

V.F. PERKINS  
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## The Cinema of Nicholas Ray

All our critics distinguish, more or less explicitly, between commercial and personal cinema. The distinction is occasionally valid, often silly, and always dangerous. It is quite legitimate, for example, to point out that Nicholas Ray has frequently been obliged to work from a scenario with which he was not satisfied: *Run for Cover*, *Hot Blood*, *Party Girl*; that many of his films have been mutilated after completion: *The James Brothers*, *Bitter Victory*, *Wind across the Everglades*, *The Savage Innocents*, *King of Kings*; and that the stories of *The Lusty Men*, *Johnny Guitar* and *Bigger than Life* might look uninviting on paper. But film is not paper, and never can be except in the wishful imagination of a critic who regards his eyes only as the things that he reads with. The distinction between personal and commercial cinema has become a weapon for use against films which do not impress by the obvious seriousness of their stories and dialogue. The director's contribution is as irrelevant to the critical success of *They Live by Night* and *Rebel without a Cause* as it is to the critical neglect of *Johnny Guitar*, *Bigger than Life*, or *Wind across the Everglades*. It is nonsense to say that in *Party Girl* Ray's talent is 'squandered on a perfect idiocy' (Louis Marcorelles in, of all places, *Cahiers du Cinéma*). The treatment may or may not have been successful: there is no such thing as an unsuccessful

subject. Ray has himself criticised the literary preoccupations of some screenwriters. "It was all in the script" a disillusioned writer will tell you. But it was never all in the script. If it were, why make the movie?' The disillusioned writer and the insensitive critic are alike in discounting the very things for which one goes to the cinema: the extraordinary resonances which a director can provoke by his use of actors, decor, movement, colour, shape, of all that can be seen and heard.

Primarily, one sees and hears actors. Ray's films contain a number of performances which can be called great because they give *complete* characterisations: Bogart (*In a Lonely Place*), Mitchum (*The Lusty Men*), Dean, Wood, Backus (*Rebel without a Cause*), Burton (*Bitter Victory*) and Christopher Plummer (*Wind across the Everglades*) spring immediately to mind. But the director's control is proved not so much by the perfection of individual performances as by the consistency with which Ray's actors embody his vision. This consistency is the result – it's an ancient paradox – of the director's search for the *particular* truth of each *particular* situation. Johnny Guitar's isolation is depicted in such specific terms that we appreciate, without directorial emphasis, the wider significance of his remark 'I've a great respect for a gun and, besides, *I'm a stranger here myself*'. In *They Live by Night* Cathy O'Donnell is unable to put her watch right because 'there's no clock here to set it by'. The remark has a specific, complex, dramatic context. We are aware, as the character is not, of its more general relevance for a girl who was 'never properly introduced to the world we live in'.

Ray works with his actors in such a personal way that he is able to utilise what we are accustomed to regard as their defects. The aggressiveness of Susan Hayward (*The Lusty Men*), the arrogance of Robert Wagner (*The James Brothers*), the coldness of Cyd Charisse and the self-conscious charm of Robert Taylor (*Party Girl*), these are all used to intensify situations and convey meanings. Ray is not unique in using actors for their weaknesses as well as their abilities, but he is in the very good company of Hitchcock and Cukor.

Throughout any Ray movie one finds a complete mastery of the – often contradictory – action which expresses more that it does, the ability to convey an idea through a gesture, a hesitation, a movement of the eyes. Much of the meaning

of *King of Kings* is contained in its intricate pattern of looking, glancing and staring. Salome's motivations are revealed almost entirely in these terms. The first image of *Rebel without a Cause* conveys a whole history of confusion and undirected tenderness in the protective gesture with which James Dean draws a newspaper over the body of a toy monkey. *Wind Across the Everglades* expresses the concept of understanding and compromise between two civilisations through the hero's action in sharing a 'peace cigar' with his Seminole friend.

Again, while insisting on Ray's genius in conveying the general through the particular, the abstract through the concrete, I have no wish to claim that it is uniquely *his* gift. It is simply the ability which distinguishes the true filmmaker from the pseudo-director who provides 'photographs of people talking'. And it is an ability which one feels not just in Ray's direction of his actors but in his use of the entire vocabulary of film.

### Time and Place

There are very few directors, for example, who have as great an appreciation of the suggestive powers of decor and locale. Critically, of course, one observes the appropriateness of place to action and theme. But beyond this, when the right location has been found, one becomes aware also of the influence of place on action. Decor, in Ray's films, is the entire visual environment, including (and here he is unique) the time of day.

It is Ray's intense sensitivity to time that makes one feel the night as something more than the absence of sunlight. *Rebel without a Cause* contains the most striking example of this sensitivity in its first planetarium sequence; here Ray makes us feel the intrusion of an artificial night into mid-afternoon. The sense of time is especially heightened in this sequence, but in fact it informs the entire structure of the film. Night is the time of confusion and insecurity, the time when parents are asleep. The film begins at night with a young man falling down drunk in the middle of a dark street. We follow him through two other 'nights', the artificial one in the planetarium and the real one during which James Dean engages in the 'chicken run' – itself an extraordinary evocation of confusion, the blind and dangerous rush along the path to extinction.







By contrast, morning offers the prospect of a new beginning, a journey in search of a new lucidity. On the first morning, Dean hopes for a fresh start because he is beginning life at a new school. His hopes are frustrated in the following 'nights'. But the next morning contains a more definite promise. It is dawn, the true beginning of day, rather than nine a.m. The film ends on an image of the renewal of life and effort, as the camera draws back to reveal a man walking towards the planetarium to begin his day's work.

Ray's use of decor to illuminate specific situations can best be seen in the various ways that he has employed the particular concept of 'upstairs'. In *Johnny Guitar* upstairs represents isolation. The saloon owner, Vienna (Joan Crawford), has completely divorced her public from her private life; the former is lived on the ground floor amid the drinks and the gambling tables, the latter in her upstairs retreat with its more delicate, feminine decor. She is quite explicit about the distinction. Standing halfway down the stairs, gun in hand, she wards off the posse which has come to search her place: 'Down there I sell whisky and cards. All you can get up these stairs is a bullet in the head.' In the last shots of the film, Johnny Guitar is shown helping Vienna to break through her isolation: he supports her as she walks down a (different) flight of stairs to rejoin the other characters.

In *Bigger than Life*, as in *The James Brothers*, upstairs suggests both the possibility of a normal family life and the temporary retreat from responsibilities. Travel posters decorating the walls become more exotic as they progress from Grand Canyon, by the front door, to Bologna, on the top landing. Upstairs represents the desire of the middle-aged schoolmaster (James Mason) to 'get away sometime'.

*Rebel without a Cause* uses upstairs to point Jim Backus' failure as a husband and father. His son is shocked and hurt to find him, aproned, outside his bedroom and on his knees. He is timidly mopping up the mess he has made by dropping the supper tray he was bringing to his wife. The choice of place, as much as the conviction of the performances, makes us appreciate James Dean's anger and anguish.

## Structure

But places and objects have a structural, as well as an evocative or symbolic value. Ray takes full advantage of this in the architecture of his images. In *The Lusty Men* Arthur Kennedy, against the wishes of his wife (Susan Hayward), abandons the impoverished security of his job as a ranch-hand and becomes a rodeo-rider. It is a life without stability, lived in station-wagons and trailer-parks. In one sequence, Susan Hayward goes to a party at a hotel. Ray shows her sitting in front of a curtain, with a good deal of nervously exuberant action going





on behind her. The shot describes her dissatisfaction with the new way of life and her longing for a secure home: the curtain has a symbolic value of its own – the fabric is very ‘domestic’ in its design – but it also divides the image vertically, to separate her from the environment which she wishes to renounce.

Ray frequently uses static masses with bold lines – walls, staircases, doors, rocks – which intrude into the frame and at the same time disrupt and unify his images. In particular he uses objects in order to enclose his characters, to produce a frame within the frame. In *Bigger than Life* James Mason takes overdoses of the cortisone which has been prescribed for his heart complaint. Under their influence he becomes the victim of a delusion of intellectual and moral superiority which threatens to destroy his family. The frame is in perpetual movement; closing down, for example, on Mason during the argument with his wife which provokes one of his seizures; closing down on his son as he struggles to placate Mason by solving some far too difficult problems in arithmetic; opening up again for a moment of respite after the solution has been found. Through his use of line and structure Ray produces ‘compositions which make tangible and clear concepts as abstract as those of liberty and destiny’ (Jean-Luc Godard on *The James Brothers*).

The turbulence of the frame is the product of the three sorts of cinematic movement – of the actors, of the camera, and of the shots, the montage. If there is a single idea which dominates Ray’s technique (and therefore his philosophy, but that comes later), it is the opposition of conflict and harmony. For example, a Ray movie is instantly recognisable as such by the director’s extremely individual use of editing. Many of Ray’s camera movements appear to be incomplete. Any simple guide to movie-making will tell you that a travelling shot must have a beginning, middle and end. Often Ray uses only the middle: the camera is already moving at the beginning of the shot, and the movement is unfinished when the next shot appears; or if the movement *does* end, it falls somewhere short of its apparent goal. Whole sequences are often built up from these ‘incomplete’ shots so that the montage becomes a pattern of interruptions in which each image seems to force its way on to the screen at the expense of its predecessor (e.g. the introduction of Scott Brady’s gang in *Johnny Guitar*). Ray



is one of the most 'subjective' of all directors. The world he creates on the screen is the world seen by his characters. His dislocated editing style reflects the dislocated lives which many of his characters lead.

Even a sequence composed mainly of static shots will frequently be interrupted by cutting in a close shot of a character who is, to all appearances, only peripherally involved in the immediate action: *Johnny Guitar* into the first confrontation of Vienna and Emma (Mercedes MacCambridge); Viveca Lindfors into a discussion between John Derek and James Cagney, in *Run for Cover*; Salome into the trial of Jesus before Herod Antipas. The effect has a remarkable duality. The abrupt cut contributes to a feeling of dislocation, of disharmony. But, through its integration of an apparently extraneous element it suggests also a hidden unity.

The use of colour in Ray's films, too, depends largely on the concept of harmony. He does employ colours in the classical, and excellent, manner of Cukor and Kazan, for their emotional effect: in the first reel of *Bigger than Life* they dissolve from the predominantly grey shot as Mason leaves school to a screen virtually covered with the glaring yellow of parked taxis makes us feel the strain that is imposed on him by performing two jobs each day. But more characteristic is Ray's manner of selecting colours for the extent to which they blend or clash with background. Although the reds which Cyd Charisse wears in *Party Girl* have an autonomous emotional value, their effect comes principally from their relation to the other colours in the shot: spotlighting her among, and isolating her from, the sombre browns of a courtroom; blending with, and absorbing her into, the darker red of a sofa on which she sleeps. Cornel Wilde's revolt against the traditions of his gipsy family in *Hot Blood* is expressed through the clash between the conventional colour of his jacket and the gaudy 'gipsy' upholstery of the chair on which he places it.

### Direct Speech

This sort of direct statement is common in Ray's films because he believes (unfashionably, perhaps, but so much the worse for us) that the cinema is a medium of communication, and that clarity is of prime importance. The directness of Ray's



approach is reflected in the construction of his screenplays. The principal characters in his films are presented as quickly and economically as possible. The first shot will usually introduce the hero, and by the end of the first reel all the important relationships will have been presented. There are exceptions to this rule, *The Savage Innocents* and *King of Kings* for example, but they only occur where the nature of the story itself makes it inapplicable. The exposition at the beginning of *Rebel without a Cause* is amazing in its speed and lucidity. The first shot – behind the credits – is a close-up of James Dean as he lies in the road; the second is a brief linking shot as he is taken into the police station; and the third introduces us to Sal Mineo and Natalie Wood. Less than ten minutes later we have learned about the family backgrounds of Mineo and Wood, and have even met Dean's parents and grandmother – again in a single shot which conveyed most of the details of a complex relationship.

The desire for direct communication also distinguishes Ray's use of symbolism. His images are never obscure; many of them are derived from nature, like the references to fire and water in *King of Kings*, or to rock and wind in *Johnny Guitar* – the first time we see Emma she looks as if she is being carried along by the wind, and for the rest of the film she acts entirely to impulse. These symbols are felt rather than noticed.





But when Ray wishes to convey an idea he is not squeamish about using an extreme image. Emma exploits the murder of her brother as a pretext for hounding Vienna; as she rides at the head of a lynch mob her funeral veil is lost in the dust of the horses' hooves. James Mason abuses cortisone to induce an inflated sense of his own significance: we see him pump life into a wilted football.

This use of extremes is not confined to symbolism. It involves the camera, most notably in the shots in *Rebel without a Cause*, *Hot Blood* and *Wind across the Everglades* which carry subjectivity to its logical conclusion; they show the inverted images which their heroes see and, in *Rebel*, the camera turns vertically through 180 degrees as James Dean swings his body round to sit upright. In *Johnny Guitar*, and at times in all his films, Ray uses extreme situations and extreme actions to provide an almost diagrammatic representation of ideas, characters and conflicts. Christopher Plummer expresses his disgust at the slaughter of the Everglades' wildlife by snatching the feathers from the hat of an overdressed woman and asking how she'd like it 'if this bird wore you for a decoration'. Lee J. Cobb, the gangster boss of *Party Girl* shoots holes in a portrait of Jean Harlow, when he learns of her marriage. One of Vienna's bartenders walks into medium shot and looks straight into the camera to tell us he's 'never seen a woman who was more like a man'. Howard da Silva smashes Farley Grangers' dream of domestic bliss (*They Live by Night*) as he smashes one of the trinkets on his Christmas tree.

### The Blind Run

Such directness, such extremes of expression, would result in the merest onthebeachified brain-fodder if they were not controlled by a profoundly personal vision. But in their context they form a moving testimony to the courage and lucidity of a filmmaker who communicates his pre-occupations on the screen with poetic intensity. Every one of Ray's 'devices' has its correlative in some aspect of his sensibility.

But conversely the majority of his films will make little sense to anyone who goes to the cinema simply to hear a good script well read. One must respond to the textures of Ray's films before one can understand their meanings. One must

appreciate their dynamics before one can see, embodied in their turbulent movement, an ethical and poetic vision of the universe and of man's place in it. In *Rebel without a Cause* Ray uses the planetarium to draw a close parallel between the isolated and insecure condition of his characters and that of the whole of mankind in the universe. Members of the lecture audience view the depiction of the end of the world with indifference, contempt or terror. But the commentator rambles on: 'destroyed as we began in a burst of gas and fire ... the earth will not be missed ... and man existing alone himself seems an episode of little consequence.' It is against this concept of a man's life as an episode of little consequence, rather than against society, or his family, that Dean rebels.

Ray's original title for the film, *The Blind Run*, reflects a view of life as a too rapid journey under no guidance, with no *apparent* direction or purpose. The actions of Ray's characters are conditioned by this view. Some of them, like the director, engage in a search for an alternative, for a real unity dominating our seemingly chaotic, unstable and indifferent world. Others, failing in the search, accept chaos but with no equanimity: there can be few more anguished statements on film than Burton's in *Bitter Victory*: 'I kill the living, and I save the dead.' *Run for Cover* shows Matt Dow (Cagney) as a man who is able to come to terms with the world because he has found an interior stability which few of Ray's characters are privileged to share.

There is one reaction to the harsh realities that Ray presents which invariably leads to disaster: the refusal to recognise life's terms. In *The Lusty Men* Robert Mitchum, a retired rodeo-rider, goes back to the shack in which he spent his childhood 'looking for something I thought I'd lost'. The door is locked. At the film's climax he returns to the arena because he needs to prove himself: 'I used to buy my own booze ... A fella just likes to see if he can still do it.' In the sequence before he signs on for the contest, a commentator describes the opening parade through the Texan town as 'an exciting display of old glory'. Mitchum dies from injuries received in the arena. The final failure and death of Jesse James results from his increasingly fantastic way of life: he attempts to divorce his two characters, as Jesse and as the respectable small-town family man, Mr. Howard. His band disintegrates during a bank raid which

fails because it takes him *too far from home*. Mason's abuse of cortisone very nearly causes him to murder his son. At the end of the film Mason can only regain sanity if he can base his life on its realities rather than on a comforting illusion: 'If he can remember everything that happened, and face it, he'll be alright.'

The acceptance of life's terms involves the acceptance of turmoil and change. Ray's characters share his sensitivity to time. Vienna tells the posse: 'I intend to be buried here – in the twentieth century!' But Emma's quarrel with Vienna is partly caused by her desire to resist change: 'You'll never see a train run through!' Christopher Plummer rejects an invitation to contribute to the development of Miami: 'Progress and I never got along very well.' And Richard Burton describes a tenth century Berber village disdainfully as 'too modern for me'.

Progress contributes to the instability of our lives. Emma opposes the extension of the railroad because it will destroy the isolation which protects her. In one very violent and moving speech she says that the trains will bring 'Farmers. Dirt farmers! Squatters! They'll push us out! ... You're gonna find you and your women and your kids squeezed between barbed wire and fence posts. Is that what you're waiting for?' Even Emma, who early in the film announces her intention of killing Vienna, has her justification.

There are no pure villains in Ray's pictures. There are simply, and more dramatically, failures of communication and understanding. In *Run for Cover* Viveca Lindfors says that the wife who divorced James Cagney 'must have been bad'. 'No', says Cagney, 'She just hated the sight of me.' Each man acts, with whatever degree of lucidity, according to his own code or his own deepest needs. Almost every man acts from a position of profound uncertainty and insecurity. Because he is insecure in his own estimation Ray's hero often seeks to win or retain his self-respect through the admiration or submission of his fellow; but this struggle only increases the instability of personal relationships. An unambiguous victory in the battle for prestige is impossible, since it inevitably makes the victor's life less worth living: Herod Antipas is haunted by guilt because he has granted Salome's request for the head of John

the baptist rather than 'let it be known that the word of a King is worthless.'

Men will make almost any sacrifice in order to protect their prestige. In *Bitter Victory* Curd Jurgens is unable to act at a vital moment in the attack, which he commands, on a German headquarters. Richard Burton tells him that 'what happened tonight has nothing to do with me, that's (a matter) between you and you.' But Jurgens is sure that his men regard him as a coward. He risks his life, by drinking from a well that he suspects has been poisoned, in order to demonstrate his courage.

Ray's films contain a large number of variations on man's appreciation of his insecurity. In *Party Girl* Robert Taylor, as defence counsel for a gangster John Ireland, is able to secure an acquittal against the evidence by giving the jury a sense of superiority: he wins their pity for himself – by exaggerating his lameness – and for his client, by suggesting that the press has already condemned him without trial (and therefore deprived the jurors of their right of decision). In a precisely parallel situation in *Run for Cover* we are shown John Derek's self-destructive willingness to exploit the sympathy of selves even from these unconventional others. He also is lame. In an attempt to win the pity of James Cagney he leans towards him across a desk exactly as he did, on the floor, when making his first attempt to walk without crutches. Christopher Plummer in *Wind across the Everglades* says that he has been given no choice but to arrest the leader of the feather-pirates (Burl Ives). In fact, he was offered *in public* a warrant for Ives' arrest provided that he would serve it personally. Inuk (Anthony Quinn), the Eskimo hero of *The Savage Innocents*, uses a man's fear of contempt positively, in order to save his life. He shames a trooper into putting his frozen hands inside the hot stomach of a husky, by asking if white men can stand pain.

The need for acceptance by society, with its conformist pressures, inevitably conflicts with the desire to live one's life according to one's own code. The heroes of *Johnny Guitar*, *Wind across the Everglades*, and *The Savage Innocents* are nearly destroyed in the attempt for recognition on their own terms. Ray's adventurers are adventurers not by choice, like Hawks or Walsh heroes, but through interior compulsion. They are 'displaced' persons whose isolation is emphasised by

their involvement with a group which stands apart from society and, often, outside the law. Indeed their non-conformism such that they isolate themselves even from these unconventional groups: Dean shocks a teenage gang whose chosen weapons are switch-blades and stolen cars by threatening its leader with the shaft of his car-jack.

But even though a man may *choose* isolation, as an escape from the pressures of society, it can never be a permanent or satisfactory solution. In *Johnny Guitar* and *Party Girl* we are shown a man and a woman, both deeply dislocated, withdrawn characters, both intensely vulnerable, each trying to escape isolation and restore his self-esteem by earning the respect of the other. *Johnny Guitar* contains a sequence of extraordinary power in which Johnny and Vienna are alone together for the first time, after a long and painful separation. Each of them hides emotion in a cynically contrived 'dialogue', designed to test the other's feelings without involvement. Johnny tells Vienna 'Lie to me ... Tell me you've waited', and Vienna 'reads' his words back to him, saying exactly what she's asked to say but trying to suppress every trace of feeling. Similarly, the relationship between Robert Taylor and Cyd Charisse in *Party Girl* starts with injured pride and mutual resentment. But it is built gradually through a series of tests until each is able to provide the conditions of trust and respect which the other needs. It is only through such a relationship, based on instinctive sympathy and explicit dependence, that Ray's characters escape the double threat of isolation and subjection.

The delicate balance needed to create and sustain any harmonious relationship can only be achieved at cost, and it is in constant jeopardy. The useful extension of a character's emotional or moral range can only follow the painful destruction of those barriers which are intended to protect him, but which in fact oppress him: false relationships, unjustified hopes and outmoded rules of conduct. In *Rebel without a Cause* James Dean looks for guidance and support from a father who is by nature incapable of providing them. Eventually, through anguish and tragedy, he is forced to accept the realities of his situation. Only then can he begin to build a more useful relationship.

## A Stranger Here

'Often', says Burl Ives in *Wind across the Everglades*, 'the longest way round is the shortest way through'. But often Ray's characters attempt to find an easy way out of their difficulties. Like Mason in *Bigger than Life* they mistake the panacea for the cure. Or like Arthur Kennedy in *The Lusty Men* they allow a *method* to become an end in itself. Kennedy and his wife long for the security represented by 'a place of our own'. As a short cut towards this goal, Kennedy competes for the prizes of the rodeo arena. But the prestige which he earns there side-tracks him from his original intention. Instead of buying a house he buys a trailer, a symbol of permanent instability.

Similarly, the laws and conventions which a society devises are valuable insofar as they meet its particular needs. But they are too easily regarded as moral absolutes; and they can only provoke chaos and injustice when applied beyond their necessarily limited context. In the first half of *The Savage Innocents* we are shown a life lived in strict accord with the terms dictated by the Arctic environment. But a missionary comes to the Eskimos, Inuk and Asiak (Yoko Tani), to persuade them that the Lord – a character who has played no previous part in their lives, and whose existence corresponds to no felt need – is angry with them for living in sin: a concept which has never suggested itself to them. Inuk is himself disgusted by the missionary's refusal of the traditional hospitalities of his race and in particular of Asiak's loving services. In his anger he accidentally fractures the missionary's skull. Much later, when Inuk has forgotten the entire episode, troopers come to arrest him and take him away to be tried according to laws of whose existence he was unaware, and whose authority he does not recognise: 'My father's laws have not been broken.' The conflict in the latter part of the film is entirely the result of an attempt to impose on an alien way of life rules which have become stronger than the men who made them. Asiak speaks for Ray when she tells the trooper that 'when you come to a strange land, you should bring your wives and not your laws'.

The rigidity with which men enforce their particular codes is a further response to insecurity. Ray's films show man as an intruder in a turbulent and indifferent, or hostile, universe. His hero often journeys into a primitive landscape like that



of the Everglades in search of a lost certainty, a lost harmony between man and his environment. But he brings with him his own inner conflicts which make that harmony unattainable. Burl Ives and Christopher Plummer represent opposite responses to nature, the former wanting to be its master, the latter its servant. Ray looks for an integration of these attitudes, towards an ideal relationship of man to nature, like that of man to man, in which the struggle for domination is resolved by the recognition of interdependence.

But such a harmony can only be attained when a man finds the purpose of his life in the conquest neither of nature nor of his fellow, but of himself. For this is the one conquest which does not imply a defeat or need a victim. In *King of Kings* Ray uses a dissolve, during the temptations in the wilderness, which absorbs the figure of Jesus into the earth. By coming to terms with himself, and only in that way, man is able to come to terms with his environment.

This is not simply a moral point. Ray has often shown us characters who are, psychologically, incapable of attaining stability and who, like the heroes of *Bitter Victory* and *Wind across the Everglades*, become victims of the basic rule of nature, the survival of the fittest. Ray makes his moral judgments from a position of sympathy and understanding: while we recognise the defects and conflicts which destroy his heroes, we are forced to recognise them also in ourselves and in our society. Until recently, one might justifiably have supposed that Ray found these contradictions so deeply embedded in men's personalities as to forbid any real stability. His most successful films were also those whose attitudes seemed the most pessimistic: their resolutions were unconvincing when they were not either tragic or extremely ambiguous. One could not believe that the hostility of the world, so concretely depicted, was entirely the reflection or the product of the hero's neurosis.

Ray refuses to guarantee the futures of his characters: at the end of *Johnny Guitar*, *Rebel without a Cause* or *Bigger than Life* the hero has reached a point from which he *may* progress towards a more meaningful and ordered existence. But we are not permitted to believe in any magical transformation of his personality. Even after the death of Sal Mineo at the climax of *Rebel without a Cause* James Dean's agonised cry of 'I've got the bullets!' symbolises for us the continuation of his inner

conflict. There is always the danger that the hero will again fall back into chaos and self-destruction.

The danger is no less real at the end of *Party Girl*, but it is less oppressive. One feels, for the first time, that the hero has recognised it and is therefore better equipped to deal with it. Also, Robert Taylor has reached, by the middle of the film, the position which other Ray heroes attain only at the end. Because we have *seen* him survive and grow through several trials we are more confident of his ability to survive the hazards of the future.

This is not a purely formal achievement. It suggests, rather, a considerable extension of the director's range. In the two films since *Party Girl* – *The Savage Innocents* and *King of Kings* – one still finds the anguish and confusion of *Rebel without a Cause* or *Bitter Victory*. But at times in both films anguish has been replaced by a passionate placidity. All Ray's films balance an immediate conflict against an ultimate unity, but his more recent work suggests a place for man within that unity.

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