath (1940). Bonnie, however, is one of the few members of the outlaw couple and buddy films to achieve such an understanding.

During the last decade, Hollywood has offered many versions of the outlaw couple in such films as Jonathan Demme's Something Wild (1986), Emilio Estevez's Wisdom (1986), the Coen brothers' Raising Arizona (1987), Tamara Davis's Gun Crazy (1992), Dominic Sena's Kalifornia (1992), Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction (1994) and Antonia Bird's Mad Love (1995). In this chapter, I have elected to discuss David Lynch's Wild At Heart (1990), Tony Scott's True Romance (1993) and Oliver Stone's Natural Born Killers (1995) because all three films are relatively recent and have a similar narrative structure to the films discussed in the previous chapters (i.e. the main characters, a heterosexual couple, have outlaw adventures while on the road). In the first section of this chapter, I will look at the personal histories, the homosocial relationships and the "homes" of the characters (as I did in the last two chapters) as a way of deciding "whose story" the films are. In the second section, I look at the attitudes and events of the last decade which may have influenced this recent rash of outlaw couple films.

I. WHOSE STORY?

A. PERSONAL HISTORIES

In chapter three, I argued that the three film noirs used the detailed relating of the male protagonist's past (whether onscreen or not) to help focalize the story through him. By contrast, we do not learn very much about the personal histories of the men in the three recent outlaw couple films. Instead, we know much more about the women's past than their film noir counterpart's; in the recent films, the female character's history is described in as much (as in True Romance) if not more detail than her husband's.
In *Wild At Heart*, details about the characters' pasts are unclear. We do not know how the two main characters meet, nor do we know exactly why Lula's family is so opposed to her attachment to Sailor. What is clear is that Lula's mother is the primary source of grief for the couple (she enlists the help of two men, a detective and a criminal, to help "get rid" of Sailor and bring Lula back home to her). While Sailor may think that his bad standing with Lula's family may have something to do with his being a possible witness to her father's death, it seems more likely that Lula's mother is obsessively interfering with her daughter's happiness for her own selfish reasons. "Maybe my mama cares for me a little too much" says Lula. Because Marietta's reasons for keeping such a close watch on her daughter are never explained, they seem irrational.

Unlike Lula, whose background is presented as an important part of the story, Sailor does not have his personal history presented so explicitly. We know relatively little about his life before the story begins—the only piece of information which relates to the story of his and Lula's escape is that he used to be a driver for the local crime lord and present boyfriend of Marietta, Carlos Santos. Any other information we learn about Sailor's past tells us, like his snakeskin jacket, about his "individuality and [his] belief in personal freedom." All the visual flashbacks told by or about Lula relate to the troubles of her family (such as the "Jingle Dell" story, or her memory of her being raped by Uncle Pooch—who "wasn't really an uncle" but is still tied to the Fortune family). ² By contrast, the only extended visual flashback about Sailor's past, his tale about the woman who tells him to "take a bite of peach," tells of his lack of commitment and responsibility in this casual sexual encounter with an unnamed woman. While the stories of Lula's past entrap her within her perverse family, the few details of Sailor's past (and, moreover, the absence of this information) set him up as an individual who is not bogged down by such complex relationships. It is interesting to note that Lula is very attracted to this aspect of Sailor. When she comes to pick him up from jail the first time, one of the first things she does is return
his symbolic jacket. Later, when listening to Sailor's "peach" story, rather than becoming jealous at his sexual activity with another woman, she gets "hotter than Georgia asphalt."

The set-up of Mickey and Mallory's backgrounds is similar in Natural Born Killers. Near the beginning of the film, we see the "I Love Mallory" show which gives us insight into Mallory's background—namely, the sexual abuse by her father and the lack of protection from this abuse by her mother. While it is clear that this sequence (and the whole film) is a black comedy parody of American culture, critics argue about the level on which this parody starts. For example, Nick James argues that the whole film is saturated with this attitude, and that we cannot take seriously that Mallory's delinquency is caused by her family problems (56). Conversely, I argue that while the style of this sequence and presentation of Mallory's story may be tongue-in-cheek, the story behind it is not. Stone may call his characters "natural born killers," but it is clear by his justifications of their actions that he believes that their actions are caused by modern society. While Stone goes out of his way to show some random killings (like the Olympic bicyclist's), the majority of the deaths are somehow justified (for example, the deaths of the police officers, justified by the standard on-duty-cop-in-the-doughnut-shop joke, of the psychotic prison guards in jail, and especially of Wayne Gayle with his callous chasing of TV stories). Because so much of the story is based on the woes of modern society, it seems likely that the sequence of Mallory's family is meant to be taken seriously. I will discuss this idea of parody later in this chapter, but I bring it up now in order to point out the importance of the "I Love Mallory" sequence to the story.

Just as the explicit presentations of the female character's personal history makes Stone's film comparable to Wild At Heart, the lack of detail about the man's past is also a similarity between the two films. While the story of the Wilson family fills two sequences of the film, Mickey's past is only presented through fragmentary flashbacks, where the old filmmaking rule, "what is unseen is scarier" applies. Mallory's past, while horrifying, is presented in full detail; during the interview with Wayne Gayle, however, Mickey refuses to verify speculations about
his relationship with his father. Mickey's past is so upsetting to him that hallucinations about it lead him to kill the old native man, the only person on the road trip met by Mickey that he trusts. Also, Mallory remains trapped in her family life until Mickey comes to rescue her; this moment in "I Love Mallory" stands apart from the rest of the over-the-top TV sitcom aesthetics of the sequence in its sudden quietness and romantic but realistic dialogue ("Why would I run away with someone I don't hardly know?" flirts Mallory), which lends a tone of sincerity to this moment of the film. By contrast, Mickey, whose past has not been explicitly shown, somehow manages to get away from the horrors of his family, and lead an independent, albeit misguided, lifestyle. Thus, it is only Mallory who needs to put the "past behind" her as the two throw old objects from her childhood off a bridge; only Mallory desires a whole new wardrobe to represent that she's a "whole new woman."

Both Wild At Heart and Natural Born Killers are consistent in their explicit presentations of the female characters' pasts and the lack of specificity about those of the men. By contrast, True Romance devotes a long sequence to the meeting of Clarence and his father, and does not make any real mention of a family life for Alabama. However, this does not contradict the roles of the dependent female and the independent male which were used in the other two films.

Although Alabama has no family life mentioned in the film, she is certainly no independent creature. In her first line of the film, in her introductory voiceover, Alabama tells us, "I had to come all the way from the highways and byways of Tallahassee, Florida to Motor City, Detroit to find my true love." Although Alabama certainly did not make this trip specifically to meet Clarence (even though her real reason for coming to Detroit is never revealed), any hint of autonomy is overshadowed by the fact that she decides the whole point of her journey was to meet her husband. Once in Detroit, she does not start an independent life, but instead falls into the perverse community run by her pimp, Drexl. When Clarence meets Drexl and announces himself as Alabama's husband, the pimp drawls, "Her husband? Why that makes us practically related!" trying to anger Clarence with the reference to his perverted
familial ties with Alabama. While Alabama wants to get away from this life, she does not seem to understand the seriousness of this desire. After she "rescues" herself from this situation by declaring her love for Clarence and aligning herself with him, she wants to ignore this part of her life ("I just want to disappear from there") and discourages Clarence from going to "her former address" and getting her things. Clarence realizes that a stronger break from the past must be made, and is shown to be right once he meets Drexl and reminds him that Alabama is not at the house. "Go get that bitch and bring her back here," Drexl orders his business partner, showing that he does not intend to let Alabama go, which, in turn, justifies Clarence's extreme version of rescuing Alabama. The scene where Clarence kills the male members of Alabama's former "family" not only gives her a complete break from her past, but also establishes Clarence as strong and worthy enough to be her new protector. Like Lula is towards Sailor, Alabama is wholeheartedly positive about Clarence's display of independence and she can barely get out these words before smothering him with kisses: "I think what you did was so romantic!"

Unlike the portrayals of Sailor and Mickey's pasts, a significant portion of screen-time is devoted to a meeting between Clarence and his father, Clifford. This family relationship of Clarence, however, does not show him in any complex trappings of dependency as did those of Lula, Mallory and Alabama. Instead, Clarence and his father seem to have cultivated an understanding of separation. Clifford does not seem completely contented with this arrangement; when he first sees Clarence he berates him for not having any contact for five years. "You're so much like your mother, I can't believe it!" he scolds, drawing attention to his wife's absence, and giving just a hint that Mrs Worley's lack of devotion may have been a good part of the family problems. Clarence is angered at this comparison and instead insists that his absence demonstrates respect for his father: "Not once, in five years, did I ever ask you for one goddamn thing!" Although Clifford finally acquiesces to his son's independence, he cannot let him leave without a fatherly warning to stop messing up and to think about taking care of his wife. Interestingly, Clifford is killed by the mafia shortly after this meeting with his son, which
perhaps, as I will argue later, may be an almost merciful end for this man who has had his independence thrust on him by a departed wife, and is not as suited to it as his son is.

All three films stress the importance of independence, which justifies the extreme outlaw actions the male protagonists must take in order to preserve their autonomy. This need for independence is reserved for men only. The female protagonists do not act out to save themselves, but must remain trapped within their bad families until the men come to "rescue" them. Once rescued, the women are unreluctantly loyal to the actions the male protagonists take to ensure their independence.

B. HOMOSOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

It is not surprising then, that if the men must forgo any type of familial structure (at least families in which they themselves are not the sole authority) in their quest for independence, that the men do not have strong homosocial relationships. In her essay, Marsha Kinder argues the outlaw couple films of the seventies present, alongside the heterosexual relationships, "competing male friendships" (6). Although "every time there is a crisis, the young man reaffirms the priority of his loyalty to his wife" (6), the background of male friendships helps create a male community in which the characters act. By contrast, the men of the nineties' films already know how men are expected to behave and do not need this backdrop against which they would define themselves.

Just as they have no familial ties, neither Sailor nor Mickey has any close male relationships. Mickey, with his tendency to kill just about anyone with whom he comes into contact, seems the least likely to have a friendship. While it is clear that everyone is impressed by this "charismatic serial killer," the few men who do try to get close to Mickey end up getting killed. These men (for example, Wayne Gayle, or Mickey's yoga teacher in jail) not only are unable to befriend Mickey, they are also shown to be not worthy of such a relationship (Gayle,
for his insincere attempts to "bond" with the prisoners, and the yoga teacher, whose death is treated in a quick cinematic joke, for his hippie-like, non-discriminating love). The only man who Mickey meets who is worthy of his friendship is the old native American. This man, when asked by his grandson if he will offer help to the pair, answers that he does not think that they want help. Not only is this man self-sufficient (existing outside of society), asking nothing of Mickey, he also recognizes and respects Mickey's own independence by not interfering. When this man is accidentally killed, he does not blame Mickey, but instead "recognizes" this event as his fate, again acting independently, and not laying the responsibility on anyone else. This death is the only one over which Mickey expresses remorse and is the only one for which he is directly punished (his grief leads the pair blindly into a patch of snakes, which brings them to "Drug-Zone" where they are captured by the police).

Like Mickey, Sailor is unable to get close to anyone but his female partner. The few men he does come into contact with (Bobby Ray Lemon, the man on the dance floor at the Powermad concert or Bobby Peru) end up either hurt or dead. All of these men have somehow expressed interest in Lula, and thus threaten to usurp Sailor's position. Bobby Ray Lemon, although really a hit-man hired by Marietta, intentionally gets Sailor riled up by referring sexually to Lula. The man at the Powermad concert cuts in on Lula's dance with Sailor and aggressively tries to pick her up. Bobby Peru tricks Lula into letting him into her hotel room and seduces her into saying she wants to have sex with him. Although Sailor never finds out about this encounter, it is the most serious threat to the relationship; here, Lula reacts to Peru's advances, while with the other men, she stayed helplessly to the side while waiting for Sailor to take care of things. Throughout Wild at Heart, the men with whom Sailor comes into contact are not seen as potential allies, but instead opponents who threaten to usurp his position in his relationship with Lula.

Just as he differed from the two other men in the presentation of his familial relationships, Clarence is the only male protagonist to have an onscreen male friendship. Although he and Dick Ritchie are childhood friends, the two, although friendly, do not seem
very close. As he and Alabama drive out to California on their escape, Clarence stops at a phone to call Dick. Although it is clear that the two have not spoken in years, and that Dick is excited to hear from him, Clarence talks to his friend for only a few moments before passing the phone off to his wife and dictating the conversation through her. He soon grows bored of this, and hangs up the phone so he and Alabama can have sex. Once in California and seeing Dick in person, Clarence is still too distracted by his wife to pay attention to his friend. Unlike the other characters of Wild At Heart, Dick never seems to be a threat to Clarence's relationship with Alabama, simply because he is too slow and likeable. He is also a worthy friend because he never interferes with Clarence's goals. This is most notable in the scene in Dick's house just before the drug deal in the hotel room. Throughout the film, Dick excitedly chats to Clarence about his future acting career. As the three hurry to get to the hotel on time, Dick is called back to take a phone call from his agent and learns that he has a role on a new television show. The group pauses to rejoice over this good news, but then Clarence quickly turns his attention back to the drug deal preparations. For a moment, Dick looks hurt and questions, "Clarence?" as if to ask his friend for a bit more support. Clarence impatiently asks "What?!" as he continues to hurry the group out the door. "Nothing," answers Dick, as he erases the expectant look off his face, realizing that he should not let his own life interfere with his friend's. I mentioned earlier that the narrative may justify the death of Clarence's father by the fact that he seems uncomfortable with his independent existence. The narrative of True Romance is quite clear in killing off only those who deserve it (which I will discuss later in this section). Dick helps out Clarence when he can, but does so without making his friend feel indebted to him (for example, it is not too difficult for Dick to set up a meeting with his colleague, Eliot Blitzer, and he gets, for this small effort, a roller coaster ride out of the deal). At the same time, Dick does not let his own goals interfere with Clarence's life, unlike Clifford, who berates his son for not keeping contact. It is probably this respect for independence that allows Dick to be one of the few characters to remain alive at the end of the film. In all three films, other men are regarded very suspiciously,
and it is only with caution that male friendships can be possible, and even then, they can only be very distant.

While the men of the three films at least have the opportunities to meet other characters, the women, once liberated from their bad family ties, do not stray too far outside their new heterosexual relationship. Lula seems unable to speak to anyone in public before Sailor authorizes it; when the man at the Powermad concert cuts in on her dance, she can only look helplessly at Sailor until he throws the man to the floor and makes him apologize. The only time she has contact with anyone without Sailor present (excluding her relationship with her mother) is when Bobby Peru nearly rapes her. Presumably, if Sailor had been there, this near disaster never would have occurred. Finally, Lula is different than the women of the other films in that she tries to keep contact with her mother even after Sailor has "rescued" her. When the two first head out on the road, Lula decides to send a postcard to her mother to prevent her from worrying. This devotion causes confusion for Sailor: "The way your head works is God's own private mystery." While Lula wants a decent relationship with her mother, a cathartic moment at the end of the film shows her realization that this is not possible. Although Sailor has tried to "rescue" Lula, it is not until she realizes that she must be rid of her mother that the relationship may pursue its course. It is after Lula firmly and finally tells her mother off ("Mama, if you get in the way of Sailor and my happiness, I'll fucking pull your arms out by the roots!") and rejoins Sailor, that Marietta literally melts out of the picture.

Unlike Lula, neither Mallory nor Alabama try to have any relationships outside those with their husbands. While it seems impossible that either Mickey or Mallory would be able to have any friendships (their homicidal tendencies would get in the way), Mickey is still looked upon with awe by the public (a French girl cries out "Mickey, c'est l'homme!") and is described as "charismatic" in an interview. The public cultivates no such view of Mallory; instead, the only attention she gets is as a sex object of Jack Scagnetti's weird obsession, a deviation (moving in on Mickey's "turf") for which he is punished.
Similarly, in *True Romance*, Clarence is the one who deals with the public, while Alabama is perfectly happy to shut herself up inside the relationship. She does make mention of a call-girl friend, Arlene, who was beat up by Drexl. Even though we later see how bad tempered Drexl can be, Alabama does not seem at all worried about her friend's well-being, but includes her in the past she wants to "disappear from." Alabama not only wants to erase the memory of her past, she also wants to fill her present with Clarence's experiences. While on the phone with Dick, she tells him, "Clarence says you're his best friend, which I guess makes you my best friend, too."

In all three films, the men have no need for male friendships, but in fact, suspiciously look at other men as opponents who might threaten their independence. Because the "possession" of a woman who has been "rescued" is a significant part of these men's independence, the fear that these women might be "stolen" is great. So, to allay these fears, the women affirm their loyalties to their men, not only by breaking off all familial ties, but by refusing almost any contact with the public world when not with their husbands. In all three films, we see a great distance between the couple and the rest of society. In previous chapters, I argued that the construction of home is related to the activities of the protagonist; in order to be a "sympathetic outlaw," the protagonist must have someone on whom to blame his transgressions. The distance between the couples and other characters, as well as the high number of killings in these films certainly shows that the "homes" of these characters are despicable places unworthy of any sympathy, which justifies the extreme actions and isolation of the main protagonists.

C. HOME

In *Wild At Heart*, Marietta Fortune is extremely upset by her daughter's relationship with Sailor and goes to great lengths to split the two up, sending both of her boyfriends after him. Although the motives of anyone who tries to make things miserable for Sailor and Lula are
always indirect orders from Marietta, these characters are terrible enough in their own right to warrant our dislike. For example, Bobby Peru is ordered to stage a fake bank robbery to disguise the killing of Sailor, but he adds the near-rape of Lula for his own pleasure. As mentioned earlier, this is the closest that Lula comes to straying from Sailor, and Peru is punished (by being the victim of the most disgusting killing of the film) for risking the breakup of the two. Even Johnny Farragut, Marietta's detective boyfriend, who seems to be one of the more sympathetic characters of the cast, acts in a way which justifies his death. Although he tries to argue that Sailor is guilty of manslaughter, not murder, and probably saved Lula's life, he is soon convinced by Marietta that he should go after Sailor anyway. This man, who is easily manipulated by Marietta, and is the weaker of her two boyfriends, is certainly no example of independence and "personal freedom" and is thus necessarily disposed of by the narrative. (He is teased for his sexual inadequacies with Marietta by his killers, who passionately kiss each other just inches from his face). The other characters who are, as Lula says, "wild at heart and weird on top," are themselves explanations of why Sailor and Lula do not want to be part of this world, and provide justification for the actions the two take to escape.

Similarly, there are few sympathetic characters in True Romance; as I mentioned earlier, the narrative is quite just in doling out punishment for those who deserve it. Clarence, up until he obtains the cocaine, is quite successful at being the loner he wishes to be. Suddenly, after he grabs the wrong suitcase at Drexel's house, he becomes the focal point for three communities of men: the film producer and his cronies, the police and the mafia. Although Clarence sees the cocaine as his ticket to escape society, he does not become greedy, but plans only to ask for less than a quarter of what the drugs are really worth. By contrast, the other men's actions are quite self-serving: Donowitz is suspicious over the low price of the cocaine, but pursues the deal all the same; the two police officers, Dimes and Nicholson, race to their boss when they learn about the cocaine, but seem to be primarily motivated for the credit they will get for the bust. Clarence also differs from these communities of men by his independence. Although he realizes that he
will have to go through a business meeting in order to sell his cocaine, he is not happy about the contact he must have with the other men. On the phone with Donowitz, Clarence says that he does not have time for the long "courtship" typically required of a drug deal; later, when about to meet Donowitz in the hotel room, Clarence mutters, "Let's get this 'getting to know you' bullshit over with." Again in contrast with Clarence, the other men seem to be unable to act independently, but instead are too reliant on their male buddies. Donowitz talks down to his overly masculine bodyguards, telling them to put away their guns and to go make sandwiches for his guests. Yet, he seems quite dependent on the other men; at one point he asks Eliot to get him a coffee which sits a mere arm's reach away. Eliot seems suited to this role of drudge; when the cops and bodyguards get involved in a standoff in the hotel room, Eliot does not face the situation with bravery, but instead asks officer Dimes's permission to leave. Even the police officers, Dimes and Nicholson, are characterized jokes of the bonds of cop-buddies. As the two excitedly tell their boss about the cocaine seizure, they hurriedly finish each other's sentences and correct each other's grammar. Dimes loses his life while displaying the most stereotypical of cop-buddy devotion. While killing off one of Donowitz's already injured bodyguards (who, forgetting that Dimes is an enemy, asks for an ambulance), Dimes delivers the clichéd "This one's for Cody," and loses sight of Alabama, who uses his distraction as an opportunity to shoot him.

As I argued earlier in this section, the narrative of True Romance is unforgiving of its characters (i.e. men, since Alabama is the only female character who has more than a bit-part) who do not display the proper attitudes towards independence. The few characters who make it out of the film alive, such as Dick, show a respect for Clarence's independence. The other men of the film are not only overly dependent on their male communities, but also greedy for what these societies can give them, which, like in Wild At Heart, provides a justification for the couples wanting to escape.

While it would be difficult to argue that Mickey and Mallory are completely sympathetic characters, the society in which they live, like those of the other two films, helps to justify their
actions. There are almost no sympathetic characters in *Natural Born Killers* (the old native man and his grandson being the only exceptions). As I mentioned earlier, although Stone calls his characters "natural born killers," he cannot help but implicate their society to some extent. During the interview, Mickey charges that there are no innocent people in the world, and his interviewer cannot come up with a solid defense against this. Almost everyone in the film is guilty of something, even if only for admiring and making stars out of Mickey and Mallory. The "more guilty" characters are corrupt with power and fame; Jack Scagnetti thrives on his reputation as "public protector", while Wayne Gayle will go to any lengths to get a story. Furthermore, these two characters, unlike Mickey and Mallory, show no capacity for change. Scagnetti remains the same perverted character up until his death; Gayle only preaches the message that "love conquers all" (a moral which Mickey claims at the end of the film), not because he understands it, but only as an attempt to save his life. While it is clear that neither Mickey nor Mallory has a complete understanding of the "lesson" learned (before shooting Gayle, Mickey tells him, "Killing you is a statement. I'm not sure what it's saying"), their naiveté is at least a step above the greedy corruption of characters like Gayle (who, after his crew has been shot, only laments that the broadcast of the pair's jailbreak is "no longer live, unfortunately"). While the presentation of Mickey and Mallory's rehabilitated escape from society is presented as tongue-in-cheek (complete with the campy Winebago scene during the final credits), the attitudes beneath the surface are sincere; although the pair does not fully understand their redemption (and it is, of course, ridiculous to think such a transition would go so smoothly), they are at least capable of desiring and aiming for such a recovery, unlike the rest of their society. Throughout the film, Mickey keeps referring to their actions as "Fate" (a belief which Mallory learns to mimic by the end of the film), thereby absolving the two from responsibility. By creating a society so corrupt that it seems to deserve such a fate, Stone makes it possible for the audience to sympathize with Mickey and Mallory, if only by default.
In all three films, there is an extraordinary importance placed on the independence of the male half of the couple. Relationships with family and friends are minimal because they risk interfering with his independent actions. The society in which the man lives is shown to be one which conflicts with his solitude; furthermore, this world is so appalling that it justifies the outlaw actions the man must take in order to preserve himself. Yet while a great significance is placed on the man's autonomy, his female partner is shown to be a much more dependent creature. Rather than being independent characters, Lula, Alabama and Mallory act more as dependent "sidekicks" to their male partners.

D. WOMAN AS SIDEKICK

I have already mentioned how all three women are "rescued" by their male partners. "Peanut, I'm thinking of breaking parole and taking you out to sunny California," Sailor tells Lula, who cannot seem to think of her own way to leave her clingy mother. Alabama decides not to go back to her former life, but Clarence must return to complete the rescue by killing Drexel. While visiting him in jail, Mallory complains to Mickey that her father is hitting her and "coming into her room," but she is unable to leave until Mickey escapes from jail and helps her kill her parents. Not only are these women unable to leave their former lives by themselves, they are also unquestioningly positive about the methods their partners use to rescue them: Lula jumps on the bed in excitement, Alabama calls Clarence's murder of Drexel "romantic," and Mallory, after the murders of her parents, fidgets eagerly while thinking about "the whole new woman" she will become.

These "rescues" help to set up the dependent roles that the women will take alongside their men. Just like Keechie is to Bowie in They Live By Night, Lula only accompanies Sailor on the ride, but does not participate in any outlaw activities herself. In the first scene of the
film, where Sailor beats Marietta's hit man to death, Lula can only stand off to the side and scream—her only participation in the event being to add to the shrill soundtrack. Later, in a scene I have already discussed, rather than defend herself, she looks helplessly to Sailor as she is accosted on the dance floor at the Powermad concert. Sailor himself recognizes that Lula can only be a sidekick to him and that he must take care of her. Bobby Peru also recognizes this and tells Sailor that Lula's dependence is a good reason to join the bank robbery. Sailor does not even think of consulting Lula on how to provide for their future family, (she only finds out about his outlaw plans after the fact) but assumes that the responsibility is his own. When the robbery fails, Sailor laments, not the fact that three people have been shot, or that he is going to jail, but that he has not lived up to his role as provider for Lula: "Oh, Lula, I've really let you down this time!"

There are moments in the film where Lula seems capable of acting independently of Sailor. After learning that she is pregnant, Sailor assures her that "it's ok by him," but Lula answers, "Nothing personal, but I'm not sure it's ok by me." Later, we learn that Lula has taken care of her child all by herself for six years. But Lula herself denies that she could be independent. Although she is worried about her pregnancy, her solution to the problem is for Sailor to sing her "Love Me Tender" (the song that he will only sing to his wife). Later, after she has picked up Sailor from his second time in jail, it is clear that she is uneasy about the relationship. Yet it is not her, but Sailor, who points out that she has managed alone for six years and suggests the two split up. Lula is horrified at this thought and cries after Sailor as he walks away. Yet he returns to her (thanks to the advice of the "Good Witch") and resumes this dependent relationship by singing "Love Me Tender."

If Lula can be compared to Keechie, then Alabama is similar to Jo, of You Only Live Once, in that she does turn to outlaw actions when her husband is not around to protect her. For the most part, Alabama follows Clarence's lead, letting him make the plans to get to California, or to arrange the drug deal. Yet there are two scenes where Clarence is not present to protect
Alabama and she must act on her own. After their meeting with Eliot, while Clarence is out getting food, Alabama plans to "get in bed and watch X-rated movies" until her husband gets "back into her loving arms," but instead must defend herself against a mafia hit-man who has come to collect the cocaine. This fight is similar to Clarence's with Drexl in that both Clarence and Alabama seem to be defeated when they suddenly turn the tables and kill their attackers. Yet Clarence remains relatively level-headed once he has killed Drexl; he instructs a call-girl to get Alabama's things for him and is able to make it back home on his own. Alabama, although quite inventive once she retaliates against her attacker (using after-shave and hairspray to defend herself) does not keep such a cool head. Instead, after setting her opponent on fire, she shoots him several times, and then, even though he surely must be dead at this point, straddles him and beats his corpse with her gun. She is crying and screaming hysterically during her attack, and is in such an altered state when Clarence cautiously enters the room with his gun drawn, that she does not recognize him and shrinks back from his touch. She is in a similar state of confusion during the hotel room shoot-out, when she kills officer Dimes. The shooting is not logically motivated (except that Clarence and Alabama's escape is much easier when everyone in the room is dead); Alabama seems only to be reacting in shock to the sound of Dimes's gun (as he kills Donowitz's bodyguard) and out of her grief for Clarence, whom she thinks is dead. (At the end of the film, when recounting the hotel episode in a voiceover, Alabama tells us how "three words kept repeating themselves over and over inside [her] head: You're so cool," once again removing herself from the duty of the situation, and focusing this responsibility on Clarence). While Alabama is able to act in outlaw ways which are beneficial to the couple, she only does so when Clarence is not present to protect her. Also, she gets into such an emotionally frenzied state while reacting, that she seems not to be as reliable a protector as Clarence, who is able to keep a rational head. So, although Alabama does some of the killing in True Romance, the absence of Clarence, along with her emotionality (instead of Clarence's rationality), fits her role of dependent on her husband.
Unlike Lula or Alabama, Mallory not only breaks the law, but also shows an understanding of her actions (in the sense that, unlike Alabama, she is in her usual state of mind while killing). She kills both her father and Scagnetti with great relish and contentment; furthermore, their sexual abuse of her provides an explanation for her actions (unlike Laurie of *Gun Crazy*, whose killings have no justification). Yet there are other ways in which the narrative sets her up as Mickey's sidekick, rather than a character in her own right. As I mentioned earlier, Gayle chooses to interview only Mickey, and the narrative does not question his decision to ignore Mallory. And, while the public looks at Mickey as "charismatic," the only attention Mallory gets is as object of Scagnetti's sexual obsession which characterizes her, not for "who" she is, but "what" she can give. But perhaps most telling is the point in the interview where Mickey tells Gayle, "Mallory was teaching me how to love. She was my salvation." While, like their escape from society, this statement is obviously tongue-in-cheek, the joke lies in whether or not Mallory can provide this salvation, not if she should play this role of support to Mickey. Because *Natural Born Killers* is much more hostile in tone than the other two films, it is not surprising that the narrative allows Mallory the same outlaw privileges as Mickey. Yet, despite these privileges, she is still a sidekick to Mickey, supporting his story.

*Wild At Heart*, *True Romance* and *Natural Born Killers* all place intense importance on the need for their male protagonists to be independent. This independence is so important that these men must forgo almost all connections to anyone else, whether to family or friends. The only type of serious relationships permitted to these men are those with their female partners and these are only allowed because they encourage, rather than threaten the male's autonomy. These women are only granted this closeness to the men at a cost of their own independence; furthermore, their dependence and need for protection give the men the justification for becoming outlaws in a cruel society. Unlike the outlaw couple films of the seventies discussed in Kinder's essay, where the men opted out of the backdrop of male communities (although still keeping some contact), the men of the nineties' outlaw couple films feel they must act alone (or
essentially alone, with the subordinated cooperation of their female partners) in a harsh world which offers no such support. In the next section, I will discuss recent attitudes towards the heterosexual couple which may contribute to the portrayals of these outlaw couples.

II. RECENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS "THE COUPLE"

In the chapter "My Mother Was a Saint" of her book, The Way We Never Were, Stephanie Coontz discusses the way that "female domesticity and male individualism developed together" (44). She points out that "[t]he Anglo-American notion that dependence on others is immature, weak, shameful, or uniquely feminine is foreign to most cultures" (45). Rather, interdependence is recognized as a way of forging necessary social bonds. While often a means of strengthening a group, "social, political, and economic inequalities" would lead to relationships where "reciprocity with others was often transformed into permanent obligations from others" (47). She cites "the situation in Europe during the period immediately preceding settlement of the New World" as one where "most of the population was subordinated to noble families who ruled through military and religious intimidation, imposing a permanent dependence on the lower classes" (47). A reversal of these dependencies came about with "[t]he emergence of Enlightenment ideology, Protestant religion and capitalist production" where "the revolutionary language of equal rights [were] set above local customs, impartial procedures above rulers' caprices [and] market exchanges above reciprocity" (48).

Although this new philosophy gave many people freedom from the unfair subjugation by their rulers, "the rise of individualism had another side"; "[i]ndependence came to mean immunity from social claims on one's wealth or times" (49). But with everyone supposedly free from the demands of others, "it bec[a]me hard to forge bonds of attachment to, or cooperation with other people, since such bonds would imply obligations that necessarily impinge on one's freedom" (52). Yet the proponents of extreme individualism were not daunted; they simply applied this
notion of "freedom" to only "half the population" (53). A clearer demarcation of men's and women's labour, where men were seen as ambitiously competitive and women as altruistically cooperative, led to "[t]he cult of the Self-Made Man...[and] the True Woman" (53). Today, as governments swing to the right, and people are encouraged more and more to fend for themselves, this division of men and women, a tenet of the "Family Values" movement, becomes a romanticized ideal. The "family" (made up of a Self-Made man and True Woman) becomes "the one place where interdependence, noncalculative reciprocity, and gift-giving prevail[s]" (53). Other realms, such as "the workplace, the market, the political arena, and the mass media" are characterized by the opposite sentiments (277). "It is no wonder," writes Coontz, [people] hope for a renewal of family values that would soften these social stresses. But very few people can sustain values at a personal level when they are continually contradicted at work, at the store, in the government, and on television (277). Similarly, the recent outlaw couples invest an enormous amount of energy into their relationships as a way of contending with the corrupt societies in which they live.

Of course, it is obvious that not all social interaction will be harmonious, and problems that arise contribute to the revolt against social commitment. Such rebellion has been a common theme for youth-oriented films, with the most famous examples being played out by actors like James Dean or Marlon Brando, who, when asked in Laslo Benedek's The Wild One (1954), "What are you rebelling against?" answers, "What have you got?" A similar example of rebellion, as I mentioned in chapter two, can be seen in Robin Wood's praise for the male buddy film as an avenue for its protagonists to rebel against the repressive nature of patriarchy (230). But while the majority of the earlier rebels reacted against being forced to take a role in a constrictive world, many audience members of the recent outlaw couple films fear that they will not be able to find a place for themselves in their societies. Interestingly, although all three couples end up escaping their societies, they do so only to end up getting or staying happily married, and raising a family—exactly the same goal against which the earlier rebels reacted.
In his article, "Melancholy Babies," Peter Shawn Taylor notes that "among a large block of the middle class, there is a great deal of insecurity" (27). He argues that people are financially better off today than any generation previous—a statement he supports with figures from Statistics Canada or The Canadian Council on Social Development (24). What is causing today's malaise is not increased poverty, he claims, but rather the insecurity over "the collapse of expectations that has come with the flattening out of growth," or worse, "the possibility of job loss or obsolescence" (27). Rather than fearing the inability to escape society, people today seem more afraid that society will escape them, trampling them in its path as it stampedes for the uncertain future.

Taylor ends his article by reprimanding his readers with the reminder that they are still better off than earlier generations: "Please quit complaining. You don't know how good you've got it" (28). This seems like quite a harsh and futile suggestion. A better solution seems to be for governments to assure their populations that they have some protection from the worst of these insecurities. Yet precisely the opposite is happening as many countries are cutting back on social programs. And, along with this "flattening out of growth" mentioned by Taylor, comes the realization that the world is a finite space which cannot support infinite growth. The environmental movement, which became a mainstream movement in the late eighties and has continued strong into the nineties, gives everyone, both private citizens and corporations, the knowledge that they are drawing from limited resources. While the environmental movement has produced many community based programs which hope to solve problems before it is too late, it also has contributed to anxiety about the future ability of the world to support its large population. The idea that one has to fight with others for a share of limited resources can be seen in government slashing of such social programs as welfare, where people are told that they should be out fending for themselves.

This Darwinian individualism can be seen in the three outlaw couples movies, where, as I discussed in the previous section, the male protagonist does not look at other men as potential
allies, but instead as opponents who threaten to usurp his space if he does not take care. And, while the couples end up only accomplishing a modest goal (marriage and children), they do display some of the indifferent "why-not?" greed characteristic of extreme individualism and uncertainty over the future. When Lula receives a candy necklace from Sailor, she tells him, "I'm going to save this." But, realizing how unlikely and unnecessary this is, she corrects herself, "But if I ever eat it, I'll be thinking of you." Clarence is constantly indulging in little treats, such as when he tells Eliot to save him the gorillas out of the animal crackers the two are eating, or when he goes to a fast food stand and orders "the fattest, juiciest hamburger [they]ve got," showing his willingness to pamper himself now as he may not have a future. Even Mickey and Mallory's killings are portrayed as fun, childlike games, such as when Mallory plays "eeny meeny miny moe" to choose who will die at the diner. Although it is difficult to see Mickey and Mallory's indulgences on the same "innocent" levels as the other couples, they are at least, as I have already discussed, a step above the greedy corruption of a character like Wayne Gayle, whose career depends on the demise of others—unlike the actions of the couple, which are repeatedly described as "Fate." Perhaps Gayle could be seen to represent the older generation, the "baby boomers" who are perceived by the younger generation as greedily holding onto and not passing along the world's wealth (Taylor 24). Whatever the case, as I have demonstrated in the last section, the actions of the couple are justified by the corruption of the societies in which they live. This, along with their uncertainty over their future, allows the couples to take a few liberties along the road. The "greed" of the couple is seen as whimsical and relatively inconsequential when compared to the life-sucking greed of other characters, who are blamed for the troubles of modern society.

This fear that no one will take care of them has led the men of couples to become extremely individualistic. Yet, this individualism, as Coontz points out, is hypocritical because it only offers independence to men at a cost to women's independence (53). While the nostalgic return of this type of heterosexual couple can be, as Coontz notes, attributed to a desire to return
to "safer" times (seen in the "Family Values" movement), this renewed interest in such strong
heterosexuality can also be seen as a reaction to the fear of the modern disease, AIDS.

In her essay, Kinder notes that the women of the seventies outlaw couple films "cannot
see beyond the narrow limits of the nuclear family" (7). While the scope of their desires may be
limited, these women are very aggressive about pursuing their goals, and Kinder notes, "We are
not used to seeing such power exerted by women in movies, and I must say I find it refreshing"
(6). By contrast, the women of the nineties films sit back and let their male partners take the
initiative. In Wild At Heart, Lula worries over the uncertain state of her future with Sailor.
Instead of trying to solve this problem, she lays back in bed, crying that she wishes he would
sing her "Love Me Tender." It does not occur to her to propose to him herself, or furthermore,
that there is a solution other than marriage. Similarly, Mallory waits for Mickey to make the
decisions; when he proposes to her, she yells out, "I've been waiting for so long for you to say
that!" Alabama is the only woman to initiate a relationship with her partner; although she
strongly declares her love for him after their first night together, and admits that her behaviour is
unconventional, she seems to be doing so only because she cannot imagine herself alone.
Furthermore, it is Clarence who must initiate and perform the real rescue of Alabama from her
former "family." In all three films, the women passively wait for their male partners to take
control of their lives.

This "control" is one tactic the men use to allay their fears of AIDS. While monogamous
heterosexuality is one defense prescribed to avoid AIDS (and especially helpful is the woman's
strong desire to be, as Alabama puts it, "one hundred percent monogamous"), the men are one
step ahead in that they have a strong control over the sexuality of their female partners. After
Sailor tells Lula the "peach" story, she asks him to "run [her] back to the hotel room" because she
is now "hotter than Georgia asphalt." Also, as I mentioned earlier, one of the most dangerous
moments in the film is when another man, Bobby Peru, is able to turn on Lula sexually. In True
Romance, Clarence is constantly showing off Alabama's sexiness to other men: "Isn't she a four-
alarm fire?" he demands of his father; later, he plays a joke on Dick, by making Alabama knock on his door, asking, "Did you call for a date?" Alabama's naive misunderstanding of the control Clarence has over her sexuality is made into a joke at one point in the film. As they leave from their visit with his father, Clarence orders Alabama to "come kiss Pops good-bye." She misunderstands, and begins to give Clifford a deep, soulful kiss before she is pulled away by Clarence, who laughingly corrects her. (He can laugh because it is clear that Alabama has made a mistake, and has actually demonstrated just how strictly she will follow Clarence's commands). Mallory is the only woman who cheats on her husband, going to a garage and picking up the gas attendant. Yet she only does this because Mickey has angered her by expressing interest in a woman the two have taken hostage. Mallory tries to seduce the attendant, but seems more interested in hearing a man tell her she is beautiful and that he "wants [her]." She ends up shooting the man, not because he does not satisfy her sexually (as she claims) but because he cannot satisfy her, since he is not Mickey. Lesson learned, she returns to Mickey (who has "raped" the insultingly acquiescent hostage) and never strays from him again.

It is surprising then, with their bursting sexuality which they can barely contain, that these women can still be considered to be on the "madonna" side of the dichotomy I mentioned in chapter two. Yet it is precisely because their men can control this sexuality that the women are rendered "safe" and do not fall over onto the "whore" side of the dichotomy. ("I'm not a whore, I'm a call-girl! There's a difference, you know!" Alabama yells at Clarence). The treatment of their sexuality brings to mind Elayne Rapping's statement that while the Hays Code still forbade the depiction of sexuality onscreen, women at least had the opportunity to be interesting characters, even if it was only in order to be a worthy match for a man (70). Now, it seems these women have to be astonishingly sexual in order to convince us that their partners would be willing to settle down with one woman.

Yet this strong passion the characters feel for one another is just what makes their stories quite unbelievable. Are we really supposed to accept that these characters fall inescapably in
love after knowing each other for such a short time? This irony shows through in Clarence's response to Alabama's request that he not go to Drexl, warning him, "You don't know what he's like." "No," he shoots back, "You don't know what I'm like, not when it comes to things like this!" inadvertently pointing out how little the two know each other despite the fact they are married. Even that the three couples marry shows the spontaneity with which they act. While in the earlier film noir films, the marriages seem to be a requirement of the narrative, in the later films, coming at a time when marriage is no longer a requirement (as, for example, in Bonnie and Clyde) they are flourishes to show just how far the couples are willing to go in order to express their love for one another.

It seems that in order for the events which ensue in the outlaw couples films to be acceptable, they must take place in a dream-like landscape. This "unreality" is created in Natural Born Killers chiefly through the editing, and in Wild At Heart through its weird cast of characters. In True Romance, the events, although more realistically presented, are still described by Alabama as "a distant dream." The endings are especially notable for this dream quality: about Alabama and Clarence, Lizzie Francke states: "they even get the dream happy ending--complete with sunset--that would never have been allowed to their predecessors on the run to the Mexican border" (52). The same can be said of Mallory and Mickey, who escape in a suburban family's trailer, or of Sailor and Lula, for whom Lula's mother and the world disappear as the two stand on the hood of her car and he sings to her. This dream-like interpretation allows the characters to experience the angst caused by their worlds, but also gives them an opportunity to escape. Yet the happy endings are just what make the films "unhappy"; the audience realizes that such remarkable escapes are only possible in dream-like worlds.

In all three films, we see a strong desire in the male protagonist to maintain his independence at nearly any cost. His desire is defended by the depravity of his society; it is clear why he would want to maintain his distance from such a community. Although he claims to be an individual, he manages to maintain a serious relationship with a woman throughout the film;
luckily, she admires his independence and does not question her own dependence on him, so his individuality is not threatened. Their relationship is consistent with Stephanie Coontz's description of the "Self-Made Man" and "True Woman," which itself is a necessary part of the Family Values Movement, which is becoming popular as the right-wing gains strength. This idea of "self-sustaining couple" (which is really only "pre-family" in all three films) can be seen as an answer to the fear of AIDS, as well as a campily optimistic solution to the uncertainty over the future (as described by Taylor in his article). While the couples of all three films experience these problems of modern society, the unrealistic aspects of the films (and especially the endings) allow the couples to solve their problems by escaping; in a sense, the couples can have their "angst" and eat it too.
Notes

1. While less so than the other two films, *True Romance* is still a road movie: the couple drives from Detroit to Cancun with a long stop in Los Angeles.

2. While Lula's past has been plagued by the influence of her bad family, Sailor's past is marked by the "lack of parental guidance" (in the words of his parole officer). Stephanie Coontz notes that "[s]tories written to teach youngsters the values of liberal society...tended to ignore families....[and] the most enduring children's characters have lacked at least one parent" (59).

3. Clarence's bounty of homophobic remarks show just how he feels about strong relationships among men.

4. Stephanie Coontz cites Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as the quintessential example of the leader/sidekick relationship. Friday's servitude is unquestioned because Crusoe has saved his life (50).

5. Clarence may seem to lose his calm in, for example, the scene where he suddenly turns on Eliot in the elevator. It turns out, however, that Clarence only blows up in order to "test" Eliot's breaking point, as a means of checking the safety of the situation, showing that his anger was actually part of a well-thought out plan.

6. It is interesting to note, however, that Mallory is not able to kill her abusers until Mickey comes to rescue her.

7. Although his article specifically deals with Canadian sentiment, Taylor's argument can be expanded to include other modern first world countries experiencing similar worries, and thus, the American society in which the outlaw couple films were made.

8. Also, although we are told several times how many people were killed on Mickey and Mallory's spree (a number which keeps rising), we never see the results of these killings (i.e. we never see their victims as people, only bodies, neither do we see how the survivors of the victims are affected by their deaths--with the exception of Kevin, Mallory's brother, who is now "free" after the deaths of his parents). This lack of consequence takes away the responsibility from Mickey and Mallory, which can be constrained to the blaming of Gayle and the media for the state of modern society.

9. This "dreamlike" state of the recent outlaw couple films is different than both the gritty realism of the film noirs or the mix of "mythic and documentary aspects" of *Bonnie and Clyde* (Murray 164).
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION: OTHER COUPLES

As a mainstream, Hollywood genre, the outlaw couple film has appeared periodically from World War Two until the present. Although it has strong links to the male buddy film, the outlaw couple does not maintain the strong yet independent relationship of the male buddies. As I observed in my introduction, the comparison between the two types of film seems to lie in the "male" rather than the "buddy" aspect; the outlaw couple film almost always focalizes its narrative through the male protagonist and subordinates his female partner's goals to his own. The only film discussed in this thesis to break this structure is Bonnie and Clyde, and even in a progressive film like this, the female protagonist only questions her role in the narrative, but cannot break out of it.¹

For all three periods of film history which I have discussed in this thesis, I have provided information on contemporary historical attitudes which may have influenced the portrayal of the couple. While these historical analyses are certainly a helpful tool, I noted in chapter two they cannot be perceived as an absolute answer. Historical analyses alone do not explain why the women of the nineties outlaw couple films play such a similar "sidekick" role to their counterparts of the film noirs nearly fifty years previous. I have suggested other reason for the continuing conservative treatment of these women, such as the "madonna/whore" dichotomy and Laura Mulvey's observation of the narrative "rule" that men are active and women passive.

Yet even these "rules" can be broken. Right in the middle of the sexist portrayal of women in the outlaw couple films of the nineties and in the male buddy films of the eighties came a new type of buddy film: Ridley Scott's Thelma and Louise (1991). This film was not only revolutionary because it showed two strong female characters gaining their independence, but because it played to great success on mainstream screens, was recognized by a most conservative establishment (its screenwriter, Callie Khouri, won an Oscar for Best Screenplay) and spurred responses from a great number of critics.² Unlike most other onscreen women, both Thelma and Louise openly broke the rules without losing audience sympathy.
At the end of his article, Timothy Corrigan calls for a change to the closeminded sexism of the road movie and wishes that "other drivers might take the wheel" so that "the road might now explore other cultural and other gendered geographies"(160). His suggestion would certainly help the outlaw couple. As I have noted, the outlaw couple films usually appear as a subgenre of the male buddy movie; the sexist treatment of women in the buddy films has certainly paved the way for the women of the outlaw couple. It would be encouraging if more screen time were devoted to strong female buddies like Thelma and Louise, to men who are not in constant fear of both women and homosexuals, or to homosexual couples themselves. 3 Perhaps by working against a more variegated background, the outlaw couple film can flower into a much more progressive genre.
Notes

1. Of course, as I mentioned at the end of chapter four, most films at the end of the sixties were pessimistic, so Bonnie's lack of action can be blamed on this, rather than her sexist treatment by the narrative.

2. For examples of criticism on *Thelma and Louise*, see Dargis, Griggers, Murphy and Willis.

3. The popularity of independent films like Greg Araki's *The Living End* (1992) and Maria Maggenti's *The Incredible True Adventures of Two Girls in Love* (1995) shows the growing desire of audiences to see onscreen homosexual couples.
WORKS CONSULTED


