

anti-freeze and fifteen parts first-degree aitch. It is said that Nico introduced her teenage son to heroin, and, as he lay in a hospital bed having overdosed, she rigged up portable recording equipment in order to capture his last breath. Nico herself will be dead at 49, having fallen from her bicycle. Her singing voice is the sound of a body falling downstairs, and she speaks as if the hangman's hands are at her throat. One drizzly night at a crib called Rafters, Nico hoists herself onstage in preparation. Her fortress harmonium stands center-stage like a battleship, ready to wheeze vaporized tones like the last harpooned humpback. Nico aims for her stool but misses and jigs herself sideways. She re-adjusts and begins the foot-pumping process of awakening her harmonium. There is no 'bello', and no 'goodbye'. I treasure her four studio albums, none of which contain the faintest hint of hope.

Two feature films of nervous vitality lock in my brain and possibly poison it forever. The first is *The Strange One* (1957), where de Paris pathologically infects the entire population of the world with his talent for bully tactics and his persistent offensiveness. Only articulate disdain for humanity saves him, and his rein of terror at a military school in Florida is remarkable solely for lasting as long as it does — even though it seems morally inevitable that he will end up being tied to a tree. His looks and style are far more penetrating than the God-fearing toothsome goofs around him — all of whom he breaks and wounds because they pay him far too much attention (or even because they show him none). De Paris is star quality and is not short on wit, thus I cannot help thinking that the common evil of his childishly dangerous ploys should be accepted by

reason of his magnificent oeuvre alone — which in itself is certainly worth having. I think so, anyway. Ben Gazzara plays de Paris perfectly, relishing the humiliation of others. De Paris is too cute to be caught, and his contribution to immortality (what?) is suggested by the number of camera shots where the victim cadets are either kneeling before de Paris and looking upwards, or somehow seen from between the breeched legs of de Paris. If it sounds sordid, it isn't. There are no lines of cruelty on the de Paris face, but we assume that he is that rare thing: a confident sodomite, or a libidinous bully, or perhaps just a talker, or all three. Inexplicably a lone female enters the film in a later scene with de Paris, and she sweeps through the only scene in the film where de Paris looks bored stiff, and we immediately forget that she's even there. It is a plotless situation thrown in to take us off the salacious scent. Phew, thank heavens for that. We're all saved! Could Hollywood bear the eternal burden of a rough fruitcake? No! Anything but that! George Raft? In any case, de Paris must die soon because he is just as real as life, and since he is free of sexual loathing there is slim chance of the obligatory suicide. It takes dominantly handsome Mark Richman, with a civic duty to sexual custom, to turn the nature of suffering back on de Paris, who, yes, is tied to a tree and tortured. For this, we are all purified and we return to the ideal vision of manliness untroubled by that nasty game of thinking. But it is all too late because we already prefer the richer intellect of de Paris to the bull-headed correctness of Mark Richman. But de Paris must perish, because he is neither correct nor dull, and by the closing credits we are left to assume that he is as dead as a pansy from last spring.

