September 20, 2022 (XLV:4)
Nicholas Ray: **IN A LONELY PLACE** (1950, 94 min)
URL for Introduction Vimeo : https://vimeo.com/750762593
URL for 7:00 Tuesday discussion zoom:
https://vimeo.com/748377120https://buffalo.zoom.us/j/93763641566?pwd=YS96cVh5c0EwS3lCcENDYzIyWm9Rdz09

DIRECTOR Nicholas Ray
WRITING Screenplay by Andrew Solt, based on Edmund H. North's adaptation of Dorothy B. Hughes' 1947 novel of the same name.
PRODUCERS Robert Lord, Henry S. Kesler (associate producer), and Humphrey Bogart (executive producer, uncredited)
CINEMATOGRAPHY Burnett Guffey
MUSIC George Anthiel

The film was entered into the National Film Registry by the National Film Preservation Board in 2007.

CAST
Humphrey Bogart...Dixon Steele
Gloria Grahame...Laurel Gray
Frank Lovejoy...Brub Nicolai
Carl Benton Reid...Capt. Lochner
Art Smith...Mel Lippman
Jeff Donnell...Sylvia Nicolai
Martha Stewart...Mildred Atkinson
Robert Warwick...Charlie Waterman
Morris Ankrum...Lloyd Barnes
William Ching...Ted Barton
Steven Geray...Paul
Hadda Brooks...Singer

NICHOLAS RAY (Raymond Nicholas Kienzle, 7 August 1911, Galesville, Wisconsin— 16 June 1979) is perhaps the only major director who made a film about coping with his own death—*Lightning Over Water (*1980), made in collaboration with his friend Wim Wenders. Ray is credited as director on 25 other films, including *55 Days at Peking* (1963), *King of Kings* (1961), *The Savage Innocents* (1959), *The True Story of Jesse James* (1957), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Johnny Guitar* (1954), *Flying Leathernecks* (1951), and *Knock on Any Door* (1949). However, he had an extraordinary career before directing his first film, *They Live by Night* (1949). He studied architecture and theater at the University of Chicago, leaving the university after a year only to soon become a mentee of Frank Lloyd Wright, for whom he helped organize and direct the Hillside Playhouse at Taliesin. After falling out with

his mentor, Ray continued to immerse himself in theater, joining the New York City troupe Theater of Action, for which he acted in a number of productions, and later John Houseman's Phoenix Theater, for which he was a director on Broadway. During this period, he worked for the Federal Theater Project as part of the Works Progress Administration. In the late 1930s he traveled widely in the deep south and the west with his friend Alan Lomax, collecting folklore for the Library of Congress. With Lomax, he produced *Back Where I Come From*, a thrice-weekly radio show for CBS featuring folk singers like Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Leadbelly, and a young Pete Seeger. His radio career continued into the second world war, during which he supervised propaganda programs for the United States Office of War Information; however, this did not stop the FBI from investigating his political commitments in 1942, and in 1943 it was revealed that Ray had been discharged from the Works Progress Administration due to "communist affiliations or sympathies." Indeed, during his time at La Crosse State Teachers College (the school he briefly attended both before and after his stint at Chicago), he wrote a left-wing column for the school paper and attempted to start a La Crosse chapter for the Communist Party USA. He never disowned or fully abandoned his left-wing activism, and he was likely able to escape blacklisting in Hollywood because Howard Hughes liked him. He transitioned into film through theater when he was asked to stage a television broadcast of the Broadway musical *Lute Song* (for which he was already assistant director, under John Houseman) only to make his first film, *They Live By Night* (1948), shortly after. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, he made films in a variety of genres, earning himself a reputation for both complex filmmaking and personal volatility, the latter marked by an unquenchable thirst for booze and women. He suffered a heart attack while working on *55 Days At Peking* (1953), signaling the end of his mainstream filmmaking career. Ray's time in the 1960s and 1970s was marked by repeated failed attempts to launch film projects and get clean; these two imperatives occasionally merged, such as when he founded a short-lived production company with his physician and psychiatrist. In 1971, Ray was hired to teach film at Harpur College of Binghamton, New York. Though short-lived (department head and filmmaker Ken Jacobs described hiring Ray as a "calamitous error"), the position led to *We Can't Go Home Again,* an experimental film made in collaboration with his students that was only screened a few times before receiving a DVD release in 2011. In his final years, he took on a few small acting roles (including spots in Wim Wenders' *The American Fiend* and Miloš Forman's *Hair*) and briefly taught at NYU (where his graduate student assistant was a young Jim Jarmusch). He was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1977 and died in 1979, making the aforementioned *Lightning Over Water* with Wim Wenders in the short time between.

HUMPHREY BOGART (b. December 25, 1899 in New York City, NY—d. January 14, 1957, age 57, in Los Angeles, CA) was an American film and stage actor. His performances in numerous films from the Classical Hollywood era made him a cultural icon. The child of a surgeon and magazine illustrator, he was sent as a young boy from NYC to Phillips Academy in Andover in MA in preparation for medical studies at Yale. He was expelled from Phillips and joined the U.S. Naval Reserve. After getting out, he started acting in local NY productions. In 1930, he gained a contract with Fox for his film debut in a ten-minute short, *Broadway's Like That* (1930), co-starring Ruth Etting and Joan Blondell. Fox released him after two years. After five years of stage and minor film roles, he had his breakthrough role in *The Petrified Forest* (1936) from Warner Bros. He won the part over Edward G.

Robinson only after the star, Leslie Howard, threatened WB that he would quit unless Bogart was given the key role of Duke Mantee, which he had played in the Broadway production with Howard. The film was a major success and led to a long-term contract with WB. From 1936 to 1940, Bogart appeared in 28 films, usually as a gangster, though also twice in Westerns and once in a horror film (*The Return of Doctor X,* 1939). His landmark year was 1941 (often capitalizing on parts George Raft had rejected) with roles in classics such as *High Sierra* (1941) and as Sam Spade in one of his most fondly remembered films, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). These were followed by *Casablanca* (1942), *The Big Sleep* (1946), and *Key Largo* (1948). Bogart, despite his erratic education, was incredibly well-read and he favored writers and intellectuals within his small circle of friends. In 1947, he joined wife Lauren Bacall and other actors protesting the House Un-American Activities Committee witch hunts. He also formed his own production company, and the next year made *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948). He won the best actor Academy Award for *The African Queen* (1951) and was nominated for *Casablanca* (1942) and for Captain Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), a film made when he was already seriously ill. He died in his sleep at his Hollywood home following surgeries and a battle with throat cancer; his last words were reportedly "I should've never have switched from scotch to martinis." On Christmas in 2000, the New York Times reported that Bogart's birthday was actually January 23,1899, but "WB publicity decided that a Christmas birthday would be far more advantageous because 'a guy born on Christmas can't be all bad.'" Speaking of his role in tonight's film, Louise Brooks noted that it resembled the Bogart she knew: "Before inertia set in, he played one fascinatingly complex character, craftily directed by Nicholas Ray, in a film whose title perfectly defined Humphrey's own isolation among people. *In a Lonely Place* gave him a role that he could play with complexity because the character's pride in his art, his selfishness, his drunkenness, his lack of energy stabbed with lightning strokes of violence, were shared equally by the real Bogart."

GLORIA GRAHAME (b. Gloria Hallward, 28 November 1923, Los Angeles, California— 5 October 1981, New York, New York) was the daughter of architect Michael Hallward and stage actress Jean Grahame. Dropping out of school to pursue a career in acting, Grahame first appeared in theatrical productions, making it to Broadway by 1943 for *The World's Full of Girls.* Her first film role was the lead in *Blonde Fever* 1944, but it was her performance as the temptress in *It's a Wonderful Life* two years later that made her a star. Two of her four marriages were in the same family: Nicholas Ray (1948-1952), and his son from a previous marriage, Tony (1960-1976). News of her marriage with the younger Ray led to publicized scandal; during the 1960s, Graham was largely absent from the film industry, performing only sporadically until the 1970s. Leonard Maltin writes: "Sulky, seductive blond actress who was one of Hollywood's top temptresses: She played more shady women (and outright tramps) than any other female performer on-screen during the late 1940s and 1950s. Even when she portrayed good girls, Grahame often layered her characterizations with unsympathetic traits." She won a best actress Oscar for *The Bad and the Beautiful* in 1952 and was nominated for *Crossfire* in 1947. Some of her other films include *Melvin and Howard* (1980), *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959), *Oklahoma!* (1955), *Macao* (1952), *The Big Heat* (1953), and *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952).

FRANK LOVEJOY (28 March 1914, The Bronx, New York—2 October 1962, New York, New York)

reportedly worked on Wall Street as a teenager only to find himself in need of a new vocation following the market crash of 1929; after this, he turned to acting, eventually making his Broadway debut in 1934. He often worked in radio, providing his voice for a number of programs across genres, including *Gang Busters, Night Beat,* and soap operas such as *Valiant Lady, Brave Tomorrow,* and *Bright Horizon.* Beginning in the late 1940s, he took on supporting roles in a number of films, including noirs like *In a Lonely Place* (1950) and *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953). He would continue to work in film, radio, television, and theater until his death in 1962 at the age of 48; at the time of his death, he was acting in a production of Gore Vidal's *The Best Man* for which his performance was praised. Leonard Maltin described him as follows: a "rough hewn, taciturn supporting player and occasional leading man who came to the screen in the late 1940s after acting on the stage and in dramatic radio for many years. A dependable player singularly lacking in charisma, Lovejoy was effective in Everyman roles and played his share of unlucky slobs caught up in intrigues not of their own making. He also played several dogface soldiers in WW2 stories. Lovejoy, a good private-eye type, played detectives in the TV series *Man Against Crime* (1956) and *Meet McGraw* (1957-58)." He was in about 40 films, but he's probably best known for *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951).

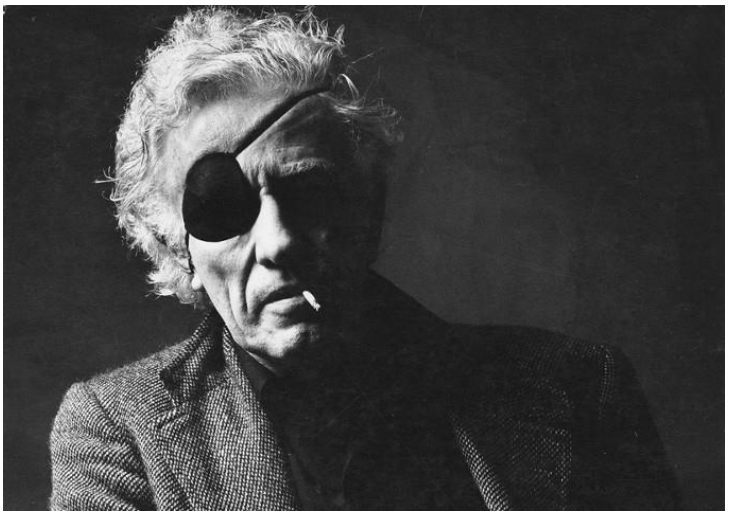
<u>Jonathan Rosenbaum: "Ray, Nicholas" (*Senses of Cinema*, 2007)</u>

That Nicholas Ray's professional name was derived from an inversion of his first two surnames sounds fitting for a filmmaking career that proceeded backwards by conventional standards, beginning in relative conformity and ending in rebellious independence. Like Jacques Tati and Samuel Fuller, Ray did a lot of living before he ever got around to filmmaking—pursuing a life largely rooted in the radical dreams and activities of the Depression years, which we mainly know about thanks to Bernard Eisenschitz's extensive and invaluable biography, one of the best-researched factual accounts we have of any director's career. In a sense, the celebrations of alternative lifestyles (such as those of rodeo people in *The Lusty Men* [1952], Gypsies in *Hot Blood* [1956], and Eskimos in *The Savage Innocents* [1960]), and passionately symmetrical relationships (such as the evenly balanced romantic couples of *In a Lonely Place* [1950] and *Johnny Guitar* [1954] and the evenly matched male antagonists of *Wind Across the Everglades* [1958] and *Bitter Victory* [1957]), and a sense of tragedy underlining their loss or betrayal, can largely be traced back to his political and populist roots. A creature of both the '30s and '60s, he was ahead of his time during both decades.

After writing and producing radio programs in his teens, Ray was invited by Frank Lloyd Wright to join his newly created and utopian Taliesin Fellowship in 1931-an encounter that lasted only a few months but which yielded a respect for the horizontal line that was central to Ray's subsequent affinity for CinemaScope. He also developed a feeling for architectural balance in both character construction and *mise en scène* that was fundamental to the almost mystical symmetries and equivalences between heterosexual couples as well as male antagonists in most of his major features. (Bisexual for much of his life, Ray was arguably a director who invested both kinds of pairings with similar erotic as well as romantic dynamics.)

Settling in New York in 1934, Ray became immersed in the left-wing Theatre of Action-which brought him in touch with Elia Kazan, as well as various federal theater programs. He also became a devotee of southern folk music, which led to close associations with Alan Lomax and such singers as Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, and Josh White and a weekly radio show for CBS in the early '40s that developed into wartime work for the *Voice of America* under John Houseman.

Houseman would later produce Ray's first feature *They Live By Night* (1947) (and the subsequent *On Dangerous Ground* [1951]) after Ray taught himself filmmaking in 1944 by following the production of Kazan's first feature, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, from beginning to end, at Kazan's own invitation. He was thus in his mid-30s by the time he made *They Live By Night*—a film that would be released over two years later, in 1949, due to the shifting agendas of Howard Hughes, who bought RKO in 1948.



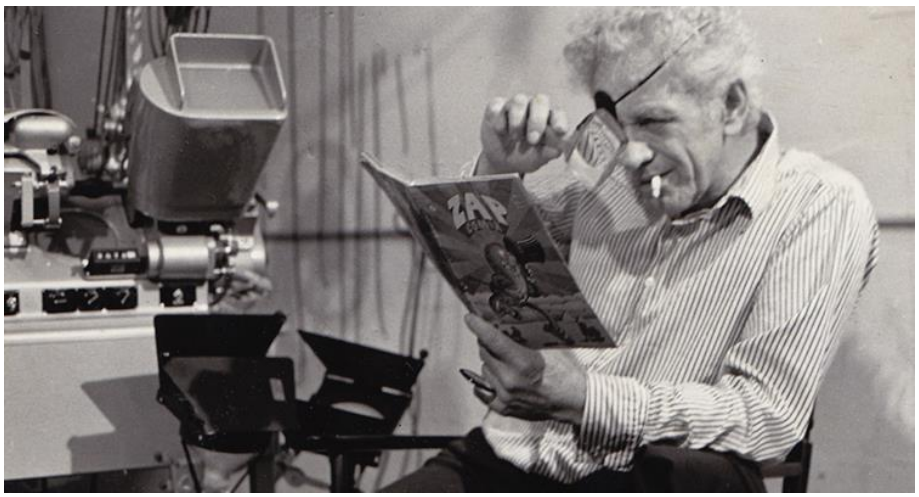
Thanks to Ray's protracted work for Hughes between 1949 and 1953-doing patch-up and piecemeal work on *Roseanna McCoy* (Irving Reis, 1949), *The Racket* (John Cromwell, 1951), *Macao* (Josef von Sternberg, 1952), and *Androcles and the Lion* (Chester Erskine, 1952) as well as directing six other RKO features-he was effectively protected from being blacklisted in spite of his political radicalism. This enabled him—while seeking to become an independent producer of his own work and collaborating on a script with Philip Yordan, a celebrated front for blacklisted screenwriters—to make *Johnny Guitar*, arguably the only film of the period to speak about the blacklist (albeit covertly, within Western conventions). It was also his first color feature over which he had some creative control, and he took advantage of this opportunity to make it one of his most poetic works-and arguably the first of many with a stylized *mise en scène* that often seems on the verge of breaking into the choreography of a musical. (Though this freedom in playing with genre conventions characterizes most of his work, *Johnny Guitar* is arguably his only film to exhibit a similar freedom in relation to gender: positing two women as the strongest characters in a group consisting mainly of outlaws and the members of a lynch mob.)

By showing how one could place one's personal stamp on all the diverse studio house styles of the '50s-a Trucolor Western at Republic in the case of *Johnny Guitar*, and also, among other things, a couple of cosmic romantic parables at Warners (*Rebel Without a Cause* [1955], *Wind Across the Everglades*), the same glimpses of suburban and small-town Middle American mediocrity that characterized 20th Century-Fox pictures like *Good Morning, Miss Dove* (Henry Koster, 1955) in *Bigger Than Life* (1956, which probably used portions of the same studio backlot), the cheaper settings of a Romany melodrama at Columbia (*Hot Blood*), and the glitzier trappings of a lush '20s Chicago gangster movie at M-G-M with an even splashier sense of color (*Party Girl* [1958])-Ray was already fast becoming a role model to the soon-to-be directors of the New Wave who were celebrating his dynamic style, especially Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, and Truffaut. And a special feeling for teenagers (especially apparent in *They Live By Night*, *Knock On Any Door* [1949], *Johnny Guitar*, *Run For Cover* [1955], *Rebel Without a Cause*, and *We Can't Go Home Again* [1976]) only enhanced his appeal.

Yet the signs of Ray's personal stamp weren't merely stylistic but also occult gestures of a particular kind: alluding to the direct references to Ray's personality, his first Hollywood apartment, and his recently busted-up marriage to Gloria Grahame in *In a Lonely Place*, American film critic Dave Kehr once noted in a capsule review that "The film's subject is the attractiveness of instability, and Ray's self-examination is both narcissistic and sharply critical, in fascinating combination." (1) (The same sort of deadly romantic mix, which led some French enthusiasts to link him to Rimbaud, was noted more critically by Jean-Marie Straub when he once observed that Ray, in contrast to the relative clarity and lack of sentimentality in a Hawks or a Buñuel, "is always fascinated by violence, and so, at a certain moment, he slips on the side of the police.") (2) Furthermore, a passionate desire to

place his mark on the work can even be felt in Ray appearing in the final shot of *Rebel Without a Cause*, walking towards the planetarium—not the sort of detail needed by the plot, the theme, or the *mise en scène*, but something closer to a naked paw print perhaps, a gesture of possessiveness and exhibitionism that paradoxically thrives on an innate sense of privacy.

Indeed, by the time Ray burned most of his bridges in Hollywood while veering in the direction of cosmic international parables (including *Bitter Victory* and *The Savage Innocents*, two of his finest and most affecting films), he was arguably beginning to value gestures of a certain defiant and personal nature over practically anything else. This was certainly the sense I had of Ray when I met him a few times in the mid-'70s, in Cannes, Paris, and lower Manhattan, while he was still working on two separate versions of his radical independent feature with hippie and student collaborators, *We Can't Go Home Again* (the second and better of which was sadly never completed), when the bravado style of the maverick became his principal calling card. It could be argued that the splintered effects of his most expensive and least expensive features, made a decade apart—*55 Days in Peking* (1963) and *We Can't Go Home Again*—represent two different kinds of shambles, although both certainly have their expressive moments. (If I had to choose between them, I'd probably opt for the second, certainly the more original of the two.) Sterling Hayden's tag line in *Johnny Guitar*, "I'm a stranger here myself," eventually became Ray's motto and perhaps even his alibi, making it appropriate that a sympathetic feature-length documentary about him in 1974 by David Helpern Jr. and James C. Gutman carried that title. (For a sharp and tender account of his last years by Susan Ray, the last of his many wives, see her essay "The Autobiography of Nicholas Ray" which serves as introduction to the collection of his writing and transcribed classes, *I Was Interrupted*, which she edited.)



By that time, almost a decade had passed since he collapsed on the set of *55 Days at Peking*, his last commercial effort, and subsequently was barred from returning (the remaining direction assigned to Andrew Marton and Guy Green), and the ravages of drugs and alcoholism had limited his capacities for sustained work. This eventually changed shortly before his death when he joined AA and successfully gave up drinking, shortly before he contracted brain cancer—a tragedy that limited his final effort, a collaboration with Wim Wenders that yielded two versions of the same film, *Nick's Movie* and *Lightning Over Water* (both 1980), that were principally an act of witness to his dying, in which his creative participation, due to his physical condition, was only fitful. (The first version, edited by Peter Przygodda, is said to be the more accurate as an account of the shooting—although the second, recently released on DVD in France, contains an unforgettably ferocious monologue delivered by Ray in the hospital to a video camera.)

Yet the strength of his first dozen or so years as a filmmaker remains unshakable: 18 features, most of which could plausibly be called masterpieces of one kind or another. (At the very least, *They Live By Night*, *In a Lonely Place*, *On Dangerous Ground*, *The Lusty Men*, *Johnny Guitar*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Bigger Than Life*, *Bitter Victory*, *Wind Across the Everglades*, *Party Girl*, and *The Savage Innocents*—and potent stretches in most of the others, including even *King of Kings* [1961].) Robin Wood once noted that no one ever gives a bad performance in a Ray film, not even Anthony Quinn, and on balance the statement is far less hyperbolic

than it sounds. It's hard to think of another Western with as many vivid and singular characters as *Johnny Guitar*, or two wooden actors used more creatively and movingly than Robert Taylor and Cyd Charisse in *Party Girl*. Maybe that's because even within a vision as fundamentally bleak and futile as Ray's, a clear view of paradise is never entirely out of mind or even definitively out of reach. This is the utopian promise of the '30s and the '60s that his work keeps alive, and it remains a precious legacy.

Anthony Lane: "Only the Lonely" (*New Yorker*, 2003

I blame the French. In the nineteen-fifties, the young guns of *Cahiers du Cinéma* turned their sights upon American film. François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Jacques Rivette, among others, declared their immortal love for certain American directors. "Cinema is Nicholas Ray," Godard wrote. Then, as now, French dreaminess about America was nicely entwined with disdain, allowing a critic of the Old World both to laud his master in the New and to sneer at the society that failed to share such reverence. The viewers who stayed away from Ray's "Johnny Guitar," say, didn't know what they were missing.

Poor Nick Ray. No artist should be asked to weather such unmitigated awe. The French were right to honor the convulsive strangeness of "Johnny Guitar" (1954), the tale of a saloonkeeper (Joan Crawford) fighting, with the aid of an old flame (Sterling Hayden), to survive a lynch mob. Only foreign eyes, perhaps, could widen with suitable amazement, and without a tremolo of sniggers, at the movie's lunging gestures and superheated tones. When our heroine is advised to change out of her milk-white dress to evade pursuit, she sensibly slips into a shirt of blinding red, suggesting that she has also found time to don a radioactive bra. What Godard and his colleagues could not register—and what, as moralists of the pure image, they would dismiss as irrelevant—were the qualities that an American audience would bring to bear. Good sense, the narrative urge, a limited patience for the warped and the whimsical: all would be tested by a film like "Johnny Guitar," which seems about as clued in to actual cowboys as Puccini's "The Girl of the Golden West." The movie is majestic, but, like the face of Joan Crawford, which could have been chipped from the buttress of a Gothic cathedral, it is howlingly close to mad.

New Yorkers can now judge how deep the madness went. The film department of the Museum of Modern Art is laying on a retrospective entitled "Nicholas Ray, Writ Large," which runs through April 12th. "Flying Leathernecks," his 1951 saga of a Marine Air Corps squadron, will be screened in rare three-strip Technicolor, which should do wonders for the peaches-and-cream complexion of John Wayne. Hunters of oddity will lock on to "High Green Wall," a 1954 television film adapted from a short story by Evelyn Waugh. (Now *there's* an unlikely duo: think of a Joshua Reynolds repainted by van Gogh.) Then, we get new prints of movies like "In a Lonely Place" (1950), "The Lusty Men" (1952), "Hot Blood" (1956), "Bigger Than Life" (1956), and "Bitter Victory" (1958), the very titles of which should serve as an ominous introduction. Ray's movies, which deal with everything from dancing Gypsies to a middle-class cortisone addict, teem with solitude; one staggers out of them with the

dizzying suspicion that men and women are like planets and moons, each following a predestined curve, repeatedly tugged or slung away by the gravity of other bodies. All of Ray can be boiled down to a single word from "In a Lonely Place." Humphrey Bogart plays a Hollywood screenwriter who is suspected of killing a hat-check girl. The morning after the crime, he is visited by a cop, a friend who fought beside him in the war, and who now comes bearing news:

***{: .break one} ** "You know I got married." "Why?" ***

Nicholas Ray (1911-79) was born Raymond Nicholas Kienzle, in Galesville, Wisconsin. He studied under Frank Lloyd Wright and later claimed that if Wright could be detected anywhere in his movies it was in "my liking for Cinemascope." That liking found concrete form in "Rebel Without a Cause" (1955)—think of the tussle that James Dean has with a knife-swiping rival on a platform of land below the planetarium, which they've just visited on a class trip. Everything about the scene—the hard blue day, the stabbing of the whitewall tires, the parapet overlooking the city against which the boys sidle and thrust, the bird's-eye view of the brawl—brands itself on your gaze as smartly as any crisis of your own teen-age years. The silvery motions of youth are staged with enough grace to make you gasp but not so much that they look stage-managed. Ray would have made great musicals; watch "Rebel" again, then wonder what he might have done with "West Side Story."

As a director, he hit his stride at once, and his career flourished as swiftly as it expired. A mere fifteen years separate his startling début, "They Live by Night" (1948), from "Fifty-five Days at Peking," in which Charlton Heston saves the Imperial City from marauding hordes. It is common practice to compare Ray's fluidly personal works, such as "Rebel Without a Cause," with the cooler, more solidified projects that were entrusted to him by the studios. But it is also a mark of dedication that the visionary—Ray was labelled "the Mystic" by Robert Mitchum—should impose himself, or at least the acute angle at which he sees the world, upon the most stubborn environment. There was a tough-guy challenge in the way epic assignments were handed, like untamable horses, to Hollywood men whose gift for intimacy hinted at a delicate emotional constitution. Thus, the William Wyler of "The Heiress" found himself saddled with "Ben-Hur," Anthony Mann was given "El Cid" as a reward—or rebuke—for his tense, unhappy Westerns, and Ray shifted from "On Dangerous Ground" and "In a Lonely Place" to juggernauts like "Fifty-five Days at Peking" and "King of Kings."

Even here, however, a nervy brilliance sneaks through. To current filmgoers, nothing is more Biblically remote than the epoch in which their forerunners sat through "King of Kings" (1961), a retelling of the life of Christ. Certainly, the sight of Robert Ryan, the veteran of three previous Rays, swapping his overcoat and fedora for the fetching sheepskin outfit of John the Baptist is less than spiritually convincing, and a more merciful God would have allowed him to disappear completely into his enormous beard. But, against the odds, the movie comes alive: first, after the slaughter of the innocents, as Herod cracks with remorse—the Jimmy Dean of year zero. Finer still is the healing of the blind man, a brief and wordless sequence played out in patterns of light and dark: a stick taps along a white wall, then touches the shadow cast by Jesus' head. Thus cured, the man slumps in terrified joy. The film has nothing to tell us about the redemption of sin, but there are moments when it redeems the kitsch of a derided genre.

And so to the question that nags at Ray's achievement, and that may be answered by *MoMA*'s invigorating season: Was he a man of moments, or do the pictures hang together? As early as 1953, Jacques Rivette identified in Ray a "taste for paroxysm, which imparts something of the feverish and impermanent to the most tranquil of moments." "On Dangerous Ground" (1951), a high point of neurosis in film noir, stars Robert Ryan as a cop so tautened by his calling that the simplest act turns savage; in his apartment, he washes and dries his hands as if wringing the neck of an invisible suspect. As for "Rebel Without a Cause," it is not just a portrait of adolescence; it breathes haltingly, with adolescent lungs, unable, like so much in Ray, to contain itself under the pressure of the encroaching world. You long, occasionally, for urbanity, for the comic shrug that would lower the temperature of feeling—as you do with Martin Scorsese, who is surely Ray's most forceful heir, sharing his tendency to switch scale (think of "Mean Streets" ballooning into "Gangs of New York") and his relief that, in a universe of unstable loyalties, there is always the color red. I love "The Lusty Men," Ray's saddest work, and, like every viewer before me, I am felled by the beauty of the shot that finds Mitchum—a rodeo rider—limping amid gusts of trash through a vacant arena, with the sharp, heartbreaking light of late afternoon slicing in from the side. At the same time, I cannot rid myself of an anecdote reported by Mitchum's biographer, Lee Server. A leading lady was required, and Susan Hayward was brought in, on loan from Twentieth Century Fox, while the script was still being written. She sat and knitted for a while, as Ray spoke of his characters and their various plights. Finally, she put down her knitting and said, "Listen, I'm from Brooklyn. What's the *story*?"

Serena Bramble: "The Heart is a 'Lonely' Hunter; On Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place*" (*Senses of Cinema*, 2011)

It is not impossible to believe that before Nicolas Ray there was never an American director who better understood the unbearable fragility of being human. From his debut film, 1949's film noir *They Live by Night*, Ray approached the most masculine of genres and infused it with an intense embrace for his protagonists who were always trying to stay one step ahead of their existentially fatal choices. From Jesus Christ to James Dean, Ray always found a poignant humanity on the script's page and a way to allow his actors to bare their souls in front of the camera's gaze.

Ray would always proclaim that the most personal film he ever made was 1950's *In a Lonely Place*, the second film Ray made under Humphrey Bogart's Santana Pictures Production banner (their first was 1949's rather pedantic *Knock on Any Door*). The story which Ray and Bogart found themselves drawn to was based on a novel by Dorothy B. Hughes, originally featuring a World War II veteran who impersonates others' identities while sating his appetite for brutal murders. Possibly forced by the Production Code to tone down the violence, but probably more influenced by Ray's natural instinct to trace his myriad flaws in his alter-egos, the focus of film's screenplay was shifted to the story of Dixon "Dix" Steele (Bogart), a down-trodden Los Angeles screenwriter whose violent and self-loathing impulses conflict with his ability to find work, making him the prime suspect in the murder case of a girl he barely knew.

Like Ray's feature debut, *They Live by Night*, the true heart of this film noir lies not in the hardboiled dialogue nor the mystery of who killed Mildred Atkinson – James M. Palmer once wrote that "Anyone viewing *In a Lonely Place* solely as a murder mystery will surely be disappointed" (1) – but in its wretchedly real depiction of love in all its complicated beauty. The fraught relationship at the

centre of the film is between Dix and his neighbour, weary actress Laurel Gray (played by a headstrong Gloria Grahame, Ray's real-life wife). First seen from afar – both emotionally and physically – she comes closer to Dix when she provides him with a much-needed alibi, assists him to write his screenplay, and finally the grants love he so badly desires and eagerly reciprocates, tenderly, tragically, and truly.

But as Dixon Steele would probably understand, dramatic structure dictates that an obstacle must test their love in order to prove its strength. The film's greatest gift is an understanding of the maturity of its characters and its audience – for the fault, dear reader, lies not in the stars but in the couple's hearts. Their relationship is forced to contain not only their sincere love for each other, but also the magnitude of their insecurities, their inability to communicate normally, and the stress of the ongoing murder investigation – all of which cause Dix's violent streak to resurface and force Laurel to re-examine the man she loves before his violence turns upon her and escalates towards the unthinkable. Even in the film's most romantic moments, every frame is laced with Dix's possessiveness over Laurel. The film's tragedy lies in Dix's acute knowledge of his own imperfections, always drawn from insecurity rather than malice. When he does indeed spiral towards self-destruction, the gravity of his guilt – as he takes a moment to compose himself – is beautifully echoed by Diego Rivera's painting, *The Flower Carrier*, positioned on the wall.

When Bogart's wife Lauren Bacall was unable to play Laurel because of contractual difficulties with her studio, Ray marshalled the talents of his own spouse Grahame in a casting move that highlights the very "homemade" nature of this production. Saving star couple Bogart and Bacall a potential examination of whatever cracks they may have had in their seemingly perfect union, the film can instead be viewed as a final farewell poem to the turbulent "shotgun" marriage of Ray and Grahame, who quietly separated during filming and divorced shortly after. Indeed, the film's most famous lines ("I was born when she kissed me, I died when she left me, I lived a few weeks while she loved me") have become a poignant ode to the temporary nature of all relationships. Channelling through Dix, Ray conveys an examination of his own temper, his fear of hurting his wife, and his own sad realisation that the end of their relationship would ultimately be for the best.

If Dix remains one of Ray's many alter-egos, it's also very possible that the director's good friend Bogart found his own personal traits and demons in this, his deepest role (it even appropriates his habit of ordering ham and eggs). Dix provided Bogart with a vehicle to rage against the machine that had undervalued and underpaid him time and again, as well as the "popcorn salesmen" more interested in the speedy earning of profit than the laboured journey of art. Louise Brooks once observed that of all the roles Bogart played, it was indeed Dixon Steele that reminded her the most of the relatively unknown actor she knew during the 1930s:

In a Lonely Place gave him a role that he could play with complexity because the film character's, the screenwriter's, pride in his art, his selfishness, his drunkenness, his lack of energy stabbed with lightning strokes of violence, were shared equally by the real Bogart. (2)

If Bogart managed to evade Dix's despair due to his new freelance status and happy marriage, the darkness crowding his character remains so deep that it could have supplied enough material for a sequel (which sadly never materialised). As Ray himself once said, "At the ending of that film, you do not know whether the man is going to go out, get drunk, have an accident in his car or whether he is going to go to a psychiatrist for help. And that's the way it should be." (3) As Laurel and Dix face an uncertain future, Ray's final question to his audience would have made Sartre proud: Is a man doomed to face the eternal return of his past mistakes, or does he have the power to rewrite himself as a new character?

Graham Fuller: "Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place* as Psychodrama *(Cineaste*, 2016)

Numerous Hollywood movies celebrate the redemptive power of love. Few trace, step by step, the progress of a love affair that brings about a protagonist's redemption only to disintegrate, canceling hope irrevocably. That is the fate of Dixon Steele in Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place* (1950). Dix carves it out for himself after little more than three weeks of romantic bliss with his neighbor Laurel Gray. The cause is his inability to subdue his violent temper.

Cinema is peppered with personal psychodramas, films in which directors or stars participate, knowingly or not, in alternative versions of their own lives: Louise Brooks in *Pandora's Box,* François Truffaut in the Antoine Doinel series, Jean-Luc Godard in *Pierrot le fou,* Ingrid Bergman in *Autumn Sonata,* Jodie Foster in *Nell,* Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise in *Eyes Wide Shut. In a Lonely Place* is one of the most bitter and disturbing examples.

When Ray directed his wife Gloria Grahame as Laurel opposite Humphrey Bogart's Dix, he made art imitate life by fueling his atypical film noir with the atmosphere of his ailing marriage, which wasn't seventeen months old when production began at the end of October 1949. They split up during the shoot, reunited, and eventually divorced in August 1952. Each would have a third and fourth spouse (Grahame's last being her former stepson Tony Ray, Nick's first-born), so they did continue to reach for the kind of happiness that Ray must have felt would elude Dix permanently. Yet for both Ray and Grahame, *In a Lonely Place* was an existential nodal point; given Grahame's history of turbulent relationships with unstable men, it might even be argued that the circumspect Laurel was a restrained self-portrait.

Dix and Laurel's idyll is marred by each partner's gathering mistrust of the other. The police detectives Brub Nicolai (Frank Lovejoy), who served under Dix during World War II, Captain Lochner (Carl Benton Reid), and Ted Barton (William Ching) play their parts in stoking Dix's paranoia by harassing him as a plausible suspect in the murder of the cloakroom attendant Mildred Atkinson (Martha Stewart). His ungovernable rages—what would now be termed collectively as "intermittent explosive disorder"—give Laurel good reason to suspect Dix of Mildred's murder. For his part, Dix suspects Laurel of colluding in the police's surveillance of him and eventually questions her fidelity, too. His persecution complex kicks in during the nightclub scene where Dix and Laurel are at their most publicly intimate until Barton and his wife show up, and on the beach after Brub's wife Sylvia (Jeff Donnell) lets slip that Lochner had interviewed Laurel a second time. Driving crazily from the shore into the hills with a terrified Laurel beside him, Dix cuts off and damages another car, then nearly batters the irate young driver to death. Dix draws not only on Ray's inherited manic depressiveness but also on Bogart's insecurities, alcoholism, and habit of brawling.

Ray, who was contracted to RKO, had directed Bogart in the courtroom noir *Knock on Any Door* (1949), the first film made by Bogart and

Robert Lord's Columbia-based Santana Productions. The collaboration was comfortable so Santana exercised their option to have Ray direct a second film, which was *In a Lonely Place*. Edmund H. North's adaptation of Dorothy Hughes's novel was set aside for a screenplay written by Andrew Solt that Bogart approved but which Ray tweaked constantly during the shoot. Bogart wanted Lauren Bacall, his wife, to play Laurel but Warner Bros. refused to release her. Columbia chief Harry Cohn suggested Ginger Rogers, but Ray persuaded him that Grahame, also at RKO, would be a better choice and Howard Hughes permitted her loan-out.

Before filming began, according to reports in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, Grahame signed a bizarre contract stipulating that "my husband shall be entitled to direct, control, advise, instruct and even command my actions during the hours from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., every day except Sunday…I acknowledge that in every conceivable situation his will and judgment shall be considered superior to mine and shall prevail." Grahame was also forbidden to "nag, cajole, tease or in any other feminine fashion seek to distract or influence him." In *Suicide Blonde: The Life of Gloria Grahame,* author Vincent Curcio notes that it was Lord who insisted on the contract, based on his "twenty-five years of experience as a married man." Grahame fought it, believing it indentured her to "slave labor," but she was quoted as saying she signed it in the end. Curators of exhibitions devoted to the women's movement might want to seek out this document, assuming it existed, and display it as an example of male supremacism.

Details about Laurel disclosed by Mel Lippmann (Art Smith), Dix's motherly agent, and Martha (Ruth Gillette), Laurel's over-opinionated masseuse, reveal that she is a struggling movie actress avoiding her former lover, an unseen real-estate investor called Baker, who had built a swimming pool at her last home because it raised the property's value for *him* and who was implicitly as domineering as Dix. (Because Martha is butch, many commentators regard her as a lesbian attracted to Laurel, but since she is aggrieved that Laurel left Baker, her main value to the film is as Baker's aggressive surrogate.) So far unsuccessful in movies, Laurel is in danger of becoming a chattel or, as Bernard Eisenschitz writes in *Nicholas Ray: An American Journey*, "a negotiable asset…passed from hand to hand and trying to take decisions which aren't hers to make."

This was "strategically…not without its dangers," Eisenschitz ventures, referring to the possibility that Grahame might have resented the worrying implications for her image and tried to liberate Laurel from such a demeaning position after shooting had begun. Thus Ray supposedly "took extreme precautions with the consent of the producers" by imposing the contract on his wife. Ray had married Grahame in 1948; later, he admitted, "I didn't like her very much." According to Patrick McGilligan's Ray biography, she was unfaithful to him; Curcio's theory is that Grahame sought to incite Ray to the kind of jealous passion she had experienced in her marriage to the actor Stanley Clements. Though the filming of *In a Lonely Place* went smoothly—candid photos from the set show Ray and Grahame working harmoniously and enjoying each other's company—they reportedly feuded after hours. Ray believed Frank Lovejoy was

covering up for Grahame's nocturnal absences from their home and retaliated by limiting close-ups of him. Jeff Donnell recalled that when she and her husband, drama coach Bill Anderson, had dinner with Ray and Grahame during production, Ray grilled Grahame about where she had been the night before—Gloria used Jeff as an alibi—and the Rays ended up screaming at each other.

Ray must have known that getting Grahame to sign a work contract that was antediluvian even for 1949 would have no effect on her after-hours activities. What, though, if he imposed it to instill in her the sense that she was being controlled for nine hours a day, to induce in her the caged-animal quality Laurel exudes in Dix's presence after the beating incident in the hills? Grahame was too intuitive an actress to need manipulating in such a way, but even if the contract—which she may have signed because starring opposite Bogart would boost her Hollywood status—did not seep into her conception of the character, contributing to Laurel's evident anxiety, the efforts at psychological control it suggests are nevertheless mirrored in Dix's increasing possessiveness.

Once Laurel has admitted to herself that she has fallen for Dix and is "interested" in embarking on a relationship, Ray instantly reorients the mise en scène to place her in subservient positions to him (which echo her position to Martha during the massage scene). After Dix makes an arch quip about Laurel's hesitancy in announcing "the official results" of her deliberations on getting involved with him, Ray shows him looking down at her from a very high angle, then cuts to a shot of her looking up at him from below, her head suggestively adjacent to his loins at a distance of about ten inches. Another high-angle shot of Dix is followed by one of him placing his hands around her throat as he leans down to kiss her. The next shot shows her head dwarfed by his body as his hands appear to tighten. The tone of the sequence, set by George Antheil's deceptively soupy score, is contrapuntally romantic and even elicits audience sympathy for Dix, who confesses to the more assured Laurel that he had been looking for someone to love. Neither character is conscious of the murderous implications of his body language, unlike the viewer, who is privy to cinematographer Burnett Guffey's claustrophobic framing, the sequence's oppressiveness, and—having seen Dix gloatingly "direct" Brub and Sylvia in re-creating Mildred's strangling as he imagines it—his ingrained misogyny, otherwise manifested via off-color wisecracks.

As film noirs reflected, the late 1940s was a period characterized by sociosexual tensions: military personnel brutalized by the war returned to a much-altered American home front, in which women were exerting newfound independence. Perhaps responding to these tensions, Ray further demolished audience expectations for a satisfying resolution to *In a Lonely Place* by making the marriage proposal sequence one of the film's most dispiriting, in defiance of the romance genre convention. Before Dix presses Laurel to give him the only answer he'll accept, their interaction in the kitchen shatters any residual illusions the viewer has about his character and Laurel's willingness to tie herself to a dangerously paranoid man. As Dix straightens out a grapefruit knife—suggesting his dislocation, as Laurel's earlier looking for a jolt of coffee in the dregs of some cop's used cup undercut her elegance—and utters screenwriterly lines about how anyone can see that they're in love, Laurel's expression indicates that she no longer is. Ray's medium close-up of her struggling not to cry, after Dix has stood over her threateningly again and left the kitchen, isolates her in a very lonely place.

Grahame's infinitesimal registering of each of Laurel's emotional fibrillations is something to behold: hers is an exquisite performance.

Ray considered the couple's inevitable sundering to be the lesser of two evils. Halfway through production, he shot the ending Solt had written. Learning that Laurel is about to desert him, Dix strangles her (as Grahame's unfaithful wife would be strangled by her paranoid husband in Fritz Lang's 1954 *Human Desire*) and carries on working (his obsessive typing anticipating that of the psychotic Jack Torrance in Stanley Kubrick's 1977 *The Shining*). Ray hated this ending, as he explained when interviewed by Myron Meisel in February 1973 for the biographical documentary *I'm a Stranger Here Myself* (1975), included as a supplement on the Criterion release of *In a Lonely Place*.

"In the meantime, I had separated from my wife," he said of the murder scene's place in the production schedule. "And if I had let the producer Bobby Lord or Bogie know that, they would have gone crazy, or Harry Cohn would have gone crazy. So I said, 'Look, I'm having trouble with the third act. Make an apartment for me in a couple of dressing rooms, 'cause I don't want to drive to Malibu every night. I want to get downstage and work at night.' Which I did. And Gloria behaved beautifully. Nobody knew that we were separated. And I just couldn't believe the ending that Bundy [Solt] and I had written. I shot it because it was my obligation to do it. Then I kicked everybody offstage except Bogart, Art Smith and Gloria. And we improvised the ending as it is now. In the original ending we had ribbons so it was all tied up into a very neat package, with Frank Lovejoy coming in and arresting him as he was writing the last lines, having killed Gloria. Huh! And I thought, shit, I can't do it, I just can't do it! Romances don't have to end that way. Marriages don't have to end that way, they don't have to end in violence. Let the audience make up its own mind what's going to happen to Bogie when he goes outside the apartment."

Ray preserved the film's ending from the nihilism augured by Dix's admission that he's "nobody" by suffusing its last few seconds in lush romanticism. Tears stream down Laurel's face as she leans against the door jamb watching him depart—*below her* now—and murmurs words from the mantric lament he had prophetically originated for the script she, as his muse, had inspired him to write: "I lived a few weeks while you loved me. Goodbye Dix."

She is young enough to find someone else. Dix halts fleetingly as he strides out of the courtyard where they had first met but then exits the frame. In an interview with *Movie*, Ray said: "You do not know whether the man is going to go out, to get drunk, have an accident in his car, or whether he is going to go to a psychiatrist for help," as Mel had once recommended he do.

"And that's the way it should be; either one of the two things could happen to him because now the pressure is off, but now there is an internal pressure," Ray concluded. "He has a problem about himself." It begs the questions: did Ray or Grahame, in partially feeding their lives to their art, learn anything about themselves from making *In a Lonely Place*? If they did, why were they powerless to prevent their marriage becoming a fiasco in 1951, to the extent that Ray had to move out and could never go home again, as if he were walking in Dix Steele's footsteps.

Fiona Villella: "Shadows on the Horizon: *In a Lonely Place*" (*Senses of Cinema*, 2000)

The ending is dark, absolute. The image is filled with a heavy, pounding score keyed to a low, sombre tone; it is, above all, thick and dramatic. A brilliantly swift and economic succession of shots bring the film to closure: *she* is on the phone, speaking to the police department, indirectly

informing *him*, who stands at the apartment door, that their relationship is over; he disappears beyond the door; she hangs up the phone; in wide-shot, he is walking through the apartment complex; she is leaning against the door, watching him leave through her tears; in wide-shot, he is walking through the archway into the night of eternal solitude (from whence he emerged).

Nicholas Ray's *In A Lonely Place* (1950) can be measured on a scale of intensity, with the final sequence – the violent end of innocence and the fully-blown re-established regime of irrationality, hurt and loneliness – registering as pure abstract. Although the film meets Hollywood prerequisites of narrative drama and suspense, it also goes above and beyond Hollywood codes and values – just one instance of Ray fitting neatly the original definition of the *politique de auteurs*. *In A Lonely Place* is a film with not only a cynical view of Hollywood but also one with a central character that is figured with ambiguity and complexity, from which the film draws incredibly poignant and intense tension, that is unusual for Hollywood. Ray's film is one of the finest *noir* melodramas Hollywood ever produced; it is a film in which all elements – performance, story, score, lighting and editing – work in complete concert to realise the emotional weight of its drama.

The film takes place in Hollywood – everyone you meet on the street, driving beside you, in the restaurant you're at, in your adjacent apartment, is in the movie business, somehow. The main character Dix Steele (Humphrey Bogart) is a screenwriter who refuses to work on a project he doesn't like (which normally translates into that which is formulaic); he is a jaded and cynical type played as only Bogart could who withdraws from the Hollywood world of big lights, premieres, egos, and artificiality. Perhaps Dix can be viewed as a visage of Ray himself. Being an artist in Tinseltown is being *In A Lonely Place*. But here is a man not only at odds with the world around him but also a truly creative artist, and so "dynamic", "superior", "exciting", "different", "abnormal". Being an artist means living in a world of *intensities* – your mind and body gripped by forces and instincts that transcend all systems of rationality. From the same source that springs imagination, springs paranoia, anxiety, and fear – only a step away from paroxysms of destructive, violent behaviour. At times, all aspects of the film (the score, the lighting, the performances) unite powerfully to reach a point of heightened abstraction that expresses this *intensity*: for example, the film's 10-minute finale or the scene where Dix re-enacts the murder of Mildred Atkinson and a band of light overlays his boggling eyes (the film's plastics here gripped and abstracted by the intensity of Dix's emotional state).

Ray's own vision – his views on commercial cinema and the difficulty of being an artist in Hollywood – is so intricately and cleverly translated into, and effectively cloaked by, Hollywood codes of narrative and fiction (a murder, a love story, drama and suspense). But not merely does Ray ingenuously criticise Hollywood from within, he also constructs the story in honest and truly bleak terms, rare in Hollywood cinema. That is, the love story is 'real': it's about people who really and deeply need each other and a love that is burnt and frazzled because of anxiety, irrationality, hysteria – those mad, intense forces that grip and overwhelm, that turn white into black, day into night. As articulated many times throughout the film, Dix is "strange", he's not like other people. His old army pal, and now investigator, Brub, tells his superior: "you never know what he's thinking". Ultimately there is a price for imagination, artistry and vision. The eclipse of love and the tragic loss of innocence is the final gesture which *In A Lonely Place* makes and the one that registers fully this price of artistic genius: loneliness.

In A Lonely Place is often discussed as an example of American *film noir*, but the film really suggests more than this. It is such a rich and multi-

levelled drama with themes and sub-themes touching many areas: art vs. commerce, fame and immortality, illusion vs. reality, artistic temperament, adult love, human weakness and psychosis. It is perhaps one example of Hollywood at its bleakest in its inclination to suggest and reveal the dark forces and instincts dancing around in the unconscious that so easily tip the individual into paroxysms of uncontrolled violence and irrational anxiety. Of course this theme of irrepressible desire, the dark edge of the unconscious is so associated with *film noir*, the 'night' of Hollywood. But the beauty of *In a Lonely Place* is its 'honesty': it's not told through stereotypes (the *femme fatale*, the gullible male) nor does it rely on visceral or suspenseful techniques belonging to the action, crime or thriller genres. *In a Lonely Place* is fixed on human frailties and vulnerabilities, the consuming force of irrational desire and, the melodrama of relationships within this context.

The love affair at the centre of the film, between Dixon Steele (Humphrey Bogart) and Laurel Gray (Gloria Grahame), begins rapidly. Though neighbours, they are unknown to each other. This is not to say that a few slight, curious glances and smiles have not been exchanged. However, it is not until the investigation into the murder of Mildred Atkinson – who was at Dixon's apartment earlier that night – that their paths cross. Things move swiftly: she is honest and upfront ("I liked his face", she states to the police captain); Dix, provoked by the charming and smooth Laurel, is curious and gets his agent to perform some preliminary research on her. Back at their apartment complex, Laurel visits Dix under the pretext of a general inquiry, which leads quickly to a flirtatious and wonderfully rhythmic wise-cracking routine. But when he tries to kiss and lure her, she steps away, with perfect grace, confirming her independence in thought and action.

Laurel and Dix don't make a couple instantaneously: there is a period of waiting and thinking. These fools don't rush in; they need to be sure. A couple of scenes after their first exchange – when Dix's forwardness is met by Laurel's cool aloofness and signalled hesitance – Dix visits Laurel at her apartment to learn her feelings anew. This man, who is governed by his emotions, his feelings, enters the apartment quivering uncontrollably. In the scene before this one, he was at his old friend Brub's home, perfectly at ease, confident and charming. But before the utterly graceful, possibly unattainable, Laurel, he is helpless. Clutching the door, his gaze – angled at her – is marked by fear and intimidation. He nervously reaches for the chair and doesn't let go till he's seated. Small talk and precious jokes veneer the sea of anxiety and anticipation that grips Dix – just one example of his 'nervous' energy. Then suddenly this desperate and longing soul interrupts Laurel with the burning question of whether she is interested in him. She answers yes, declares her love and the two embrace tenderly.

The 'honesty' of *In A Lonely Place* is that both Dix and Laurel are 'searching' individuals. The smoothness and directness of Laurel (played superbly and flawlessly by the radiant Gloria Grahame) and whose confidence suggests a *femme fatale*, reflects the surety and maturity of an experienced woman. Both Dix and Laurel have emerged from a past of failed relationships and loneliness: Laurel has run away from a former lover and Dix is a lonely and disenchanted Hollywood screenwriter. And so they know what precious joy it is to be really in love. And when these disconnected, lost souls do finally join, it is with a knowing, heartfelt embrace. Dix, holding Laurel's face, reflects poetically that he has finally found the woman he was been waiting for. And so begins this precious love affair.

The film's characters belong to a space that could hardly be circumscribed as socially conventional. In fact, there is a certain romantic disillusionment that hovers over *In A Lonely Place* and is evident in various ways: in snippets of dialogue between characters (eg: Brub to Dix (proudly): "I got married"; Dix: "why?"; Brub (jokingly): "Oh, I don't know, I guess she had a couple of bucks to spare"); the notion of 'adult love' between Dix and Laurel and their own personal situations; Dix's hostile attitude toward Hollywood and 'fame'; and the drunken poet, former actor Charlie sputtered out of the Hollywood system. There are also the strange 'power' relationships: Mal, the agent, and Dix; Martha, the masseur, and Laurel (whom she calls "Angel"). But this is part of the appeal of the film: that it takes place in a world that is post-Hollywood-idealism, that's sharp and witty, honest and raw, slightly perverse yet also deeply romantic. It is no surprise then that the cynical, jaded Dix cares deeply for Charlie – who through his constant poetic murmuring, suggests an eloquence and richness that Hollywood (forever seeking the latest 'fad') could never embrace.

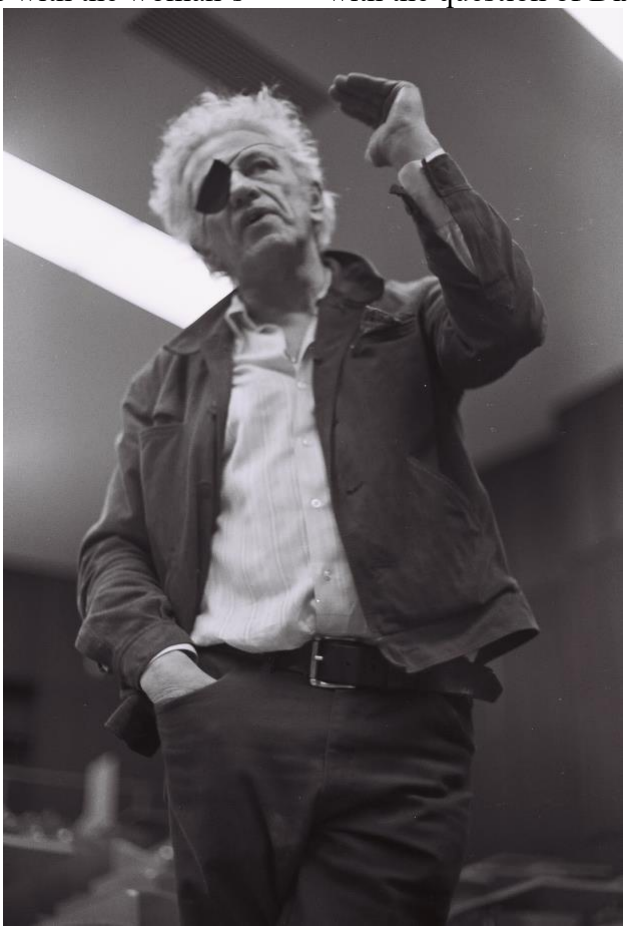
So genuinely close to the needs and desires of its lonely protagonists, *In A Lonely Place* is a melodrama of intensities, emotions. One aspect of this 'intensity' that Ray draws is the love between Dix and Laurel: it is shown to be the force from which springs all life. The scene immediately after their resolved 'togetherness' – a scene dominated by a taut, trembling tone – is light, open, free. Dix is working hard adapting a novel into a script (which only a few days earlier he vehemently rejected on the basis that it was 'trash') while Laurel is caring and nursing for him. We see this all from the perspective of Mal, standing outside the home peering through a window. Dix's home is suddenly transformed into a light and magical place (wonderfully signalled by the playful turn in the score); above all, it is a place of *balance*, with all elements – work, care, love and respect – locked into a synergetic harmony. Of course, the flowering of Dix's abundant energy and Laurel's maternal instincts is rooted directly in their mutual love. Its profits can also be seen in the sense of community that they form, and in particular the way they financially help Charlie and, in turn, the way he fills the house with poetry and gaiety. Dix and Laurel are even pitched as the favourite couple in the film – not only do they shine separately but they radiate together: their rhythmic wise-cracking and absurd gayness puts them at complete odds with the totally straight and average, boring and forgettable, Brub and Sylvia. But a love that shines so brightly – that is so charged – must also burn just as rapidly.

Although there is no overlap between the script Dix is working on and the story of the film, at several points the two merge. At one point in the film, Dix goes over a piece of dialogue to Laurel that he's thinking of inserting in the script:

"I was born when she kissed me
I died when she left me
I lived a few weeks while she loved me"

At the end of the film, this becomes a poignant epigram for their love. It is of course what Laurel murmurs painfully as she watches Dix walk through the archway. The life-stream of loneliness and despair that these characters inhabit is occasionally punctured with bursts of intensity, of love and life. This theme of the beat of life, a beat pumped by the *intensity* of love and a beat that animates and awakes a character, is at the very heart of the film's formal world itself. We are only with

these characters – they come alive for us – for the period of time in which they meet and fall in love. Before and beyond they are sleeping, somnambulists – and, in fact, the physical appearance of Dix both in the first and last scene suggests this state. We first see him, side-on glance, shrouded in darkness, his face sliced into shards of shadow, sunk into the seat of his car. When a woman's voice from a car alongside him calls his name, his face is emotionless, blank, dead. An ensuing exchange with the woman's male partner, and Dix quickly gets into a broil. The music escalates dramatically – Ray's number one expressionistic device to signal Dix's boiling rage – as Dix moves to get violent on the man. In the final shot, Dix is walking through the archway, his back to the camera, his body completely entranced, poised, somnambulist-like. Meanwhile, the gracious, suffering Laurel will continue to slide through and between crowds in her sleek, reserved manner.



But the intensity of love, that gives rise to the (heart)beat of life, is only one form of intensity. Another is the intensity of fear, insecurity, anxiety, and anger. And both Laurel and Dix are gripped to certain degrees by these intensities. Once Laurel begins to question Dix's innocence – which is presented throughout the film with such ambiguity – she is increasingly overwhelmed by anxiety and fear. The event that triggers these feelings is of course Dix's violent outburst on the young driver, whom he almost kills. At precisely this point, Laurel begins to suspect Dix. Ray builds a heightened and acute tension from here on as the very identity of Dix as a violent murderer and killer becomes incredibly ambiguous. But Ray's artistry – and the film's entire meditation on notions of self-reflexivity, Hollywood storytelling, imagination vs. official discourse – reaches a height when one realises that the essential structure of the plot is based on a complete and utter fiction (that Dix killed Mildred) placed on another fiction (Dix and Laurel's relationship), and that what is ultimately revealed to be completely fictious (that Dix is discovered not to be the murderer) destroys that which produced love and life (1). However, the superb irony of Ray's film is that despite this extra layer of fiction, Dix *is* a potential murderer.

Throughout the film, Ray plays incessantly with the question of Dix's innocence. For example, in the scene in which he brings Mildred Atkinson home, Dix throws his shoes violently against the wall, the banging noise alerting Mildred. At the police interview, he evinces little shock at the news of Mildred's murder (though countered by the following scene in which he buys her flowers); the way he *directs* Brub and Sylvia to dramatise the murder scene; his general frankness toward issues of murder and killing; his past criminal record; and his playing with the grapefruit knife. Dix becomes increasingly shrouded in ambiguity. Above all, he becomes increasingly dominated by those negative, life-destroying forces such as anxiety, paranoia and anger, which manifest in a roughness and impatience toward Laurel. During the scene in which Dix directs Brub and Sylvia to dramatise Mildred's murder – there is a specific point at which the film's style shifts to another register. This is the point at which Dix hones in on the killer's perspective, the thoughts circling his mind, the score makes a sudden piercing noise and a band of light highlights his eyes. Meanwhile, Dix's face is chilled, vengeful, intense. He grits the killer's motivation: ".she deceived you, she's impressed only with celebrities, she looks down on you.squeeze harder.squeeze harder." In this essentially rhythmic

respiration of sound and image, Ray expresses Dix's intensity and roots it in a deep cynicism that is Hollywood related. In this scene, the 'beat' or the pulse, which marks life with an intensity, also marks the image, which becomes 'gripped' by this beat. This pulse that can animate the lifeless can derive from either a good-natured or an evil-natured intensity: ultimately Dix's ability to see, to visualise – his imagination – which can create intensities means that Dix is himself ruled by such an economy. And so, he experiences everything in extremes: deep, passionate love; boiling rage; heightened anxiety; violent outbursts; utter solitude.

Ray is just as interested in dramatising the intensities which animate life that are keyed to a dark, destructive tenor as those which are life-giving and life-assertive. For those who live by intensities – whose damp, dank lives are animated by 'pulses', who are "dynamic" and "exciting" – ultimately die by intensities. And this is the rich and wild path that Ray beckons us to journey. The flowering and the fraying of love. But Ray's accomplishment is that the film is never clinical or predictable. Rather, *In A Lonely Place* is – at every point – a richly layered, finely textured (even the texture and the range of the actors' voices is remarkable), ingenuously crafted and poignantly realised drama that shocks and *intensifies* over and over.

Film noir (Wikipedia)

Film noir is a cinematic term used primarily to describe stylish Hollywood crime dramas, particularly those that emphasize cynical attitudes and motivations. The 1940s and 1950s are generally regarded as the "classic period" of American *film noir*. Film noir of this era is associated with a low-key, black-and-white visual style that has roots in German Expressionist cinematography. Many of the prototypical stories and much of the attitude of classic noir derive from the hardboiled school of crime fictionthat emerged in the United States during the Great Depression.[1]

The term *film noir*, French for 'black film' (literal) or 'dark film' (closer meaning),[2] was first applied to Hollywood films by French critic Nino Frank in 1946, but was unrecognized by most American film industry professionals of that era.[3] Frank is believed to have been inspired by the French literary publishing imprint Série noire, founded in 1945.

Cinema historians and critics defined the category retrospectively. Before the notion was widely adopted in the 1970s, many of the classic films noir[a] were referred to as "melodramas". Whether film noir qualifies as a distinct genre or whether it is more of a filmmaking style is a matter of ongoing debate among scholars.

Film noir encompasses a range of plots: the central figure may be a private investigator (*The Big Sleep*), a plainclothes police officer (*The Big Heat*), an aging boxer (*The Set-Up*), a hapless grifter (*Night and the City*), a law-abiding citizen lured into a life of crime (*Gun Crazy*), or simply a victim of circumstance (*D.O.A.*). Although film noir was originally associated with American productions, the term has been used to describe films from around the world. Many films released from the 1960s onward share attributes with films noir of the classical period, and often treat its conventions self-referentially. Some refer to such latter-day works as neo-noir. The clichés of film noir have inspired parody since the mid-1940s.[4]

THE FALL 2022 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XLV:

August 30 William Wellman ***Wings*** 1927
Sept 6 Jean Renoir **R*ules of the Game*** 1939
Sept 13 Michael Curtiz ***Casablanca*** 1942
Sept 20 Nicholas Ray, ***In a Lonely Place*** 1950
Sept 27 Luis Buñuel ***Viridiana*** 1961
Oct 4 Orson Welles ***Chimes at Midnight*** *1966*
Oct 11 Mel Brooks ***Young Frankenstein*** 1974
Oct 18 Arthur Penn ***Night Moves*** 1975
Oct 25 Sydney Pollack ***Tootsie*** 1982
Nov 1 Akira Kurosawa ***Ran*** 1985
Nov 8 Martin Scorsese ***Goodfellas*** 1990
Nov 15 Hiayo Miyazaki ***The Wind Rises*** 2013
Nov 22 Ava Duvernay ***Selma*** 2014
Nov 29 Pedro Almodóvar ***Parallel Mothers*** 2021
Dec 6 Ang Lee ***Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*** 2000

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