



RIFIFI (ri-f'-fi) n. French argot.

- 1. Quarrel, rumble, free for all, open hostilities between individuals or gangs, rough-and-tumble confrontation between two more individuals.
- 2. A tense and chaotic situation involving violent confrontations between parties.

Etymology: probably derived from rif "combat," Italian argot ruffo "fire," Latin rufus "red." Since 1942: Paris underworld slang coined by Auguste Le Breton during a gangland clash in 1942 and popularised in his novel "Du Rififi chez les homes" (Paris: Gallimard, 1953) and the film directed by Jules Dassin (1955). The enormous popularity of that movie led to the use of "rififi" in the titles of several unrelated thrillers.





ENGLISH SUB TITLES

ROBERT MANUEL
CLAUDE SYLVAIN

(spells trouble)

CARL MONNER MAGALI NOEL PERLO VITA AUGUSTE LE BRETON

JULES DASSIN



HEAR MAGALI NOEL UNG THE



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PATHÉ-CONSORTIUM CINÉMA

presents an
INDUSFILMS
PRIMAFILM
S. N. PATHÉ CINÉMA

production

a film by

JULES DASSIN

DU RIFIFI CHEZ LES HOMMES

based on the book "DU RIFIFI CHEZ LES HOMMES"
by AUGUSTE LEBRETON published by
GALLIMARD
adaptation by JULES DASSIN in collaboration with RENÉ WHEELER
and AUGUSTE LEBRETON dialoque by AUGUSTE LEBRETON

starring

JEAN SERVAIS CARL MÖHNER ROBERT MANUEL

director of photography PHILLIPPE AGOSTINI
art direction ALEXANDRE TRAUNER
music GEORGES AURIC conducted by JACQUES MÉTEHEN
editing by ROGER DWYRE
sound JACQUES LEBRETON
song "Le Rififi" by Jacqes Larne (lyrics) and M. Philippe-Gérard (music)

produced by

Principal Photography: September 22 – December 21, 1954
Exteriors: St.-Rémy-les-Chevreuses and Paris
Paris release: April 13, 1955



I'M A CROOK AT HEART

by David Cairns

Pulling off a heist is like making a film. An idea is hatched, a plan drawn up, a team of specialists gathered. Locations are scouted, equipment procured, the task tackled on a tight schedule. The aftermath is fraught with peril, and all too often the perpetrators, rather than going home rich, fall into squabbling or are denounced and exposed.

So heist movies are naturally popular with filmmakers. Jules Dassin's *Du riffii chez les hommes* (1955) wasn't the first: John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) set the pattern. Dassin's film confirmed that it could be repeated, with variations, without immediate risk of boredom. Also, that outside Hollywood and the constraints of the Production Code, it was unnecessary to prettify ugly stories with socially redeeming messages and moralising.

THE IDEA

All heists and movies germinate from some tiny notion: like a seed, it contains all the information necessary to grow the finished product, but needs fertile ground to sprout from. Here, the producers Berard, Bezard & Cabaud had acquired crime novel by August le Breton, reeking with authentic atmosphere, and felt they needed an American to direct it.

Jules Dassin was looking for a job after being blacklisted in Hollywood, where he had made several thrillers including the classic *The Naked City* (1948).



When Dassin's pre-war communist affiliations came to the attention of the House Unamerican Activities Committee (he was named by fellow noir director Edward Dmytryk), Darryl Zanuck sent him to London to shoot *Night and the City* (1950), which successfully exported American noir style (arguably a European development in the first place). The film worked, but the idea of hiding Dassin from HUAC didn't, and he found himself unable to get a film off the ground.

Although Dassin wasn't too taken with Breton's book, so full of luridly unpleasant characters and incidents, it was the only offer on the table, so he set about rewriting it to suit his own tastes.

The above narrative, told so often by Dassin in interviews, echoes the story he tells on screen uncannily: Tony le Stéphanois, newly released from stir after being denounced to the authorities, is offered a tempting caper but feels he can't accept it. As in many versions of "mythic storytelling," the hero is at first reluctant. What makes Tony change his mind?

Tracking down Mado, the woman who ratted him out, Tony forces her to strip and thrashes her savagely with a belt.¹ Immediately thereafter he calls his friend and agrees to the job: "One has to live." Also, Tony greatly alters and enlarges the plan,

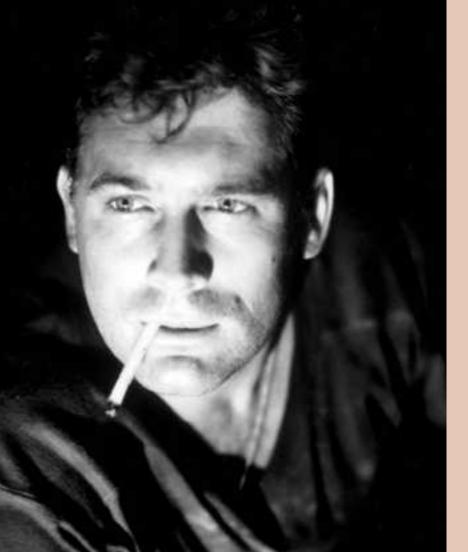
Directing thrillers would seem to be one of the few professions where a zest for sadism might be put to positive practical use. Dassin's homoerotic treatment of brutal warden Hume Cronyn in Brute Force (1947), coupled with the somewhat gratuitous whipping of Gina Lollobrigida in The Law (1959), suggests a keen interest in the sexual side of cruelty. Even the primarily light and cheerful Topkapi (1964) hints lightly at kinky goings-on between Melina Mercouri (Dassin's wife) and Maximilian Schell: but then, it might be disappointing to think of international mastercriminals enjoying only boring vanilla sex.

just as Dassin reworked Breton's book. So, either avenging himself frees his mind to concentrate on the next stage of his life, or it invigorates his spirits and makes him want to test himself, or it leaves him at an emotional dead end where the risk of death seems meaningless and any chance worth taking.

THE GANG

Dassin had never worked in France but swiftly found capable technicians: cinematographer Philippe Agostini had worked with Carné, Duvivier, Ophuls and Autant-Lara. Editor Roger Dwyre would work with Dassin on many of his later films: his work here is taut and efficient, genuinely groundbreaking at the film's conclusion. Production designer Alexander Trauner was a legendary wizard: he had by this time made Les Enfants du Paradis and Othello; he would go on to design The Apartment (1960). Composer Georges Auric was a longstanding collaborator with Cocteau, among many other credits. If Rififi had started out with the aspirations of an exploitation pulp thriller, the A-list technical talent suggested something else.

As Tony, Dassin cast Jean Servais, once a star but now fallen on hard times. The actor's painful history, whatever it may have been, is written on his features. Some faces look lived in: his appears died in. The aura of a man who has suffered gives the character a raw credibility that almost replaces psychology. But Servais is more than just an evocative presence: his eyes can dart with a flash of white-hot anger, like Jean Gabin's. Some kind of fierce life still burns within. He looks ill, but never weak. The overcoat that swamps his wiry frame suggests a man physically diminished by suffering: at the movie's end, a child wrapped in an adult's coat offers a rhyming image.



If Dassin's crew were the cream of the industry, his cast were mainly semi-washed-up types like Servais, or newcomers like minor thug Robert Hossein, who went on to a good B-list career as both handsome lead and director. Using a multi-national gang (Carl Möhner an Austrian playing Swiss, Robert Manuel, a Frenchman playing Italian) excused Dassin from deploying one of Breton's most celebrated tropes, the extensive use of French criminal argot.²

A movie can't easily feature a glossary, so Dassin contented himself with showing the details of behaviour and ethical codes which suggest a real underground subculture. And when a casting idea fell through, he stepped in to play safecracker Cesar himself, under the pseudonym Perlo Vita, a role which gave him the chance to rat on his friends and die for it. Must have been cathartic.

THE JOB

Servais rejects the simple smash-and-grab operation proposed, and concocts the kind of complex scheme essential to heist movies. Dassin's masterstroke was the alarm system which forces the thieves to work in silence: and yet, the alarm is deactivated as soon as access to the jeweller's is achieved, and in any case, it's been established that quiet sounds – such as whispers – will not trigger the bells. So the wordless half-hour sequence is an expression of sheer virtuosity, not truly motivated by any story necessity. Dassin even keeps the gang from speaking until they've escaped the scene of the crime, disposed of the getaway car, and reconvened to

²Regardless of his name, Dassin was New York Jewish, not French, and the rich slang of Breton's novel was incomprehensible to him.

examine their takings.

The director must have observed what every projectionist knows: audiences talk when the characters talk, and are silent when the characters are silent. Simply by eliminating dialogue – and by focussing on a suspenseful task – he could greatly increase the audience's attention. Of course, a wordless sequence at the heart of the film made his task, as a non-French filmmaker, a little easier; it's less often remarked that the film's climax also features a long dialogue-free stretch.

Despite his linguistic handicap, Dassin was a good choice to conjure a convincing underworld milieu. His American films included one prison drama (*Brute Force*), one tale of gangsterism and corruption (*Thieves' Highway*, 1949) and one police procedural (*Naked City*). Most significantly, *Night and the City* had tackled street-level crime in London. The London fence *Rififi's* pass their loot to, "Teddy the Greek", might almost be a minor character from that film, a cousin to Herbert Lom's ruthless Kristo.

The quirkily inventive, wholly credible robbery sequence makes use of socks, an umbrella, and a fire extinguisher; the inventiveness with which the crooks burrow through from above without disturbing the noise-sensitive alarms below, and the ruthlessness with which they tackle the couple living in the upstairs flat and, later, a policeman who gets in the way, puts the emphasis on coldblooded professionalism rather than any kind of heroism³. Our guys may not be as ruthless as the gangsters who turn on them, but the film doesn't encourage too many romantic illusions about their honour.



³But there's a touch of gallantry in the cushion provided for the bound and blindfolded lady.

Rififi presents the crime as a coup de cinema and a scheme of Rube Goldberg complexity. The jeweller's security system is a clever set of contraptions in itself, but its true purpose is to expose the greater cunning of our band of outlaws. John Huston's heist was disconcertingly simple by comparison, dependant on blunt instruments and guns. The comparative artistry of Dassin's model stresses ingenuity over both high-tech gadgets and brute force, and wins our respect without totally overcoming our scruples. The only violence comes when the plan momentarily goes wrong. Far from Hollywood, Dassin didn't have to insert any socially redeeming speeches to balance the celebration of criminal endeavour, as John Huston had been forced to do in *The Asphalt Jungle*. The closest thing to editorialising comes from Möhner's wife, who wonders what drove him to this career: not poverty, since many are poor but few turn to robbery as a profession. The suggestion that the childhood influence of other hoods, with their apparent glamour and easy access to money, formed the

basis of the seduction, is paid off at the end when we see Möhner's kid swathed in his father's coat, a pint-sized protégé. American gangster films since at least *The Public Enemy* (1931) have diagnosed gangsterism as a childhood ailment, a kind of arrested development. *Rififi* suggests the same thing more obliquely.

AFTERMATH

In the traditional heist movie, the job itself always occurs around the mid-point, for obvious structural reasons: it's hard to sustain interest in the planning for a whole movie. This always leads to the question of what to do in the remaining third act, and

over the years various solutions have been attempted. It's axiomatic that something must go wrong in order to build to an even greater climax, so heist movies become, by structural necessity, tales of hubris, modern Greek tragedies in which carefully wrought plans fall apart due to human error. It was probably inevitable that Stanley Kubrick would tackle this subject, since that theme informs so much of his work: his *The Killing* followed *Rififi* a year later.

The police investigation; personal rivalries or betrayals within the gang; a tiny, simple, stupid mistake; the interference of outsiders – all are useful plot devices to turn the triumph of a successful caper into ruin. *Rififi* uses variants on all of the above, although the police are virtually nonentities in this story: the detective glimpsed is an efficient state functionary. But it's the greed and jealousy of other criminals and the follies of the gang (as well as the absence of mobile phones, which would have derailed the plot at a crucial point) that really ensure the gang's eventual demise. In other words, civilisation itself defeats the aspirations of these asocial entrepreneurs.

The film's climax, a delirious drive through the streets of Paris by a dying man, anticipates the fragmentary style of Godard's *A Bout de Souffle* (1960), though the stylistic excess is here given the alibi of the POV of a character in extremis. The rapid flow of scenery viewed from a racing perspective, coupled with the jagged jumpcuts, manically compresses a long journey into a flurry of confused sensations. As death nears, montage disintegrates.

The huge success of *Rififi* led to a spate of phony sequels, all unrelated except by title and the heist structure (Dassin also failed to profit from the conversion of his film *The*



Naked City into a hit TV show).

Dassin himself went on to a wildly varied, and variable career, mainly eschewing thrillers for arthouse pieces of high seriousness. The colourful self-parody of *Topkapi* constituted his only return to the field helped create, although *Up Tight!* (1968), a blaxploitation remake of John Ford's *The Informer* (1935) contains a modest caper⁴.

For the most part, Dassin pursued seriousness openly, rather than through the disguise of genre. The results were at times uneven, and have often been derided for ludicrous pretension: David Thomson writes, "In good company, and a little drunk, He Who Must Die, Phaedra, and 10:30 p.m. Summer might cure would-be suicides." One could add A Dream of Passion (1978) to that role-call, in which an actress prepares for the role of Medea by interviewing a real murderess — actorly self-importance is indulged to the utmost, and Dassin's uncritical direction of his wife, Melina Mercouri,

results in some preposterous moments. But the film's climax, intercutting the onstage performance with the earlier crime, is a dazzling feat of pure cinema. And the other films Thomson condemns interweave moments of stunning imagination

among the thematic over-reaching and dramatic over-playing. 10.30 p.m. Summer, a 1966 Margueruite Duras adaptation, seems particularly ripe for reappraisal, for its arthouse aesthetic (Fellini appears to have swiped the moody, modish night drive in 1968's Spirits of the Dead from a similar sequence here), giallo-like stylistic brio, and frank eroticism

⁴Has any leading man sweated as much as Widmark in Night and the City? Not until Julian Mayfield in Up Tight!

Dassin's work, divided between highbrow aspirations and punchy potboilers, Hollywood and a whole package tour of European countries, critical success and derision, is a hard *oeuvre* to get a handle on. As early as his first short, an adaptation of Poe's *The Telltale Heart* (1941) that plays like an audio-visual poem, he'd embraced internal division and psychological schism. While many of his films are dismissed for embodying these inner conflicts in their stories and style, tearing themselves apart in a welter of breast-beating, a few of his films achieve a strange unity and balance: *Rififi*, like its characters, tiptoes lightly across alarmed surfaces, relying on professionalism and fearlessness to gain its prize.

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AUGUSTE LE BRETON AND THE SÉRIE NOIRE

by Alastair Phillips

The intercultural formation of Jules Dassin's adaptation of Auguste Le Breton's novel was but one further instance of the complex relationship between European and American forms within the associated spheres of French crime literature and French crime cinema. In her study of the influence of the *roman noir* on French postwar culture, Claire Gorrara points out that the publication of the first true French detective novel, Emile Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge* in 1863, only preceded Charles Baudelaire's translation of the American writer Edgar Allan Poe's short mystery stories such as *Murders in the Rue Morgue* by two years. Similarly, Vincendeau reminds us that the 'dovetailing of French and American traditions in the *policier* genre' within French cinema goes far back to the enormous success with the French public of Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset's *Zigomar* and *Nick Carter* films as well as Louis Feuillade's *Fantômas* serial (1913-14).

The success of the Le Masque collection of crime fiction founded in 1928 and the appearance of Georges Simenon's first Maigret novel, *Pietr le Letton*, in 1931 was paralleled during the 1930s by a proliferation of French translations of American hardboiled crime novelists such as Dashiell Hammett. Claude-Endome Magny has argued that the 'phenomenological' style of this kind of American literature was antithetical to the 'refined' French literature of introspection by the likes of [André] Gide and [Marcel] Proust'. "This may have been a reason why Gide admired Hammett, but it also accounts for one aspect of the later successful reception of *Du rififi chez les*".

hommes in France. The film preserved an attention to psychological detail in terms of the representation of local milieu, but in the form of its treatment of the heist, it also sensationally concentrated on the unfurling in real time of an elaborate externally observed physical activity. As Marcel Duhamel, the founder of the Série Noire, would later say, 'as in all good movies, feelings are expressed by gestures'. In

The immediate precursor of the Série Noire was the Collection Minuit, which began during the Occupation when the French public was officially denied access to American crime and fiction. As Gorrara suggests, one of the functions of this particular series ghost-written by French authors (often with American sounding pseudonyms) was clearly to depict 'an imaginary America in sharp contrast to ration obsessed wartime France'. This interrelationship between American and French traditions continued with the arrival of the Série Noire in 1948. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the very early books in the later highly successful series were actually translations of works by English writers Peter Cheyney and James Hadley Chase, who were writing pastiches of American crime fiction precisely because they too had never travelled to the USA!

Marcel Duhamel's simple aim in initiating the Série Noire format was to 'stop [his readers] from falling asleep'. To this end, he came from an appropriate pedigree, thanks to a longstanding association with the Surrealist poet and scriptwriter Jacques Prévert, who suggested the title of the actual enterprise. Duhamel had also worked in the French cinema during the 1930s. He appeared (as an often uncredited) actor in numerous films such as *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (Jean Renoir, 1936); *Drôle*

de drame (Marcel Carné, 1937) and Carrefour (Curtis Bernhardt, 1938) and also, appropriately, worked in film dubbing. He had also translated American fiction and it was no surprise therefore that the next tranche of work published in his series consisted of French translation of work by the likes of Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, Jim Thompson, David L. Goodis, Mickey Spillane and Horace McRoy. This Franco-American cross-cultural fertilization developed further with the subsequent publication of novels by "Terry stewart" (the pseudonym of Serge Acrouët), 'John Silver Lee' (Thomas Narcejac) and 'Vernon Sullivan' (Boris Vian). In an interesting reversal of the acculturation process Dassin faced, these writers provided French audiences with the phenomenon of a French writer with an apparently American name writing American-style crime fiction rather than the subsequent phenomenon of an American director with an apparently French name directing French-style crime fiction.

It has been argued that this interest in the Americanization of crime fiction in France may relate to Borde and Chaumeton's previously mentioned dismissal of the legacy of French poetic realism in favour of critical approval displayed towards the reinvigorated American film noir.* But in an interesting twist on this, which has repercussions for the way in which aspects of Dassin's adaptation of *Du rififi chez les hommes* may be read, Gorrara also suggests that this model of crime literature nonetheless 'offered a privileged narrative for contesting social and political change in France'. Much of the work of this generation of 'American' oriented French writers, she argues, 'focused on controversial and disturbing images of America [in that] they adapted the hard-boiled genre for a transposed critique of their own culture', especially in relation to the influence of American models of capitalism.'*ii

If this literature seemingly offered a displayed critique of contemporary France through the refracted lens of an American setting, it was perhaps not surprising then that the Série Noire initially remained a relatively minor taste during these years. Indeed, the series only developed a serious mass appeal with the publication of their seminal novels, Touchez pas au grisbi and Du rififi chez les hommes.xiii What distinguished these books from their predecessors within the imprint? In two words, it was language and locale. Both titles resonated with a lively and often impenetrable use of gangster slang as if to celebrate the native identity of the criminal protagonists of the narratives. Simonin and Le Breton offered glossaries to their readers at the end of each volume explaining the more abstruse terms used in the dialogue. Each book also offered a return to the centrality of Paris as an enduring and mythologized space for criminal, especially gangster, activity. As noted in the case with the subsequent film adaptations, the network of streets, dens, bars and rooms the authors details provided and immediately recognizable enveloping community, which then also

Le Breton (born Auguste Monfort in Finistére) was ideally suited to play the role of advocate for this new appeal to cultural authenticity. Both *Du rififi chez les hommes* and *Razzia sur la chnouf* (the screen adaptation of which preceded the former by only one week)^{xiv} were promoted in terms of their author's plausible proximity to the world in which the stories were set. The latter is populated by an extraordinary array of louche, lowlife, Parisian character types, including an immaculately dressed

gangland criminal played by Le Breton himself. When the book *Du rififi chez les hommes* was released in January 1954, exactly one year after Simonin's novel, Le Breton claimed that the character of Tony was based on someone he had once known in Montmartre and that other characters resembled people he had known during the Second World War. Later, in two of his semi-fictionalized autobiographies, *Les Hauts murs* and *La Loir des rues*, Le Breton also included photographs of himself in underworld settings and the distinctive quality of these carefully orchestrated images may be likened to stills from a film noir. It clearly suited Le Breton to mythologize himself, but, as Claire Gorrara convincingly suggested, 'more so than almost any other film of popular literature in France, the roman noir [nonetheless offers] the opportunity to re-evaluate French national identity and cultural practice from the bottom up, from the perspective of writers and readers who perceive themselves to be marginal to the literary and political establishment.'xv

This extract is re-printed with the kind permission of author Alastair Phillips and I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd. The book covers all aspects of the film, from its production history and cinematic style through to its cultural legacy, impact on the French filmmaking industry and significance as part of the heist thriller genre. It is part of the I.B.Tauris Ciné-File French Film Guides series.

Rififi CINÉ-FILES: The French Film Guides

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- Claire Gorrara (2003) p. 12.
- Ginette Vincendeau (2003) p.100.
- iii Ibid n 101
- Marcel Duhamel, 'Série Noire manifesto', http://gallimard.fr/catalog/html/actu/serienoire_cit.htm (accessed September 2006)
- v. Claire Gorrara (2003) p. 13. The celebrated crime novelist Léo Malet wrote two novels for the series for example, under the pseudonyms Franck Harding and Léo Latimer. See 'A l'ombre du polar' http://www.polars.org/article31.html (accessed 16 September 2007)
- Marcel Duhamel, 'Série Noire manifesto', http://gallimard.fr/catalog/html/actu/serienoire_cit.htm (accessed September 2006)
- vii. The poet Jacques Prévert, had a significant influence on classical French cinema. He worked on scripts for several Marcel Carné films, including Le Quai des brumes, Le jour se léve and Les Enfants du paradis, but he also collaborated with other notable directors, such as Jean Grémillon (Remorques, 1941); Jean Renoir (Le Crime de Monsier Lange); Richard Pottier (27 Rue de la Paix, 1937) and Christian-Jacque (Les Disparus de Saint-Açil, 1938).
- viii. Of course, Raymond Chandler was actually British, but his chosen idiom in the USA was of the hard boiled American crime writer. It is worth noting the fertile historical relationship between French cinema and many of these authors. Pierre Chenal directed the first adaptation of James M. Cain' the Postman Always Rings Twice/Le Dernier tournant in 1939. Jim Thompson adaptations include Serie Noire (Alain Corneau, 1979) and Coup de torchon (Bertrand Blier, 1981). David L. Goodi adaptations include Tirez sur le pianist (François Truffaut, 1960), Le Casse (Henri Verneuil, 1971), Lune dans le caniveau (Jean-Jacques Beinix, 1983), Rue barbare (Giles Béhat, 1984) and Descent aux enfers (Francis Girod, 1986). Horace McRoy's No Pockets in a Shroud was adapted as Un Lincet n'a pas de pochas (Jean-Pierre Mocket 1974).
- ix. The poet, novelist, trumpeter, screenwriter and actor, Boris Vian, was a renowned figure in postwar Left Bank Parisian culture. Although he never actually visited the United States, his work was permeated with an awareness of the central place that American culture occupied in the cultural imagination of his French metropolitan audience. When it was originally published in 1947, Vian initially claimed that J'irai cracher sur vos tombes (I Spit on Your Graves) was only the French translation by him of an original American source novel written by Veronon Sullivan. The following year, once the book had become a bestseller, he was forced to 'come clean' about this hoax.
- c. Ginette Vincendeau (2003) pp. 101-2
- xi. Claire Gorrara (2003) p. 36
- xii. Ibio
- Such was the success of Touchez pas au grisbi that it sold out of its initial print run less than a month after its publication on 3 January 1953. See Albert Simonin interview, Les Cahiers de la cinemathéque, 25 (1978) pp. 120-1.
- xiv. The film of Razzia sur la chnouf was released on 7 April and Du rififi chez les hommes on 14 April 1955.
- xv. Claire Gorrara (2003) p. 9.



JOHN TREVELYAN REMEMBERS RIFIFI

In films for young people and adults we always tried to keep off the screen any details of criminal techniques, such as how to open a locked door with a piece of celluloid, or how to open a safe; if we were consulted before production I used to advise that the details should not be shown. When I gave talks in prisons about film censorship I invariably had full support for this, since fathers who were in prison for criminal offences did not want their children to embark on crime.

Every time I gave a talk in a prison someone used to mention the French film *Rififi* made by Jules Dassin in 1954. This remarkable film showed in great detail a robbery of a jeweller's shop, the robbery sequence lasting about half an hour and being backed only by natural sound - one of the most brilliant film sequences of all time. I remember our discussions at the time. We took into account the fact that the robbery was accomplished only with the use of elaborate and obviously expensive equipment, and that only the most experienced and skilled criminals could possibly imitate it; we believed therefore that it was relatively safe. When talking in prisons some years later I learned that there had been several robberies in which the techniques had been copied, so perhaps we were wrong. However, I once met at a dinner a judge of the Central Criminal Court who told me that *Rififi* was easily the best film he had ever seen. When I said that possibly it had added to his work, and that I would be interested to know whether he thought that we should not have passed it, he said, 'Certainly not. It was a marvellous film. Of course it should have been passed.'

This extract from What the Censor Saw by former Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors, John Trevelyan, is published by Michael Joseph Ltd., 1973.



FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT ON RIFIFI

Rififi, the first French film by the American filmmaker Jules Dassin, who came to cinema from directing in the theatre, is structured like a classical tragedy. Act I: Preparation for a holdup; Act II: "Consummation" of the holdup; Act III: Punishment, vengeance, death.

It isn't necessary to point out the modest production budget of *Rififi* before I say that I liked the film and intend to praise it, but it may serve some purpose, if only to demonstrate that a film's success depends more on its director than on massive production resources or the participation of world-renowned actors.

Out of the worst crime novel I have ever read, Jules Dassin has made the best Film Noir I have ever seen. In fact, this is not a minor genre. Dassin shot the film on the street during high winds and rain, and he reveals Paris to us [Frenchmen] as he revealed London to the English (Night in the City) and New York to the Americans (Naked City). It would be unfair not to credit also the chief cameraman, Agostini, who truly worked miracles under very unusual conditions: the interior shots in actual dark bistros, night time exteriors without lights, the platform of the Port-Royal subway station, tiny details of décor, etc.

Everything in *Rififi* is intelligent: screenplay, dialogue, sets, music, choice of actors. Jean Servais, Robert Manuel, and Jules Dassin are perfect. The two failures are the female casting and the specially written song, which is execrable.

The direction is a marvel of skill and inventiveness. *Rififi* is composed of three bits of rigorously developed bravura. Every shot answers the viewer's question, "How?" Dassin remains faithful to his style of combining the documentary approach with lyricism. For the past week, the only thing being talked about in Paris was the silent holdup, splendidly sound tracked, in which objects, movements, and glances create an extraordinary ballet around an umbrella placed over a hole pierced through the ceiling of a jewellery store alive with security systems.

Beyond that, the real value of the film lies in its tone. The characters in *Rififi* are not despicable. The relative permissiveness of the French censors allowed Dassin to make a film without compromises, immoral perhaps, but profoundly noble, tragic, warm, human. Behind the smiles of the three actors - Jean Servais' bitter, Robert Manuel's sunny, and Jules Dassin's sad though with bursts of gaiety - we divine the filmmaker, a tender, includent man, gentle and trusting, capable of telling us one of these days a more ennobling story of characters who have been better served by their destiny. That is what we must not forget and why we must thank Jules Dassin. It is this consideration that amply justifies the presence at the Cannes Festival of *Le rififi chez les hommes*.

Originally reviewed in Le Cahiers du Cinema, 1955

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

Jules Dassin's *Rififi* set the tone for a sub genre within the genre of the crime film, namely the heist movie, and with this came a very particular language representative of the working class gangster milieu in 1950s Paris. Thus the style of the language used in the film is typical both of the gangster world as well as that of lower social classes in Paris of that time. There is no doubt that there is a strong American flavour to the film, not least due to the fact that the director was himself American (despite his French sounding name). The film portrays a criminal underworld within a context of strongly masculinised values and this is reflected in the dialogue used by the main characters. The translation therefore echoes this whilst seeking not to render the translated version too American yet retaining its flavour within the context of the 1950s French gangster film. In translating the dialogue in this film, it was necessary to render this style in a register that reflects this period and the gangster slang used whilst equally making it accessible for a contemporary audience.

-Sonali Joshi, day for night*



PROJECTIONIST'S NOTE

In the past certain directors issued notes on how their films should be projected to ensure the image on screen reflected the director's intentions. As the master of the remote in your home cinema you are the projectionist and here you will find a short note on how to view Rififi as intended by the director.

Rififi is presented in the 1.33:1 FULL FRAME ASPECT RATIO

To view the film correctly a widescreen television should be set to the **4X3 FRAME**, the image inside will be presented as per the below still with the inactive portions of the screen offset by black at the left and right.



If your television is not correctly set up (in options such as 16:9, 14:9, zoom, wide and so on) it will squash or crop the image meaning that vital detail is lost in the film. To lose this detail is to alter the intention and meaning of the image.

NAVIGATING THE MENU

Enjoying classic films with the cinematic experience has become closer to what we now experience at home though without losing the flavour of the cinema the menu on your screen will display four options:

When you are ready to watch the film click **AUDITORIUM** to step through and enjoy the film.

If you are searching for a specific point in the film click **REEL CHANGE** to find your desired point.

Should you be interested in finding out more about the film take a trip to the KIOSK for further discussion.

Click on ${f PROJECTION\ BOOTH}$ should you need to adjust the settings of the viewing of the film.

We hope you enjoy the film.

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