

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Le jour se leve</b>
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Source	<i>Kit Parker Films</i>
Date	1979
Type	distributor materials
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Le jour se lève (Daybreak), Carné, Marcel, 1939

LE JOUR SE LEVE  
(THE BREAK OF DAY)  
(DAYBREAK)

(France/1939) 92 minutes \$40.00

Directed by Marcel Carné - Screenplay by Jacques Viot, Jacques Prévert - Cinematography by Curt Courant, Philippe Agostini and André Bac - Edited by René Le Henaff - Music by Maurice Jaubert - A Sigma Film. Players: Jean Gabin, Jules Berry, Arletty, Jacqueline Laurent.

*Le Jour Se Lève* is the fourth of seven films on which director Marcel Carné and the poet-screenwriter Jacques Prévert collaborated between 1936 and 1946. It was an enormous success upon its original release (contemporary film critics immediately boosted it onto All-time Ten Best lists) and, along with the Carné-Prévert *Port of Shadows* of the previous year, it exercised great influence on filmmakers around the world. Jean Gabin gives one of his most affecting performances as the simple laborer who kills a man at the film's beginning and then, barricaded through the night in his top-floor apartment, reflects back upon the incidents that made him a murderer. The victim, as played by Jules Berry, is an only slightly muted version of the archetypal villain Batala in Renoir's *Crime of Monsieur Lange* (likewise played by Berry and conceived by Prévert)—a satanic tempter who manipulates the women in his and Gabin's life (Jacqueline Laurent and the luminous-eyed Arletty) and virtually engineers his own destruction as a final perverse gesture of self-loathing.

From the very first shot, Carné's direction stresses Gabin's precipitous position, physically and metaphysically: the first clearly audible words in the film are spoken by a blind man tapping his cane about the corpse of Berry on a stair landing: "Who has fallen? Who has fallen?" Alexandre Trauner's evocative decor and the subdued glossiness of Curt Courant's cinematography contribute to the poetic realism that almost succeeds in elevating this lowlife exercise in doomed passion to the level of tragedy. The film now tends to seem talky and slow-moving rather than measured and fate-ridden, as it may once have been. But Gabin's presence at its core remains moving and genuine. One will never forget his absentminded notice of a new tie he has neglected to hang up—this, only moments after having become the focus of a police siege—or his calmly curious gaze as snipers' bullets shatter his bedroom mirror, or the weary resignation with which, his fingers probing between his shirt buttons, he locates the exact position of his soon-to-be-stilled heart.

Richard Jameson RTJ

K.P.F. 1979