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Above, Marissa Roth for The New York Times; top inset, Columbia Pictures/Photofest; bottom inset, Paramount

Curtis Hanson, above, at a screening of "In a Lonely Place" with Humphrey Bogart and Gloria Grahame (top inset). Mr. Hanson directed "Wonder Boys," with Michael Douglas and Robert Downey Jr. (bottom inset).

WATCHING MOVIES WITH

CURTIS HANSON

A Dark Lesson In Trust

By RICK LYMAN

CURTIS HANSON said he wanted to make two points to the actors Russell Crowe and Guy Pearce before they started filming "L.A. Confidential" back in 1996. He wanted them to understand how people really looked and moved and talked back in the early 1950's in Southern California, where the story was set. But just as important, he wanted them to see the kind of naked, emotion-driven acting that he thought the complex, hard-boiled story required.

So he sat them down and showed them Nicholas Ray's "In a Lonely Place."

Mr. Hanson, 55, sat in the middle of a row in the otherwise vacant James Bridges Theater on the Univer-

sity of California campus at Los Angeles. It was late on a

weekday afternoon, and there were a few hours before the auditorium was needed. Mr. Hanson had arranged to borrow a vintage print of Ray's 1950 drama, starring Humphrey Bogart and Gloria Grahame, from the Columbia Pictures archives. A veteran screenwriter and director whose work also includes this year's "Wonder Boys," starring Michael Douglas, he is the chairman of the University of California Film and Television Archives, which explains his pull at the Bridges Theater, the archives' main venue.

"When I first saw 'In a Lonely Place' as a teenager, it frightened me and yet attracted me with an almost hypnotic power," Mr. Hanson said. "Later, I came to understand why. Occasionally, very rarely, a movie feels

so heartfelt, so emotional, so revealing that it seems as though both the actor and the director are standing naked before the audience. When that kind of marriage happens between actor and director, it's breathtaking."

By 1950 Humphrey Bogart was in that phase in his career when he seemed to wear bow ties in most of his movies, still exuding the confident masculinity that epitomized his best work in the 30's and 40's, but beginning to edge toward the scowling and the jowly — poised about midway between Sam Spade and Captain Queeg. In the film, he plays Dixon Steele, a talented and bitter screenwriter with a hair-trigger temper, who was mysteriously damaged by his experiences in World War II. Throughout the film, he is either exploding in rage or struggling to suppress it. And yet he appears to be, at heart, an honorable and decent guy.

"To me, what is so incredible about his performance

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