

**T H E S T O R Y O F
B O N N I E A N D C L Y D E**

BY BONNIE PARKER

(AND OTHER POEMS)

EDITED BY ALEXANDER BARON

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Parker, Bonnie, 1910-1934
The story of Bonnie and Clyde and other poems.
I. Title II. Baron, Alexander, 1956-
811.52

ISBN 1-871473-55-1

© Alexander Baron 1990

The original poems by Bonnie Parker: The Story of Bonnie and Clyde and The Story of Suicide Sal are reproduced in full in The Strange History of Bonnie and Clyde, together with her epitaph. All three are in the public domain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the following individuals, each of whom helped to make this short work possible. Lew Louderback, for using the word "Telice" rather than "Telico" in his excellent essay: "Clyde, Bonnie, Buck and the Boys"; the late John Treherne, author of "The Strange History of Bonnie and Clyde"; the librarians of the British Newspaper Library at Colindale and the Library of Congress, Washington D.C., (whoever they are); Mary Ellen Holt of Dallas Historical Society; Joan L. Dobson of Dallas Public Library; Ellen Thompson of Jonathan Cape Ltd; Kate for giving me the free run of the Centre; Orishe and Caroline, for explaining patiently several hundred times how to use the computer; and Bob Cobbing of ALP.

BONNIE AND CLYDE AND ME

A couple of years ago I borrowed a book called *Killer Couples* (1) from my local library. Though not by nature a ghoul, I have probably read more about infamous mass and multiple murderers than most people. And like most people in the English speaking world I was long familiar with the names Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker.

Having already seen the 1967 film "Bonnie and Clyde" starring Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty I had formed the impression that this killer couples' portrayal had been romanticised and probably hyped up a great deal. The first of these assumptions was true; the second, as Judge Lew Louderback demonstrated, was manifestly untrue. Far from being exaggerated, the exploits of the real Bonnie and Clyde were even more daring and outrageous than those of their celluloid counterparts. In reality he was a vicious psychopath who thought nothing of gunning down innocent men in cold blood; she, though not the dominant partner could be equally callous, and can accurately be described as a gangster in her own right rather than as a mere mobster's moll. Bonnie Parker was no spectator.

The Louderback essay is researched in some depth, although later I discovered it contains a number of inaccuracies. It also contains fragments of two poems by Bonnie Parker: "The Story of Bonnie and Clyde" and "The Story of Suicide Sal." The exact sequence of events eludes me, but sometime after reading "Clyde, Bonnie, Buck and the Boys" I decided both to obtain the full poems and any other poems by Bonnie Parker, and to write a poem about Bonnie and Clyde myself.

This latter was in fact to be written for a competition, a maximum, I seem to recall of 24 stanzas of Rhyme Royal on an historical character(s) or subject. In due course I wrote the poem, sent it off and was a little chagrined that it received not even an honourable mention, much less a prize. In retrospect this is hardly surprising; the poem is factually accurate, cleverly rhymed, scans well.....and is quite appalling. I offer it here for what it is worth. I also wrote to the British Newspaper Library at Colindale to try to obtain further information on any other of Bonnie's poems that may have been published in the contemporary press.

Colindale referred me to the Library of Congress, to which I wrote, receiving a reply dated February 28th 1989 which contained photocopies of *The Story of Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Story of Suicide Sal*, both taken from the book by John Treherne, (2), (now deceased). The anonymous librarian stated further "We have not found published copies of other poems by Bonnie Parker." I was

also given the names and addresses of three Dallas archives including Dallas Public Library which, I was told, might be able to offer me further assistance. I wrote off and waited. In due course I received a form letter from the registrar of Dallas Historical Society explaining that the archives were temporarily closed due to modernization, while in a letter dated April 3rd 1989, Joan Dobson of Dallas Public Library, (to whom my letter to Dallas County Heritage Society had been forwarded) stated that despite searching extensive clipping files on Bonnie and Clyde she was unable to find any other original works by Bonnie Parker. It is possible that others still exist; a photocopy of the Dallas Times Herald Magazine of February 12th 1967, page 12, is suggestive of this, but another photocopy taken from a book I have yet to research states point blank that the two poems included here are the only ones to survive.

I ordered John Treherne's excellent book from my local library and photocopied the two completed poems. The publishers, Jonathan Cape, informed me that both are in the public domain. They have been described, perhaps a little unkindly, as doggerel. This is certainly due more to their imperfect metres than to their lack of literary merit; purely as narratives they read very well. The versions included here have been edited severely to make them scan, so are, in a sense, collaborations. The originals are, as pointed out, to be found in John Treherne's book, which I heartily recommend, whatever your interest in poetry.

I have dropped most of the quotation marks, which are used liberally throughout and have in many places substituted commas for semi colons. I have also tried to retain the "flavour" of both works. For example, in The Story of Suicide Sal the third line of the eighth stanza reads "Who I couldn't resist loving madly" which is grammatically incorrect, but would a mobster's moll really have said "Whom"? As to my own poem Bonnie And Clyde, as previously stated, this was written for a competition and as such was to be of a maximum length. I did flirt with the idea of adding more, perhaps many more stanzas, but decided finally against it. I should point out that I wrote the poem before I read The Strange History of Bonnie and Clyde. Lew Louderback gives Clyde's hometown as Telice; John Treherne calls it "the tiny Texas township of Telico." I have been unable to verify the name, but Treherne's book is by far the more detailed. As I couldn't find Telico in any modern atlas, I assume it was more of a hamlet than a town and has perhaps since been absorbed into a larger township. In my poem it was and will remain Telice, to fit the rhyme scheme if for no other reason.

In the poem I have also incorporated the betrayal of Bonnie and Clyde by Henry Methvin's father. In Chapter 22, John Treherne refutes this idea, and in Chapter 25 suggests further that the betrayal is a necessary element in the growth of the legend, likening it to those of King Arthur, Robin Hood, Jesse

James and Pretty Boy Floyd. Of course, the actual events leading up to the Gibsland ambush will never be known for certain, but Treherne has probably got as near to the truth as anyone will ever get.

In his book, Treherne traces the growth of the legend and the influence of Bonnie and Clyde from J Edgar Hoover's anti-crime films to Arthur Penn's definitive Bonnie And Clyde in 1967, the "Bonnie and Clyde look" in 60's fashion, Bonnie and Clyde memorabilia and Georgie Fame's classic song The Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde.

Having read both Lew Louderback's essay and John Treherne's biography I can truthfully say that Bonnie and Clyde left me spellbound: the countless robberies, innumerable car thefts, senseless murders, shoot outs, prison break outs, secret rendezvous with their families and their outwitting the police for over two years makes incredible reading. At times I found it difficult to take the story seriously; the police seemed to have an almost Keystone Cops-like quality, while the gangsters' picaresque wanderings came across as totally unreal, as though the whole thing were a melodramatic if slightly sordid 20th Century fairy tale.

With a little insight the real reason for this soon becomes apparent. The world we live in today, the 1980's and on into the 90's is a very different world from that of the Great Depression. No latter day Bonnie and Clyde could remain at large for two weeks, much less two years living the way they did. Today, virtually every home has a telephone and a television set, and communications between the police and the public, and the police and the police are not comparable. The American police of that era were also hampered by restrictive legislation which prevented the pursuit of criminals interstate, inadequate training and inferior automobiles.

Commenting on the growth of the legend of Bonnie and Clyde, Treherne suggests that for many people they have become a metaphor for rebellious youth, or even a symbol of revolt against capitalist "oppression". Whether or not this is true, they were in reality cold-blooded killers: a vicious, warped psychopath and petty crook, and his more than willing accomplice. We must never forget that. They were also lovers; the loyalty, tenderness and devotion they showed each other can but rarely have been surpassed, particularly Bonnie's towards Clyde.

For me they epitomise that all too familiar syndrome: wasted youth. Clyde, in spite of his many shortcomings, became an excellent marksman and a brilliant driver. Bonnie possessed a raw literary talent which, under different circumstances might have led to her achieving fame of a lesser, though more acceptable kind. And whatever else may be said of them, neither lacked for courage. The most tragic thing about Bonnie and Clyde, and indeed about almost every "big name" who takes the

wrong path is that had they not, they would now be historical cyphers and almost certainly would have been cyphers in every other sense.
Live fast, die young?
Bonnie's epitaph reads:

As the flowers are made sweeter
By the sunshine and the dew,
So this world is made brighter
By the likes of you.

The bereaved of their victims would probably take issue with that, but certainly she and Clyde have made a positive contribution to the world which far outstrips their notoriety. They have inspired films, songs and literary hacks, (like myself), though on the whole we would rather have a few less murderers, even at the cost of a little less inspiration.

Bonnie's wish that they would die together came true on the 23rd May 1934 when they were gunned down on a quiet Louisiana backroad. But the second part of her prophesy did not come true. Bonnie was buried in the Fishtrap Cemetery in West Dallas; Clyde was buried next to his brother, Buck, in West Dallas Cemetery. Bonnie's mother is reputed to have said: "Clyde had her for two years, and look what he did to her."

What more could he have done in all eternity?

Reference (1) "Clyde, Bonnie, Buck and the Boys" by Lew Louderback from Killer Couples, selected and with an introduction by Richard Glyn Jones (Xanadu) 1987.

Reference (2) "The Strange History of Bonnie and Clyde" by John Treherne (Cape) 1984.

THE STORY OF BONNIE AND CLYDE

You've read of the tale of Jesse James -
Of how he lived and died,
But if you're in need
Still of something to read,
Here's the story of Bonnie and Clyde.

Now Bonnie and Clyde are the Barrow gang,
And I'm sure that you all will have read,
How they rob and they steal,
And the lowlife who squeal
Are found dead with a slug through the head.

There are lots of untruths to these write ups,
For they're neither as ruthless as that,
Though their nature is raw
And they hate all the law -
The stool pigeons, the spotters and rats.

People say they are cold-blooded killers,
Claiming they are both heartless and mean,
But I say this with pride,
That when first I met Clyde
He was honest and upright and clean.

But the law fooled around,
Kept on sending him down,
And kept locking him up in a cell,
Until he said to me:
"I will never be free,
So I'll meet a few of them in Hell."

The road they took was dimly lighted,
There were no highway signposts to guide,
But they made up their minds
If the roads were all blind
That they wouldn't give up till they died.

The road's growing dimmer and dimmer,
Until sometimes you hardly can see,
But it's fight man to man,
Get as far as you can,
For they know they can never be free.

From heartbreak many people have suffered,
And from weariness many have died,
But take it in all,
People's troubles are small
Till they end up like Bonnie and Clyde.

If a lawman is shot down in Dallas,
And they haven't a clue or a guide,
If they can't find a fiend,
They just wipe their slate clean
And announce it was Bonnie and Clyde.

There are only two crimes in this country
They've not tried to pin on Barrow's mob,
It's said they had no hand
In the kidnap demand
Nor the Kansas City depot job.

A newspaperboy said to his buddy:
"I wish Bonnie and Clyde would get jumped,
In these awful hard times
We would make a few dimes
If a handful of cops would get bumped."

The police haven't got the report yet,
But I heard from Clyde only today,
He said: Don't start no fights,
Cos we ain't working nights,
We're joining up with the NRA.

From Irving to West Dallas viaduct
Is what's known as the Great Divide,
Where the women are kin,
And the men are real men,
And they won't "stool" on Bonnie and Clyde.

If they tried to act like decent citizens
And rented a nice little flat,
About the third night
They'd receive an invite
From a sub-machine gun's rat-tat-tat.

They don't think they're too tough or desperate,
They realise the law always wins,
They've been shot at before,
But they neither ignore
That death must be the price of their sins.

Some day soon they will go down together,
And they'll bury the two side by side,
To few it'll be grief,
To the law a relief.....
But it's death for Bonnie and Clyde.

THE STORY OF SUICIDE SAL

We each of us has a good alibi
For being down here in the joint,
But few of them really are justified
If you get right down to the point.

You'll have heard of a young woman's glory
Being trashed on an out and out cur,
But you can't always credit the story
As the truth as related by her.

All the times I've been here on this island
And heard confidence tales from each gal
Only one seemed both tragic and truthful,
That's the story of Suicide Sal.

Now Sal was a girl of rare beauty,
Though her features were callous and tough,
Never once did she falter from duty,
Never once did she say: That's enough!

Sal told me this tale on the evening
Before she was out of here free,
And I'll do my best now to relate it
Word for word as she gave it to me.

"I was born on a ranch in Wyoming,
Guess I wasn't no Helen of Troy,
For I was taught the rods were the rulers,
And was ranked as a greasy cowboy.

"Then I left my old home for the city,
And got caught in its mad, dizzy whirl,
Unbeknowing how little of pity
It extends to a green country girl.

"Then I fell for the lie of a henchman,
A professional killer from Chi';
Who I couldn't resist loving madly,
For him even now I'd surely die.

"For one year we were desperately happy,
While our ill-gotten gains were spent free,
In the underworld's ways I enlisted,
Jack was almost like a god to me.

"I got onto the F.B.A. payroll
To get the inside lay of a job;
The bank was turning over big money,
And it looked like a cinch for the mob.

"Eighty grand without even a rumble -
Jack was last with the loot to the door
When the teller dead-aimed a revolver
From where he'd been forced down on the floor.

"I realised I had only a moment,
He would surely shoot Jack as he ran,
So I called out as he squeezed the trigger,
Lunged and knocked the gun out of his hand.

"They came down on me hard at the station,
Shouted at me that I'd get the blame,
The way I'd pulled that stunt on the teller
Meant I had to be in on the game.

"The police said the raid was a set up,
That the job had been planned from inside,
But their claims I'd been in with the robbers
I refuted and flatly denied.

"The gang hired me a couple of lawyers,
The best fixers in any man's town,
But it takes more than lawyers and money
When it's Uncle Sam shaking you down.

"I was charged as a scion of gangland,
And was tried for my sins by my peers,
When the jury said they found me guilty
The judge said: Five to forty-five years.

"So I took the rap as do good people,
Not so much as a squeak did I make,
Jack reneged on the promise he'd given
That he'd fix a sensational break.

"Well, to shorten a sad, lengthy story,
Five long years have gone over my head
Without even so much as a letter,
For a while I feared he might be dead.

"But a few days ago I discovered
From a gal in the joint known as Lyle
That Jack and his new moll had got over
And were living in true gangster style.

"If he only had come to me sometime
Though he hadn't a nickel to give
I'd forget all this hell that he's caused me
And love him for as long as I live.

"But there's no chance of him ever coming
Because he and his moll have no fears
Except that I should not die in prison
Or rot here for the next forty years.

"But tomorrow I'll be on the outside
For I've got me an early parole,
Jack has no idea, which is his bad luck,
Cos I'm gonna fix him and his moll."

The iron gate swung wide open next morning
For a bitter, scorned woman of waste,
I could tell she was going to fix him,
Murder showed in her cynical face.

A week later I read in the paper
That a gal on the East Side got hot,
And the smoke, when it fin'ly retreated
Showed a hood and his moll on the spot.

It related the colourful story
Of a jilted and wronged country gal,
And two days later a sub-gun ended
The sad story of Suicide Sal.

BONNIE AND CLYDE

It would indeed be difficult to find
Two gangsters as unlikely as were they,
But each baby-face hid an evil mind
That showed mercy to neither foes nor prey,
Without a twinge of conscience both would slay,
And soon the South would speak their names in fear:
Clyde, Bonnie and the Barrow gang are here.

A legend has grown up around the pair
As legends often do evolve and weave,
But Bonnie and Clyde were a breed so rare
That their legend is easy to believe,
While the truth is something most writers leave,
But not this one, so let us trace their story,
Seedy, incredible, insane and gory.

Clyde entered the world in nineteen-o-nine,
Born on a Texas farm outside Telice,
At schoolwork young Clyde surely didn't shine,
And soon had his first brush with the police,
A spell in the reform school, on release
His parents moved to Dallas where the law
And Clyde clashed, (inevitably) once more.

This time it wasn't bunking off of school
Or petty thieving, this time it was cars,
He drove extremely fast and thought them cool,
He had no time for dancing, girls or bars,
The way some men love booze, dough or cigars
Clyde loved wheels, but he grew to love guns more
When he became the most wanted outlaw.

Arrested for auto theft, Clyde made bail
On account of his youth, who could believe
A weak chinned, pint-sized kid who looked so frail
Could be a hardened crook? but looks deceive.
So, more strands of the web began to weave
Until, with brother Buck, Clyde's graduation
To the big league was robbing a gas station.

They ran into the cops, and Buck was caught,
The following morning they came for Clyde,
He did a deal: the other two were brought
To book, he and Buck got an easy ride;
The only deal he did until he died -
Buck drew five years, while Clyde went back to crime,
Arrested thrice, but beat the rap each time.

In 1930 Clyde met Bonnie when
He went to work with an accomplice, Ray;
She was nineteen and dating several men,
Her husband having just been put away,
With twenty-nine years left to serve, soon they
Struck up a friendship, Bonnie ditched her lovers,
For Clyde excited her, unlike the others.

No sooner had she met her number one
Than the police came and nailed Clyde real good,
"Forgot to wear gloves this time, Clyde old son,
So it's off to gaol for one small time hood."
And as before the court young Barrow stood
A lenient sentence of just two years
Was handed down, but Clyde was gripped with fears.

Well he remembered reform school, and now
A claustrophobic horror seized his mind,
His brother busted out of Eastham gaol,
And Clyde had no desire to hang behind,
He sent for Bonnie and, love being blind,
On a visit she smuggled him a gun,
And Clyde and his cellmate went on the run.

They were soon caught, and this time gaol for Clyde
Was fourteen years, the court mercilessly
Had altered his sentence, when he'd been tried
The seven terms had run concurrently,
Now they were changed to consecutively.
At Eastham prison farm Clyde's despair rose,
And in a rash ploy he hacked off two toes.

It didn't work, but an impassioned plea
From his mother brought him a swift parole,
It came too late though, for soon Clyde was free
And on the run with Bonnie as his moll,
The chase began near Mabank where they stole
A car, down highways and backroads cops sought
The crazy couple, soon the girl was caught.

Bonnie sat in gaol cooling off, outside
Three young men robbed the Sims Oil Company,
Then, April 30th Hamilton and Clyde
Committed murder on a robbery,
The first of many on their killing spree.
Rewards were posted, Frank Clause joined the gang,
And through Texas the deadly outfit ran.

Bonnie returned home, Clyde and company
Gunned down two lawmen in a Choctaw town,
A phone call came to Bonnie: "Hi, it's me,
Pack your toothbrush, cos I'll be right on round."
Reunited, the lovers went to ground,
Bonnie told Clyde the best place they could go
Was her Aunt's town: Carlsbad, New Mexico.

Their honeymoon was brief, when they got there
The local sheriff was soon on the scene,
He approached them, alert, but unaware
As to who they were, but they beat him clean,
Bonnie held a gun on him, Clyde looked mean
And snarled: "Get in the car, it's time to go."
They drove with him to San Antonio.

That lawman lived to tell, but others died;
Over the next two years they robbed and killed,
More rewards were posted: dead or alive,
But before they were trapped, much blood was spilled,
At the sound of their names, lawmen's blood chilled.
Buck joined the gang and so did WD:
Hold ups, murders, raids on the armoury.

They hid out in the hills, robbed far and wide,
Drove round in circles, often doubling back,
With the gang in tow, Bonnie at his side,
And oft' as not the cops hot on his track
Clyde thought of the future, and it looked black.
"I thought we were goin' somewhere," said she,
"But we're just goin'." Clyde had to agree.

In Joplin, local police planned a raid,
Suspicious of Clyde's Texas licence plates;
"Bootleggers!" they said, and were quite dismayed
To find, by one of those strange quirks of fate
They'd ambushed the most feared gang in the States.
Alerted, the gang blasted their way out,
And yet again put the police to rout.

Grown tired of the gang and their evil spree
The authorities hatched a clever plan,
Gang member Henry Methvin went to see
His farmer-father who was named Ivan,
This was known to the trackers of the gang,
And they approached the father, who agreed
Provided his son was pardoned and freed.

The trap was sprung and, taken by surprise
They had a choice, to surrender or die,
Bonnie went for her gun, and so did Clyde,
They had no chance, this was the long goodbye.
The gunfire sounded like a banshee's cry -
One hundred, sixty-seven rounds of lead:
A voice came".....careful, they may not be dead."

Such was the awe in which those two were held,
But they were dead, at last, and laid to rest.
Into legend their names have been propelled,
Crooks and killers yes, but they were the best,
The extent of their crimes can't but impress,
They lived like snakes, like cornered rats they died;
But we'll never forget Bonnie and Clyde.

ISBN 1-871473-55-1