

LE DOULOS

- RIALTO PICTURES -

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Direction & Screenplay
Jean-Pierre Melville

Based on the novel by Pierre Lesou

Producers
Georges de Beauregard
Carlo Ponti

Cinematography
Nicolas Hayer

Production Design
Daniel Guéret

Sound
Julien Coutelier

Editor
Monique Bonnot

Music
Paul Misraki

Assistant Directors
Charles Bitsch **Volker Schlöndorff**

English translation/subtitles (2007 Rialto re-release)
Lenny Borger

Principal Photography : April-June, 1962
Original French release: February 8, 1963
U.S. release: March 2, 1964

A Rome-Paris Films – Compagnia Cinematografica Champion (Rome)
co-production

France 1963 B/W Aspect ratio 1.66:1 In French with English subtitles
Running time: 108 minutes

A RIALTO PICTURES RELEASE

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CAST

Silien
Jean-Paul Belmondo

Maurice Faugel
Serge Reggiani

Captain Clain
Jean Desailly

Nuttheccio
Michel Piccoli

Gilbert Varnove
René Lefèvre

Jean
Aimé de March

Thérèse
Monique Hennessy

Fabienne
Fabienne Dali

Rémy
Philippe Nahon

1st Inspector
Marcel Cuvelier

2nd Inspector
Jack Léonard

Armand
Jacques de Léon

Inspector Salignari
Daniel Crohem

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“DOULOS” DEFINED BY MELVILLE

Doulos (doo-LOHS¹) is the name applied, by extension, to the wearer of the *doule*. The *doule* is both the emblem of the policeman, who wore one in the days when gangsters didn't, and a mark of elegance that indicated a style, a personal touch among gangsters when they began to wear one.

A *doulos* is a hat.

Silien wears a *doule*, which is to say that to those of the Underworld, he “squeals” (cf. [Carné and Prévert's] *Children of Paradise*, when Pierre Renoir, who wears a *doule*, enumerates his nicknames: “White Sheep,” “Thirteenth at Table,” etc.). A *doulos* is a police informer. He is feared and one tends to avoid his company. He has a special status, both in the Underworld, and at the Prefecture of Police. He's no ordinary outlaw, but his life is more dangerous. Only the intelligent *doulos* lives long.

MELVILLE ON FETISHISM

I attach great importance to the sartorial fetish. In my films, a man's clothes have paramount importance, sadly, because what a woman wears matters less. When there's an actress to be clothed, my assistant sees to it. It stimulates me a lot less.

The hero in my *films noirs* is always an armed hero. He always carries a gun. An armed hero is almost a soldier; he wears a uniform. An armed man is different from other men and I assure you that he's a man who tends to wear a hat. I'm talking about movies here, but a man who fires a gun with a hat on his head is far more impressive than a bare-headed man. Wearing a hat somewhat balances the gun in his hand. It comes with the uniform.

translations by Lenny Borger (2007)

¹ The “s” is pronounced.

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SYNOPSIS

NOTE: CONTAINS SPOILERS – PLEASE READ AFTER SCREENING

Maurice Faugel (Serge Reggiani) is an ex-convict who, on coming out of jail, settles an old score by killing his friend Gilbert (René Lefèvre²), a fence, and buries the loot from a high-profile heist. He then plans a robbery with his friend Rémy (Philippe Nahon), with safe-busting equipment lent by another friend, Silien (Jean-Paul Belmondo), a notorious police informer. The robbery goes wrong, Rémy is killed, and Faugel is wounded and later arrested by Inspector Clain (Jean Desailly). Faugel suspects Silien -- who meanwhile beats up Faugel's girlfriend Thérèse (Monique Hennessy) – of betrayal. While Faugel is in jail plotting revenge, Silien unearths the money and jewels and kills the two big-time gangsters, Nuttheccio (Michel Piccoli) and Armand (Jacques de Léon), who had masterminded the initial robbery. He also meets up with his former girlfriend Fabienne (Fabienne Dali), currently Nuttheccio's mistress. When Faugel comes out of jail, he (and we) find out that the betrayer is not Silien but Thérèse, whom Silien and Jean (Aimé de March) have disposed of in a staged car crash. Faugel tries to stop the contract killer Kern (Carl Studer) he had paid to kill Silien. On arrival at Silien's house, however, Faugel is mistaken for Silien and killed by Kern. Silien and Kern then kill each other in a shoot-out.

- synopsis excerpted from Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris by Ginette Vincendeau (BFI Publishing, 2003)

² Lefèvre (1898-1991) was a veteran French film actor perhaps best known for his appearances in Clair's *Le Million* (1931) and Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1935).

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MELVILLE ON *LE DOULOS*

The following is from an interview with Melville conducted by Claude Beylie, published in L'avant-scène du cinéma, no. 24, March 15, 1963 (translated by Lenny Borger, 2007)

How did you come to make Le Doulos?

One evening in January, 1957, my friend [and agent] Jean Rossignol, phoned me to say "I have a book for you." He sent me the press proofs of a novel due out in the *Série Noire* collection³ entitled *Le Doulos*. I was immediately taken with it, not so much by the form, which was episodic and Montmartre-set, which I didn't respect, but by the spirit. [Author Pierre] Lesou had written a documentary on Montmartre; I, on the contrary, wanted to get away from there, "distance myself." Hence the symbolic zoom shot in the opening scene, where I pull away from Montmartre... and Lesou. I also wanted to get beyond a certain sordid style, by excluding, for instance, any use of underworld slang. I dislike slang in movies.

So what interested you was a certain complexity to the characters?

Yes, and in that respect I went a little bit farther (or was a little more dishonest) than Lesou. For Lesou, the *doulos* isn't an informer. For me, he is, and a totally unscrupulous one. Or, at least, I conceived my film in such a way that one could think he was one. The totally subjective final explanation can very well be another lie, a new tall tale of Silien's. I played up this ambiguity a good deal. I have to say that this "betrayal" didn't at all bother the novel's author!

Is there any one character in the film who acts as your mouthpiece?

They all do, and in the same way. If I were a police informer, I would be one like Silien. If I were a battered, marked man, diminished by prison and anxious to avenge the murder of his wife, I would behave like Faugel. If I were a police chief, I would act exactly like Clain. And if I were the owner of a nightclub or an illegal gambling den, I think I would act like Nuttheccio.

³ Trend-setting collection of French and American crime and detective fiction founded in 1945 by Marcel Duhamel and published by the prestigious Gallimard press. *Le Doulos* was published in 1957. The term "série noire" (dark series) was coined by poet-screenwriter Jacques Prévert and later spun off the term "film noir".

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So it's as if you had personally played each of these four people in turn.

Absolutely. Making a movie is like being ten actors at once. It means escaping, dreaming, living other lives. When I made *Léon Morin, Priest*⁴, I saw myself as a Catholic, even a priest, for the duration of the production. It's marvelous... and that's why the craft of film director is actually a sublime craft: for several months, you lead the life of your heroes even more totally than the actor does. But less so than if you're a writer. In this respect, I think that a writer is the most spoiled person in the world.

Is there a misogynistic element in Le Doulos?

A few critics claimed so. But that strikes me as totally false. The women in my film aren't as ordinary as they seem. Besides, nothing proves that Thérèse is a stoolie: that's the Belmondo version. And it's obvious that Fabienne deeply loves Silien.

What is the place of Le Doulos in your work?

After the failure of *Two Men in Manhattan*, I decided that I was only going to do films with the public in mind, and not just for a small number of enlightened movie buffs. I wanted to reach as many spectators I could. It's human, isn't it? *Léon Morin* was made in this light and so was *Le Doulos*. This new audience means a lot to me.

Does that mean that you're cutting yourself off from the New Wave, which you had prefigured 18 years ago with Le Silence de la Mer, and of which you're still referred to as the "spiritual father?"

I've said time and again that the "New Wave" is an economical way to make films, and nothing more. There's no such thing as the "New Wave style." If there was one, it would purely and simply be the Godard style. Well, we all know that the Godard style, like Pasteur's anti-rabies vaccine, was due to chance: Godard had made a film, *Breathless*, which was too long, and he had to cut it down, so he had the brilliant idea of cutting, not entire scenes, but shots, at random. This technique had become all the rage; even older directors like Henri Decoin used it. Now they're looking for something else.

⁴ *Léon Morin*, also starring Belmondo, was the second of three Melville films dealing with the French Resistance (the first was *Le Silence de la Mer* in 1949, the third was *Army of Shadows*). *Léon Morin* is a future Rialto Pictures release.

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What are the innovations and the classical elements in Le Doulos?

Innovations: zero. I'm not out to reinvent the movies every time I make a new film. The movies reached perfection in the years 1934-35. And since then, well, we've had more sensitive film stock, which among other things allows you to shoot scenes at night in conditions that were unthinkable before then. Apart from that, I wonder what there is to invent in movies. The movies had two "inventors" -- two "moments," if you prefer. First, there was Méliès, and then... the 63 American directors who "made" the pre-war sound cinema. My debt to these latter names, especially in *Le Doulos*, is tremendous. Without the American cinema of those years, which I loved and still love with a passion (it still has its successors), I wouldn't be making movies, and I would never have made *Le Doulos*.

This is particularly discernable in my sets: note that there are no French-style windows in *Le Doulos*, only sash windows with Venetian blinds, like the ones you find in American life and movies. The same goes for the telephone booth in the Métro station, and even more so, the office at police headquarters where the interrogation is held, which is a faithful copy of the set in Mamoulian's *City Streets*⁵, itself a reconstitution of American police stations of the time. Similarly, there are no scenes in a Parisian-style bistro, but in the kind of bar you might find on Second or Third Avenue in Manhattan. Note that these details are sufficiently concealed so as not to jolt French audiences. I'm not out to disorient the audience at any price. What's important is that it comes under the spell of this uncharacteristic setting, without being aware of it. This charm, this fascination, is purely cinematic. This was deliberate.

Is there a sense of existential difficulty, of aging, of continuing to "play the game" in Le Doulos?

Of course. Besides, just about everyone dies. So they feel this "existential difficulty," as you put it. In fact, after the climactic bloodbath, there's virtually no one left but Fabienne and Clain (since Jean will get a maximum sentence). This, if you like, is the Shakespearean angle of *Le Doulos*. Oh, sure, I have no pretension to being Shakespearean. I simply tried to make a tragic film.

What are the differences between American actors and French actors?

America is a unique actors' training school. Take [Paul] Muni, [George] Raft, [Frank] Sinatra: though they come from different backgrounds and nationalities,

⁵ Mamoulian's 1931 gangster movie starred Gary Cooper and Sylvia Sydney.

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they all became typical American actors at some moment, in their language, their behavior, in their very gestures. There's nothing like that in European actors, who fiercely preserve their individuality, their mannerisms. And French actors always over-act... except when they play like American actors, with that ease, that economy of means I admire so much. American actors always *underplay*. In France, a Belmondo... a Reggiani, a Piccoli are underplayers. As for the others...

There seems to be at least one common denominator to all your movies: the total absence of open-air scenes and, inversely, the abundance of night scenes, or artificially lighted interiors.

Yes, indeed. At home, I keep everything shuttered during the day. Not so much as a single ray of sunshine gets into my bedroom. It's the ultimate in claustrophilia. Or else it's a desire to be at the movies all the time.

The following is excerpted from Melville on Melville by Rui Nogueira (New York: The Viking Press, 1971); translation revised and annotated by Bruce Goldstein and Lenny Borger (2007).

Before making Le Doulos, you had signed a contract with Georges de Beauregard⁶ to make a film called Les Dons Juan. What happened?

Georges was anxious for me to make a film from a Prosper Mérimée story, *Les Ames du Purgatoire*, which he thought was marvelous. It was a rather ordinary story of one of the two Don Juans of Spanish legend, but I agreed to do it. In a situation like that, always tell the producer his idea is brilliant and then think about the changes you can make. So, using the Mérimée story as a starting point, I wrote an original screenplay with Jean-Paul Belmondo and Anthony Perkins in mind. This film, which was to have been a libertine film -- *not* an erotic one, let's get that straight -- never got off the ground because Jean-Paul asked for a fee of fifty million [old] francs and Georges refused to pay him that much. He thought it was immoral to pay so much to someone he had launched [in *Breathless*].

While trying to find another actor for the part, I commissioned I don't know how many scripts on the subject: one by Monique Lange, another by Michel Mardore - which was excellent - and a third by France Roche. The copies of all these scripts, mine included, were destroyed in the rue Jenner fire.⁷

⁶ Georges de Beauregard (1920-1984) produced such New Wave milestones as Godard's *Breathless* and *Contempt*, Jacques Demy's *Lola*, Agnes Varda's *Cleo from 5 to 7*, and Rivette's *La Religieuse*.

⁷ Melville's studios on Rue Jenner in Paris were destroyed by fire in June 1967.

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Then one day de Beauregard arrived at the rue Jenner studios in a terrible state. He was green-faced and glassy-eyed. "Jean-Pierre," he said, "I'm finished. I'm going bust!" He had already signed all the contracts with Chabrol, [Françoise] Sagan⁸, [Jean] Rabier⁹, Michèle Morgan, Danielle Darrieux, Charles Denner, etc. to make *Landru*, when United Artists told him they were dropping the film. Without UA, it was impossible for him to honor his contracts. To get himself out of this bind, Georges planned to sell off *Landru* in Rome, but in order to unload the Chabrol film he needed a "locomotive." 'You're going to make *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* with Belmondo next August,' he said, 'but I know he'd be willing to make another film with you immediately. Now don't tell me that in the whole *Série Noire*¹⁰ there isn't one novel you would like to film right now...' And in fact there was a novel by Pierre Lesou which I particularly liked: *Le Doulos*. I therefore agreed, but on one condition *sine qua non*: that Reggiani play the role of Maurice Faugel.

The day after this conversation, Georges de Beauregard telephoned me from Rome to say that the matter was settled. However, Reggiani, who had just read the book, wanted to play Silien. Reggiani has a particular knack for always wanting the part he isn't offered. If someone asked him to play Armand Duval, he'd be quite capable of saying he wanted to play Marguerite Gauthier!¹¹

I was determined to have Belmondo as Silien. I thought it would be amusing to have him go from priest [in *Léon Morin, Prêtre*] to stool pigeon. I was just considering letting the whole thing drop when Reggiani decided to change his mind.

One funny thing was that it was only when *Le Doulos* was finished and Belmondo saw himself on the screen that he realized, with great astonishment, "Oh shit! The stoolie is me!"

You got rid of all the argot in the book ?

Yes. I can't stand argot in movies. When I was young and thought it was genuinely romantic, I spoke it for a long time. It became second nature.

⁸ Author of the bestseller *Bonjour, Tristesse*

⁹ Cinematographer, best known as the D.P. on all of Claude Chabrol's films from 1958 to 1991. He also shot Demy's color masterpiece *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*.

¹⁰ See footnote 3.

¹¹ The lovers of Alexandre Dumas fils' *La dame aux camélias*, better known here by its English title of *Camille*. They were played by Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor in Cukor's 1936 film.

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Gradually, as I grew older, I cut it out, but when Florence¹² first knew me I talked virtually nothing but argot. For a long time I kept... “bad company”...

How did you come to know the underworld so well?

Among other gangs before the war there was the Gare Saint-Lazare gang. Originally this gang was made up of students from the Lycée Condorcet who lived in the west and north-west suburbs. In time we left school but continued to hang around the Gare Saint-Lazare. I have to admit that by late 1939 we were a real gang of hooligans ... we were no longer kids... We all went on to other things, but in those days we weren't bothered by scruples. We played tough. But that's another story . . .

All the characters in Le Doulos are much more ambiguous than those in the original novel.

Yes, the characters are all double, they're all false. I even indicate this to the spectator at the beginning of the film with a truncated quote from Céline¹³:

“ONE MUST CHOOSE . . .
DIE ... OR LIE?”

I cut the end, which is “ME, I LIVE!”

Le Doulos is a very complicated film, very difficult to understand, because I gave a double twist to the situations in the novel.

Was Lesou happy with the changes you made?

Yes. He even said I should have told him my story before he wrote the book. There's another thriller by Lesou I would have liked to adapt - *Main Pleine* - it's ten times better than *Le Doulos*. But it was filmed by Michel Deville in 1964 under the title *Lucky Jo*. He made a complete mess of it. It makes me sick when I think of it. If you knew the film that could have been made . . . !

You obviously have a certain affection for the character of Nuttheccio in Le Doulos.

¹² Melville's wife

¹³ Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1894-1961), one of the most influential French novelists of the 20th century, whose literary status has survived his vicious anti-Semitic writings of the 30s and 40s. The quote adapted by Melville is from Céline's masterpiece, *Journey to the End of the Night*.

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In the average French film, the role of Nuttheccio would have been played by Dario Moreno¹⁴, wouldn't it? Well, I wanted a villain who wouldn't cringe in a cold sweat the moment he realizes he's going to die.

I didn't want Dario Moreno, or [Marcel] Dalio¹⁵, or Claude Cerval¹⁶, anyone like that. When I telephoned [Michel] Piccoli to ask if he would help me out by doing a bit part in my film, he immediately said yes without waiting for details. He did the part without even reading the script or knowing how much he was going to be paid. I told him that this bit part would do him a lot of good, and he simply said "I know!" He is excellent in the film.

But Nuttheccio isn't closer to me than the other characters. I would certainly go to my death like he does, but I would behave like Silien if I were a police informer. On the other hand, if I were a man embittered by prison and eager to avenge the death of my wife, I would behave like Faugel. And if I were a police captain, I would behave exactly like Clain. I always escape through my characters. Making movies means being all the actors at once, living other lives ...

Are you happy with Desailly, your second police captain?

Yes, I think he's magnificent. I wanted Clain to be of middle class background and to have, in addition to the vices and virtues of his class, that layer of cynicism and vulgarity which all policemen acquire after associating with crooks for a certain number of years. I must say that Desailly's reading of the character was perfect.

In general, I think my policemen's portrait gallery is quite convincing, and corresponds to a certain reality, even though I take care never to be realistic.

How did you do that shot in Clain's office which lasts nine minutes and thirty-eight seconds?

We rehearsed all one Friday. By the end of the day, when everything was ready, I was exhausted, especially as I always feel washed out around 6:30. Georges

¹⁴ Dario Moreno (1921-1969), jovial, rotund Turkish-Jewish singer, composer, lyricist and guitarist, who enjoyed screen popularity in commercial French films of the 1950s, most memorably in Clouzot's *The Wages of Fear* (1952).

¹⁵ Marcel Dalio (1900-1983), famed French character actor most fondly remembered for his roles in Renoir's *Grand Illusion* and *Rules of the Game*. He was often typecast as slippery characters, such as the shady fence of Claude Sautet's *Classe tous risques*.

¹⁶ Claude Cerval (1921-1975), French supporting actor who appeared in Melville's *Bob le flambeur* and Sautet's *Classe tous risques*.

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de Beauregard had noticed this, and wanted me to stop work at this time every day. That's the nice thing about Georges: he was ready to lose a fortune so that I could knock off an hour and a half earlier every night.

The next day Henri Tiquet, my camera operator, recited the dialogue for all the characters to me while rehearsing the camera movements I had given him. Then I called in the actors and we shot it. You can't imagine the technical problems we had to overcome to get that shot.

I did an equally difficult though much briefer shot in Delon's room in *Le Samourai*. But Delon's room wasn't full of glass like Clain's office. Here in *Le Doulos* we constantly ran the risk of getting our reflections in the shot, so that at certain moments the entire technical crew had to hide behind the camera. Except the boom operator. He was the invisible man. Dressed in black from head to toe, even wearing a black hood, he didn't create any reflections.

By four o'clock in the afternoon we had a completely successful take in the can: the sixth. Just to be sure, I wanted to duplicate it, but had nothing but false starts and fluffs until the fourteenth take, which was perfect up to the fast pan from Belmondo to Marcel Cuvelier. I then shot a fifteenth to complete this one, starting with the pan and continuing to the end. So fourteen and fifteen made a complete take, linked by the fast pan. Although it was as good as the sixth and no one would have noticed the join because it came over the three fuzzy images of the pan, it was the sixth I used in the final cut. Just as a matter of principle.

As a matter of fact, bringing off a shot like that was pretty extraordinary. I remember that just at the moment when Clain, Silien and the two cops went out of the door and out of the shot, my assistant cameraman announced that there was no more film in the camera. We had been shooting uninterruptedly for nine minutes thirty-eight seconds. A thousand feet, in other words.

In the final sequence, Silien is mortally wounded, yet he still takes time out to look at himself in the mirror before dying. It's a very Melvillian ending.

Yes. . . the man face to face with himself. . . Silien need lie no longer. But the end is not exactly as I had conceived it. Silien's last words, "Fabienne? ... I won't be coming tonight," weren't planned that way. What I wanted, after he got to the telephone, was for him to dial a number, and you would hear, 'Police Headquarters. Hello?' That his last reflex should be an impulse to go and telephone the police made a much better ending. It was only when he heard the voice at the other end that he saw the inanity of his gesture and hung up without

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saying a word. It was at that moment he realized he was already dead. Unfortunately I shot the other version, as used in the film.

Do you see the thriller as the only way of transposing classical tragedy ?

I have no use for the Visconti type of society drama. Tragedy doesn't go at all well with dinner jackets and frilly shirtfronts: it has come down in the world. Tragedy is the immediacy of death that you get in the underworld, or at a particular time such as war . . . The characters from *Army of Shadows* are tragic characters, you know it from the very beginning.

Maybe that's why you have been accused of treating the theme of the Resistance exactly as you did the theme of Le Doulos.

Very probably. I feel no need to apologize.

THE TRAGEDY OF AMBIGUITY: *LE DOULOS*

The following is excerpted from Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris by Ginette Vincendeau (BFI Publishing, 2003):

With 1,475,391 tickets sold in France, *Le Doulos* was Melville's second major box-office success after *Léon Morin, prêtre*¹⁷. The clever plot was a major attraction (publicity urged people not to miss the beginning¹⁸), as were the performances of Belmondo, the top young male star of the time, and Reggiani, who was (rightly) hailed as an actor who had been scandalously ignored by film-makers since [Jacques Becker's] *Casque d'or* (1952).

Le Doulos was widely reviewed by the daily and weekly press, where it received flattering comparisons with the three "gold standards" of [Jacques Becker's] *Touchez pas au grisbi* [and] *Le Trou* (1960) and [Jules Dassin's] *Rififi*.¹⁹ ...References to masterly technique, sobriety, elliptical style and narrative efficiency graced almost every review, summed up by *L'Express* as "quasi perfection of *Le Doulos*." An isolated critical note by *Les Nouvelles littéraires* ("All I see here is a lot of professionalism and a clever use of two remarkable actors, Belmondo and Reggiani") is worth quoting because the "all technique and no content" slur will become a leitmotiv of hostile Melville criticism right up till the

¹⁷ See footnote 4.

¹⁸ A gimmick Melville probably appropriated from Hitchcock's similar promotional campaign for *Psycho*, an apparent influence on *Le Doulos* in more ways than one.

¹⁹ Both *Rififi* and *Touchez pas au Grisbi* are distributed by Rialto.

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1990s. Since 1963, *Le Doulos* has steadily risen to the status of an uncontested “classic.” It was one of the “100 films” included in a special issue of *Cahiers du cinéma*. For Thierry Jousse (who sees the influence of the film especially on the Coen Brothers’ *Miller’s Crossing* [1990]), “*Le Doulos*, which I long thought an unpleasant and formalist object, has become today a film which I keep going back to, as a whole or in fragments.”

Many reviewers in 1963 praised Melville for reaching out to both popular and cinephile audiences. A few lamented the “vulgar” genre, although on the whole conceding that Melville had “transcended” the thriller. Inevitably, references to the “American-ness” of the film abounded, evidenced by its classicism, and in particular its “efficiency” and “sobriety,” as well as its noir thematics and visuals. At the same time most reviewers noted that the essential ambiguity and “tragic” mood of *Le Doulos* endowed it with a strong French and Melvillian streak.

FROM LESOU TO MELVILLE

Le Doulos was adapted by Melville from the excellent 1957 eponymous novel by Pierre Lesou, a young *Série Noire*²⁰ writer noted for his first-hand knowledge of the milieu, taste for stories of male friendship, and self-confessed “feminophobia.” Melville’s references to Lesou’s *Doulos* repeatedly emphasize his film’s departures from the book, apparently with the writer’s approval: “Lesou even said I should have told him my story before he wrote the book.” Melville claims his characters are more ambiguous than those in the novel: “*Le Doulos* is a very complicated film, very difficult to understand, because I gave a double twist to the situations in the novel” - and that he suppressed the slang in the book. Lesou retorted, “You only have to read the book and watch the film to see that the shooting was done with ‘book in hand.’” There is only one exception in the final scene, apart from the shot of Belmondo stroking the horse’s neck, Melville’s tribute to John Huston’s *The Asphalt Jungle*.

FAR FROM MONTMARTRE: THE ABSTRACT GANGSTER

In an often repeated quote, Melville said, “Without the American cinema [of the 1930s], which I loved and still love, I would not make films, and I would not have made *Le Doulos*.” Melville goes on to list some items of décor borrowed from American cinema: “the telephone booth from which Silien calls Salignari, the bar [...] which bears no resemblance to a French café, the sash windows with slatted metal blinds, Clain’s office.”

I would add the Americanization of [the book’s] bar names (the “Sicil” becomes “The New York”, the “Cockpit” becomes the “The Cotton Club”), the mutation of Citroen into American cars and of Cinzano into whisky, and the ubiquitous jazz soundtrack. Even more obviously, the traditional gangster attire of trench coat

²⁰ See footnote 3.

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and hat and contrasted black-and-white lighting of *Le Doulos* place it within the iconography of 1940s and 50s American noir.

In starting *Le Doulos* in [an] urban wasteland, Melville sets out to locate his film in an abstract, generic noir space rather than in the Parisian underworld. As he said, “With the symbolic zoom at the beginning, I leave Montmartre” (we recall the ubiquity of the Sacré Coeur in *Bob Le Flambeur*)...The credits and opening images ... prepare the viewer for the hybrid world of *Le Doulos*, merging French idioms (language, stars, situations) and American icons into an abstract space. Gone are the book’s references to precise locations (Thérèse’s flat in Montmartre) and contemporary events (mentions of North Africa on the radio). Likewise...Melville obscures the identity of his hero. His refusal to align us with Reggiani’s inferiority is part of the film’s overall system of alienation and confusion, but it is also necessary for the stunning surprise at the end of the next sequence.

MASCULINITY, AMBIGUITY AND CLASSICAL CINEMA

THIS PARAGRAPH CONTAINS A MAJOR SPOILER. The aspect of *Le Doulos* which has attracted most critical attention is its spectacular narrative twist. Until nearly ninety minutes into the movie, we believe Silien is a narc. His phone call to Salignari, his assault on Thérèse, his appropriation of the jewels, [the] elaborate *mise en scène* of Nuttheccio and Armand’s deaths, all conspire to make the spectator, like Faugel, believe Silien has set him up. When he reveals that Thérèse, not he, was the informer, we are stunned into rereading everything that has gone before.

...As announced by the post-credit quote (“One must choose. To die ... or to lie?”), each character in *Le Doulos* in turn lies (or may be lying) to someone at some point – Gilbert about Arlette, Faugel about Gilbert, Silien about Faugel, Thérèse about Silien, Clain about the drug squad’s threat to Silien, etc. In the [original French] trailer, *Le Doulos* is described as both “A tragedy of lies” and “Pure mystery”. Even Silien’s series of revelations is open to question. As many, including Melville have pointed out, there is no guarantee that he is telling the truth.

STAR PERSONAS

By the early 1960s Reggiani was a solid character actor rather than a star. While he had starred memorably opposite Simone Signoret in Becker’s classic *Casque d’or*, his small stature and unconventional looks mostly confined his roles to the doomed or downright villains of *Les Portes de la nuit*, *Manon*, *La Ronde* (1950) and *Marie-Octobre* (1958). In the early 1960s he was at a low ebb in his career, reputed “to bring bad luck” to a production. The aura of existential doom which

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suffuses his tragic Manda in *Casque d'or* was, however, the reason Melville insisted on Reggiani for Faugel, seeing the character as “Manda’s grandson.”

By contrast, Belmondo in 1963 was in the first flush of his triumphant stardom, riding on the popularity of *Breathless*²¹, *Cartouche* (1962) and Melville’s own *Léon Morin, prêtre*. Ten years younger than Reggiani, Belmondo was indelibly associated with both the modernity of the New Wave and the energy of popular cinema by virtue of his insouciant insolence, mobile features, humor and physical energy. Melville admired Belmondo’s underplaying, a quality he valued above all others in American actors, and compared him to Robert Ryan and Humphrey Bogart. Reggiani, also understated, is equally brilliant as Faugel, but it was Belmondo who appeared on the poster of *Le Doulos* and who dominated the publicity and reception of the film. His fame, youth, good looks and star persona as a charismatic and sympathetic rebel tips the balance between the two protagonists in his favor. They anchor the reading of the film in his version, a version which reveals Silien as the *deus ex machina* of *Le Doulos*, the figure of the filmmaker in the film.

DÉNOUEMENT IN THE BANLIEUE

In a more conventional film one could see in [the] ending a classic “crime does not pay” message. Silien’s palatial new home, paid for with ill-gotten gains, will not be lived in. But this would be to ascribe to the film a moral framework which is alien to it. The incursion into *nouveau riche* suburbia, which rhymes with and yet points to the difference from Gilbert’s seedy abode at the beginning, hints at a critique of 1960s *embourgeoisement*, or at least a deliberate departure from it.

Out of an excellent thriller, Melville fashioned a tragic noir tale, stripped of its sociological depth and conventional moral viewpoint, yet resonant with cinematic art in its purest form. As Bernard Dort put it in *France-Observateur*, “It is less the crime plot which kept me on the edge of my seat than the pleasure Melville takes in making cinema.”

²¹ Melville himself had a memorable cameo in *Breathless*.

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JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE (Writer/Director)

Jean-Pierre Melville was born Jean-Pierre Grumbach in Paris in 1917, the son of a Jewish wholesale merchant. (He would later adopt the name Melville in homage to the author of *Moby Dick*.) His father gave him a 9.5mm movie camera when he was six years old; he graduated to 16mm at age 12. An avid moviegoer in his childhood and youth, his other passions were the theater, the circus and the music hall. Like the New Wave generation which would consider him a mentor, Melville learned about cinema by watching the films of others, mostly Hollywood directors.

Melville started his military service in 1937 and was still in uniform when the war broke out. Information on his activities during the early years of the Occupation are contradictory, but he fled to England in 1943, where he joined the British Army, then the Free French, with whom he took part in the invasion of Italy and the liberation of Lyons.

Demobilized in October 1945, Melville was determined to be a filmmaker. But the doors to the heavily corporate industry remained closed to him. Unable to get a professional card, Melville created his own production company. After a documentary short about the famous circus clown Beby, he wrote, produced, directed and edited *Le Silence de la mer*, an austere, strikingly faithful adaptation of the famous French Resistance novel, secretly published in 1942. It brought him the grudging respect of the film industry — which still fined him heavily for shooting without a permit. The film also launched the career of his great director of photography, Henri Decaë.

Melville also drew praise from none other than Jean Cocteau, who entrusted him with the film adaptation of his famous 1929 novel, *Les Enfants terribles* (1950). Although Cocteau worked on the screenplay and imposed the casting of his then-lover, Edouard Dermithe, Melville made it very much his own film. It influenced several of the later New Wave directors, Truffaut and Chabrol in particular.

The next few years were lean ones for Melville. He made *Quand tu liras cette lettre* (1953), an implausible melodrama starring Juliette Greco, which he agreed to do to prove he was not a cinematic dilettante or art house intellectual.

Melville entertained hopes of directing *Rififi*, promised to him by the producer, who finally passed him over in favor of expat American Jules Dassin. Nonetheless, the success of *Rififi* allowed him to make *Bob Le Flambeur*, for which he obtained the collaboration of *Rififi* author Auguste Le Breton.

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Melville himself acted in his next film, *Deux Hommes Dans Manhattan/Two Men in Manhattan* (1958), a tale of two French journalists investigating the disappearance of a diplomat in New York, which was partially shot on location. His next film, *Léon Morin, prêtre* (1961), starred New Wave sensation Jean-Paul Belmondo as an enlightened young Catholic priest.

Le Doulos (1962) was the first of his highly stylized appropriations of film noir conventions and stereotypes, which again cast Belmondo. That same year Melville filmed his adaptation of Georges Simenon's novel *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* (1962), which co-starred Belmondo and the great character actor Charles Vanel.

The gangster epic *Le Deuxième Souffle (Second Breath)*, 1966, with Lino Ventura as one of the great Melvillian heroes, came next. He followed that a year later with *Le Samourai* (1967), a hieratic thriller about a betrayed contract killer, played with icy, impenetrable grace by Alain Delon. Melville then paid a moving homage to the heroism and sacrifice of the French Resistance in *Army of Shadows (L'Armée des ombres)*, 1969, starring Lino Ventura, Simone Signoret, and Paul Meurisse. Melville's next film proved to be the greatest hit of his career: *Le Cercle Rouge* (1970), a fatalistic caper drama with Delon, Yves Montand and Gian-Maria Volonté as three outlaws and beloved funnyman André Bourvil in one of his few straight dramatic roles as the pursuing cop.

Melville's last film was another thriller with Delon, *Un Flic* (1972), which co-starred Catherine Deneuve and met with only partial success. Melville was at work on the script of his 14th feature when he died suddenly of a stroke on August 2, 1973. He was 55.

Melville's maverick status within the French film industry and his then unorthodox methods of independent production (which even included his own facility, Jenner Studios, in southern Paris, where he shot the interiors for most of his films) served as a model and inspiration for many of the New Wave directors. Many later-day directors, among them John Woo, have declared their debt to Melville.

In *Breathless*, Jean-Luc Godard paid special tribute to Melville. In one scene, a cop tells Jean-Paul Belmondo that his friend Bob Montagné is in jail – a reference to the title character of *Bob Le Flambeur*. *Breathless* also boasts a memorable cameo appearance by Melville himself, as the pretentious best-selling novelist interviewed by Jean Seberg:

Seberg: "What is your greatest ambition in life?"

Melville: To become immortal... and then die."

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JEAN-PAUL BELMONDO (Silien)

Born in Neuilly in 1933, the son of sculptor Paul Belmondo, Jean-Paul Belmondo studied acting at the Paris Conservatory and became a star overnight in Godard's *Breathless* (1960). The quintessential New Wave actor, Belmondo went on to work with most of the major directors of the 60s and 70s. He climaxed his Godardian phase with *Pierrot le fou* (1965), swashbuckled and globe-trotted in Philippe de Broca's *Cartouche* (1962) and *That Man from Rio* (1964), wore a cassock and a trenchcoat for Melville's *Léon Morin, prêtre* and *Le Doulos* (both 1961), romanced Catherine Deneuve in Truffaut's *Mississippi Mermaid* (1969), stood up to screen veterans Jean Gabin and Charles Vanel in Henri Verneuil's *Un Singe en hiver* (1962) and Melville's *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* (1963), and embodied one of the 20th century's most daring swindlers in Alain Resnais's *Stavisky* (1974). By the late 1970s, Belmondo had abandoned arthouse films for action vehicles which shifted the dramatic emphasis from acting talent to acrobat prowess. (Belmondo prided himself on being his own stuntman.)

By the mid-80s his popularity was on the wane, though he made a comeback of sorts in Claude Lelouch's *Itinéraire d'un enfant gâté* (1988) and *Les Misérables* (1995). His other recent credits include Patrice Leconte's *Half a Chance* (1998), Cedric Klapisch's *Peut-être* (1999) and Bernard Stora's made-for-television remake of *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* (2001), in which Belmondo reprised the role played by Charles Vanel in the 1963 version. Owner of the prestigious Théâtre des Variétés in Paris, Belmondo made his stage comeback in 1987 and has portrayed Edmund Kean, Cyrano and Frédéric Lemaître (the brilliant ham actor of *Children of Paradise* fame) and starred in two Feydeau revivals. In 1999 and 2001, Belmondo suffered strokes that forced him into retirement.

MELVILLE ON BELMONDO

Belmondo is the most extraordinary actor of his generation. He can do absolutely everything. His range is much greater than, say, [Jean] Gabin's at the same age. I appreciate his flexibility, his sensibility, his gentleness. You know, you can have an actor repeat the same line 20 different ways. Doing it wrong 19 times and right once is something any actor can do. But to give us that line in 20 different ways, and do it right each time is another story. Belmondo can do it. I know, because I've asked him for that kind of amazing feat... I think that, since the death of Gérard Philipe, he's the greatest revelation our cinema has had. *Translated by Lenny Borger (2007).*

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SERGE REGGIANI (Maurice Faugel)

Born in Italy in 1922, Serge Reggiani attended acting school in France, where he was discovered by Jean Cocteau, who cast him in a wartime stage production of *Les Parents Terribles*. Reggiani's film credits include Marcel Carné's *Les portes de la nuit*, Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Manon*, Max Ophüls' *La Ronde*, Jacques Becker's *Casque d'or*, Melville's *Le Doulos*, and Visconti's *The Leopard*. In 1965, with the help of Simone Signoret and Yves Montand, he began a second career as a singer, becoming one of the most acclaimed performers of French *chanson*. He died in 2004.

MICHEL PICCOLI (Nuttheccio)

From his first substantial role as a young coal miner in Louis Daquin's *Le Point du jour* (1949), French leading man and character actor Piccoli, born in 1925, is still going strong in a risk-taking career that has included collaborations with such world-class directors as Jean Renoir, Luis Buñuel, Jean-Luc Godard, Costa Gavras, Louis Malle, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Demy, Agnès Varda, Claude Sautet, Marco Ferreri, Jacques Rivette, Raoul Ruiz, Manoel de Oliveira, among many others. He won best acting honors at Cannes in 1979 for Marco Bellochio's *Leap into the Void* and at Berlin for Pierre Granier-Deferre's *Une étrange affaire* in 1982. Originally a stage actor, Piccoli also appeared in numerous TV productions, including Marcel Bluwal's now classic adaptation of Moliere's *Don Juan* (1965). Piccoli has also directed two features.

JEAN DESSAILLY (Captain Clain)

A leading actor-manager of the Paris stage (alongside his wife and frequent co-star Simone Valère), Jean Dessailly (born in Paris in 1920) made his screen debut during the Occupation years around the same time he entered the Comédie-Française. He was the romantic lead in two early films by Claude Autant-Lara, *Sylvie et la fantôme* (1944) and *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (1948) and co-starred opposite Michèle Morgan in Jean Delannoy's *Symphonie pastorale* (1946). During the 50s and 60s he matured into a remarkable character actor in such films as Delannoy's *Maigret tend un piège* (1957) and Edouard Molinaro's *La Mort de Belle* (1960) -- both adaptations of Georges Simenon novels -- and François Truffaut's *The Soft Skin* (1964), but the failure of this latter film seemed to compromise his film career. He acted in Melville's last film, *Un Flic*, in 1972 and continued to appear in films until 1998.

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NICOLAS HAYER (Cinematographer)

Born in 1898, Lucien-Nicolas Hayer was a newsreel cameraman in the 20s and early 30s before moving into theatrical features, first as camera operator, than as chief lighting cameraman, most prominently for Jean Delannoy's exotic melodrama with Erich von Stroheim, *Macao: l'enfer du jeu* (1939). During the Occupation, Hayer shot Jacques Becker's *Dernier atout* and *Falbalas*, Abel Gance's *Capitaine Fracasse* (1942), and most notoriously *Le Corbeau* (1943) – the swinging lamp in the opening scene of *Le Doulos* is a visual quotation of one of the most famous moments in Henri-Georges Clouzot's masterpiece.

Established as a master of black-and-white photography and a specialist in moody, often noir-ish subjects, Hayer went on to lense several of Julien Duvivier's post-war films, *Panique* (1946), *Sous le ciel de Paris* (1950) and *The Little World of Don Camillo* (1952). His other major credits of this time include Christian-Jaque's literary adaptation of *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1947), for which he won a cinematography award at the Locarno Film Festival, Carlo Rim's macabre farce starring Fernandel, *L'Armoire volante* (1949), and Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1949). He photographed the blacklisted John Berry's 1951 documentary short on McCarthyism, *The Hollywood Ten*, and later shot Berry's Technicolor costume comedy, *Don Juan* (1955), with Fernandel.

On the eve of the New Wave, Hayer photographed the studio interiors for Melville's *Two Men in Manhattan* and Erich Rohmer's debut feature, *Le Signe du lion* (both 1959). In the 60s, he worked mostly in television. His last theatrical feature was Pierre Granier-Deferre's underrated film noir, *La Métamorphose des cloportes*, with Lino Ventura. He died in 1978.

LENNY BORGER (2007 translation & subtitles)

Le Doulos is translator/subtitler Lenny Borger's 25rd collaboration with Rialto Pictures, which began with the 1998 re-release of *Grand Illusion*. A former Paris *Variety* correspondent, the Brooklyn-born expatriate has also subtitled recent films by Bertrand Tavernier, Jean-Luc Godard and Claude Chabrol and has written new titles for such classics as *Rififi*, *Band of Outsiders*, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *Casque d'or*, *Le Corbeau*, *Rules of the Game*, Raymond Bernard's *Les Misérables*, and four other Melville pictures – *Le Samourai*, *Bob Le Flambeur*, *Le Cercle Rouge* and *Army of Shadows*.

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RIALTO PICTURES

Described as “the gold standard of reissue distributors” by Los Angeles Times/NPR film critic Kenneth Turan, Rialto Pictures was founded in 1997 by Bruce Goldstein. A year later, Adrienne Halpern joined him as partner. In 2002, Eric Di Bernardo became the company’s National Sales Director.

Rialto’s past releases have included Renoir’s *Grand Illusion*; Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* and *The Fallen Idol*; Fellini’s *Nights of Cabiria*; Jules Dassin’s *Rififi*; De Sica’s *Umberto D*; Godard’s *Contempt*, *Band of Outsiders*, *Masculine Feminine* and *A Woman is a Woman*; Julien Duvivier’s *Pépé le Moko*; Buñuel’s *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *Diary of a Chambermaid*, *The Phantom of Liberty*, *The Milky Way* and *That Obscure Object of Desire*; Claude Berri’s *The Two of Us* (and his Oscar-winning short *Le Poulet*); Louis Malle’s *Elevator to the Gallows*; John Schlesinger’s *Billy Liar*; Clouzot’s *Quai des Orfèvres*; Mike Nichols’ *The Graduate*; The Maysles’ *Grey Gardens*; Mel Brooks’ *The Producers*; Claude Sautet’s *Class Tous Risques*; Jacques Becker’s *Touchez Pas Au Grisbi*; Bresson’s *Au Hasard Balthazar* and *Mouchette*; Franju’s *Eyes Without A Face*; and Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Bob le Flambeur* and *Le Cercle Rouge*, the latter released for the first time in its uncut European version.

In 2002, the company released the critically-acclaimed first-run film *Murderous Maids*, the chilling true story of two homicidal sisters, directed by Jean-Pierre Denis and starring Sylvie Testud.

Rialto celebrated a record-breaking 2004 with the previously unreleased, original 1954 Japanese version of Ishiro Honda’s *Godzilla*; Peter Davis’s Oscar-winning and newly-restored 1974 documentary *Hearts and Minds*; and Gillo Pontecorvo’s groundbreaking *The Battle of Algiers*, which became one of that year’s top-grossing foreign films.

In 2006, Rialto released Melville’s 1969 epic masterpiece *Army of Shadows* for the very first time in the United States. *Army of Shadows* became the most critically acclaimed film of last year, topping many Ten Best lists, including those in *The New York Times* and *Premiere*, and was named Best Foreign Film of 2006 by the New York Film Critics’ Circle, in addition to receiving special awards from the Los Angeles Film Critics and National Film Critics associations.

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Rialto's latest rediscovery is Alberto Lattuada's *Mafioso*, starring Alberto Sordi, a dark comedy from 1962 that became the unqualified audience highlight of the 2006 New York Film Festival.

In 1999 Rialto received a special Heritage Award from the National Society of Film Critics, and in 2000 received a special award from the New York Film Critic's Circle, presented to Goldstein and Halpern by Jeanne Moreau. The two co-presidents have each received the French Order of Chevalier of Arts and Letters. 2007 marks Rialto's tenth anniversary, a milestone that will be celebrated this coming July with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

rialtopictures.com

2007 RELEASES

LE DOULOS
MAFIOSO
LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD (fall '07)

2006 Releases

ARMY OF SHADOWS
THE FALLEN IDOL
FANFAN LA TULIPE
TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER

2005 Releases

MASCULINE FEMININE
ELEVATOR TO THE GALLOWS
THE TWO OF US
CLASSE TOUS RISQUES
MOUCHETTE

2004 Releases

THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS
GODZILLA (U.S. premiere of uncut Japanese version)
HEARTS AND MINDS

2003 Releases

LE CERCLE ROUGE (U.S. premiere of uncut version)
A WOMAN IS A WOMAN
TOUCHEZ PAS AU GRISBI
AU HASARD BALTHAZAR
EYES WITHOUT A FACE
THE MILKY WAY

2002 Releases

PEPE LE MOKO
MURDEROUS MAIDS
QUAI DES ORFEVRES
UMBERTO D.

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THE PRODUCERS
THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTY

2001 Releases

BAND OF OUTSIDERS
BOB LE FLAMBEUR
THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE
JULIET OF THE SPIRITS

2000 Releases

RIFIFI
THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE
DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID
BILLY LIAR

1999 Releases

THE THIRD MAN
GRAND ILLUSION
PEEPING TOM

1998 Releases

NIGHTS OF CABIRIA
GREY GARDENS

1997 Releases

CONTEMPT
THE GRADUATE

Pressbook edited and annotated by Bruce Goldstein
Additional material: Lenny Borger
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