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Johnny Guitar

Selected by Myron Meisel, film critic, *L.A. Reader*.

1953. Color. 1.33 format. 109 min.

Producer: Herbert J. Yates/*Director:* Nicholas Ray/
Screenwriter: Philip Yordan, based on the novel by Roy
Chanslor/*Cinematographer:* Harry Stradling/*Music:*
Victor Young/*Principal Cast:* Joan Crawford, Sterling
Hayden, Mercedes McCambridge, Scott Brady, Ward
Bond/*Production Company:* Republic Pictures/*Print
Source:* Crystal Pictures

In *Pierrot le Fou*, Belmondo permits his maid to go to the cinema for the third time that week because *Johnny Guitar* is playing—and "she must be educated!" Nicholas Ray's bizarre Western is certainly an education in what cinema can do, a film with a multitude of important themes. A political parable, a sexual allegory, a vaguely feminist hallucination, a musical, a love story, bitter and giddy by turns, this enigma wrapped in a Republic Western is probably the chimerical Ray's most personal film. It takes McCarthyite witchhunt hysteria to dramatic extremes bolder than the conventional polemics of *High Noon* or even *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. A revolutionary film, its color schemes anticipate those of Bergman in *Cries and Whispers* by twenty years. *Johnny Guitar* must be seen to be believed, and seen to be understood, since its emotional ferocity and complexity reaches us through our eyes.—*Myron Meisel*

